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STRUCTURES OF THE SELF:

A STUDY OF THE FEMALE LIFE CYCLE THROUGH

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF REPRESENTATIVE FRENCH WOMEN AUTHORS

by

Sonia Aladjem

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

October

1987

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No piece of work is the result of only one person's efforts. It is usually achieved through a combination of hard work and the support, the guidance and the encouragement of others. Or, as sociologists would put it, a dissertation is social.

For help in achieving the goal which this dissertation represents, I am specially grateful to the chair of my dissertation committee, Kathleen McCourt, who believed in the value of my ideas for an interdisciplinary study and encouraged me from the time these ideas crystallized throughout all phases of the research.

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Last but not least, my most sincere thanks to Robert McNamara.

His untimely death deprived me of the joy of sharing this work with him to the end. I was privileged, however, to have had his counseling, support and enthusiasm from the moment I joined the Department of Sociology. To him, I dedicate this dissertation.

VITA

Sonia Aladjem was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, on October 11, 1928, and became a U.S. citizen in 1970.

Her elementary and high school education took place in Montevideo, Uruguay, and in 1955 she received the degree of Bachelor of Science from the University of Uruguay, Montevideo, Uruguay.

From 1972 to 1974 she attended Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, where she took courses in French literature. In January of 1975 she was admitted to the Master's program in the Department of Modern Languages of Loyola University of Chicago and received a Master's degree in French Literature on February 13, 1977. During that period (1975-1977) she was awarded two research assistantships by the Department of Modern Languages, Loyola University of Chicago.

In January of 1978 she was accepted for a graduate degree in Sociology by the Department of Sociology, Loyola University of Chicago, and was awarded two research assistantships (1980/81-1981/82).

She has been teaching at Loyola University of Chicago since 1979, specializing in Sociology of the Life Cycle, Sociology of the Family (Women's studies), Sociology of Literature and Studies in French Literature. The academic years 1982/83-1983/84 she spent teaching in Rome, at the Loyola University of Chicago Rome Center. At present, in addition to teaching part-time at Loyola University of Chicago she is also teaching at North Park College, Chicago, and Concordia College, Chicago, Illinois.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Research Problem

In most studies of the life-cycle there is a noticeable absence of inquiry into female development. Researchers like Gould (1978), Erikson (1963, 1968, 1976, 1980, 1982), Levinson (1978) and Vaillant (1977) among others have either analyzed the life-cycle from a male's perspective or constructed a male paradigm of the life-cycle. This has not prevented them, however, from drawing conclusions that include women as well as men.

More research in the area of female adult development is needed to provide balance to this growing area of inquiry. The possibility of differences between men and women in the subjective perception of the maturation process can only be addressed after first viewing the issue from a woman's perspective. Should the results of a study based on the perceptions of women differ from those in earlier studies, the conclusion could be drawn that the majority of studies to date have measured women with a yardstick that was not appropriate to their experience.

Until not too long ago, it was the general perception that once an individual reached a certain adult age, whether defined chronologically or sociologically by the "social clock,"[1] he or she had reached a certain fixed stage of development. Neugarten (1974) argues that we cannot lump and restrict older people as if they were a

single group, but she suggests instead that the whole area of middle age and beyond has to be redefined. A growing older population and technological and medical advances have expanded the parameters of middle age and enlarged the span of years that formerly constituted middle age or beyond. Neugarten's implication is that there is a need to expand and redefine this stage and she has come up with a distinction in the older population between the "young-old" (aged 55-75) and "old-old" (over age 75). Middle age and beyond also has to be looked at from an individual's subjective perception of aging. Neugarten further suggests that most of the "young-old" perceive themselves as middle-aged and not as old.

The autobiographies that will comprise the data for this study were written when the writers were between the ages of fifty and seventy-five. Since even the authors writing in their seventies describe not only their present feelings but also how they felt at middle-age, we will treat this extended stage of life (50-75) and from here on refer to it as "middle age and beyond."

Literature has traditionally been used by social scientists to illustrate sociological and psychological concepts and to show that social science and literature are not completely distinct since they explore the same themes. Books like Sociology through Literature (Coser, 1972), Psychology through Literature (Shrodes, Van Gundy, & Husband, 1943) and The Family through Literature (Tavuchis and Goode, 1975) use passages from literary texts to illuminate such topics as the self and the other, emotional conflicts and marital interaction.

In addition, literature and other art forms have been used to

prove or test certain sociological or psychological theories. Ricciardelli (1973) for example, has used the disengagement theory by Cummings and Henry to analyze Shakespeare's King Lear, while Erik Erikson (1976) has taken his own development theory to explicate the aging of Dr. Borg in Bergmann's film Wild Strawberries.

More recently, Sharan B. Merriam (1980) has taken literary fiction as data to produce insights and hypotheses into the male mid-life, but to our knowledge no literary data have been used to date to generate insight specifically into the female life-cycle.

As often happens, there is one phrase, one concept, that sparks the imagination. In the case of this enterprise, it was Daniel J. Levinson's statement that "... a man must de-structure his existing life pattern, work on a number of basic developmental tasks, and restructure a new life" (1978, p. 52). The words that caught our attention were "de-structure" and "restructure" and their connotation in the context of the study of life-cycles. To Levinson, de-structure meant to take apart, to fragment, while restructure meant, in most cases he set as examples, what he calls "breaking out," that is, to try for a new life structure. Seldom in Levinson's conclusions do men restructure by rearranging, by transforming[2] or by integrating the fragments of the life pattern into the original structure.

The study of men in mid-life by Merriam, using literary fiction as data, shares Levinson's perspective: fragmentation at the mid-life period moves men either to forge "a new structure" or to resign themselves to the old one and "... go on in much the same way as before ..." (1980, p. 78). This second possibility, resignation, we

found more perplexing: de-structure to reconstruct the same, that is, return to the old structure? We felt that there might be a third possibility, namely not resigning to the old structure but reconceptualizing and transforming the old structure.

As the sources of our inspiration and initial inquiry - students of the life-cycle like Erikson, Levinson, Merriam, Vaillant - dealt in their work basically with male samples, the question became: can it be assumed that the female "destructures" and "restructures" in precisely the same fashion as males do, or are we using the same words to conceptualize different processes? The differences between women and men in other areas are significant and evident enough to warrant the study of this one from a woman's perspective.

The present study then has been prompted both by the need for a clearer understanding of women's experiences in the course of their adult development and by the belief that literature, which deals primarily with the subjective facets of the human experience, has a unique contribution to make to such an understanding.

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to explore, through literary data, more specifically autobiography, the female experience of aging. The method will be a comparative analysis of texts by women who have written their autobiographies at the periods of their lives that can be considered "mid-life and beyond." This study will also test the merit of using such autobiographies as valid and useful data for sociological research in the life-cycle. It is hoped that such literary texts will illuminate categories and their properties not otherwise readily accessible to the sociologist. From this may emerge

a new framework for interpretation; one that combines sociological concepts with literary insights.

Specifically, this dissertation will try to uncover the main issues, concerns and problems that emerge in women's mid-life and beyond. If different from those of men, how do they differ? If similar, is the reaction to conflicts or problems the same for both men and women? In addition, this dissertation will address itself to the issues of the structuring and restructuring of the self and the reordering of time at mid-life and beyond, thus attempting to bring to light new sociological hypotheses regarding women's development. And, to the extent that it is possible, findings with this literary approach will be compared with more standard social science empirical research methods.

In order to reach the attempted goals, the following order is pursued:

Chapter I will include a discussion on the validity and usefulness of literature as data source; how and why literary material was selected, specifically autobiography, and will contain a description of the theoretical framework to be used throughout the study. Chapters II through V will be explanatory of the emerging themes and properties and their role within the framework of female development and the life-cycle. Chapter VI will be devoted to a comparison between this study and other life-cycle empirical findings, while Chapter VII will draw the final conclusions.

Literature as Data Source

> Quoi qu'on fasse, on reconstruit tojours le monument à sa manière. Mais c'est déjà beaucoup de n'employer que des pierres authentiques.
>
> -Marguerite Yourcenar

> (No matter what one does, one reconstructs always the monument in one's own fashion. But it means already a lot not to use but authentic stones.)

Ritzer (1980) has stated that equally as important as a conceptual framework for the data is a method of data collection appropriate for the problem under study.

One research method that seems highly appropriate for qualitative research but which has been neglected by researchers for some time (Denzin, 1978; Starr, 1983) is life history. Life history as a testing tool for sociological theory was pioneered by Thomas and Znaniecki in their classic study of The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1927). Their primary goal was to understand the individual's development from his or her own subjective perspective, taking into account individual definitions of the situation.

For students of the life-cycle the life history method can provide a view of an individual's unique perceptions of goals, experiences, and the progression of events along the life-line.

Denzin (1978) states that:

> A good life history reads like a novel. Beginning with the objective facts, the reader is taken through the protagonist's life, one step at a time. The hero's reactions to each critical event are carefully detailed, and are often presented in the light of other reactions and interpretations. The central figure in a life history presents the world through his or her own eyes. Life histories are like novels in that novelists, like sociologists, interpret the experiences of their subjects within special theoretical frameworks. The fatalism of Zola

> or the existentialism of Conrad can be compared to the interactionist perspective guiding an interpretation of a deviant's career. A sociological life history is at once literary and theoretical; without a theory to guide the facts, a life history becomes bare description. Good life histories, like good novels, offer the reader a way to interpret the author's findings. That interpretative framework may be a theoretical scheme or a philosophical position (p. 286).

This similarity between life histories and literature is also seen by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who only regret that:

> ... letters, biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, speeches, novels and a multitude of nonfiction forms tend to be regarded as irrelevant except for a few restricted purposes (p. 161).

Some sociologists then see literature in general and autobiography in particular as data for the study of human behavior that may be comparable to life histories. An autobiography, a basically subjective account, can be an ideal tool when written by first-rate writers with intense powers of perception and observation. Such writers reconstruct the past in an articulate manner, providing the researchers with a particularly rich vocabulary of words, images, symbols and figures which may not be used by the "ordinary" subject recounting a life history.

Autobiography fits well the purpose of this dissertation because, like life history, its goal is to express concrete human experience and to analyze the role of the self in the context of this experience.

From a subjective point of view, autobiography should reveal the structure of an individual's gradual development as well as provide clues and insights into that individual's constellation of perceptions and goals. Finally, it should show how events are being restructured

in and through the writing process itself.

From a more objective point of view, autobiography gives the researcher an idea of the author's social and cultural milieu and of the norms and values that rule that particular milieu. This is particularly important to be able to identify the subject's "social clock."

Autobiography as data, then, should allow identification of subjective and objective perceptions and the same kind of analysis that would be possible from a successful life-history interview. If indeed, as stated by Denzin "life histories are like novels in that novelists, like sociologists, interpret the experiences of their subjects within special theoretical frameworks" (p. 286), autobiographies are like life histories and can be read and analyzed (from the interactionist point of view) with equally valid results. It has been established that in oral accounts (Kohli, 1981) the result is in part directed by the person who listens; a similar dynamic takes place in the case of written accounts. Writing is a social process and in autobiographies the result, too, is interactive. Kohli (1981) makes this point clearly and succinctly:

> In written autobiographies, the interactive dimension is two-fold: first, the interaction of the writer with the (idealized) reader that he takes as his point of reference; second, the constitution of the meaning in the interaction of the (real) reader with the text (p. 66).

From the perspective of interactionism, then, autobiography shares with life history a dynamic process. In an interview, when the subject recounts his or her life orally, the dynamic process is prompted by a face-to-face interaction. In writing one's life there

is a continuous restructuring which results from the combination of memory and the associations which writing brings to the conscious mind. When writing the subject is "face-to-face" with his/her own words, not with another person; yet this interaction can also have rich implications for the researcher.

Finally, the writing of autobiography is a creative process which involves the representation of what may seem to be a complete picture by a writer who has, in fact, isolated and selected events and reactions to those events. There is not a simple recounting of events, but rather an enhanced vision of selected events and reactions. The uniqueness of this vision is created rather in the fashion of impressionist painting, where less emphasis is placed on some points and colors so that others can be stressed. It is precisely that uniqueness, the unequal emphasis on experiences, that alerts the sociologist to the fact that she is confronting new data which will, inevitably, bring her to new insights.

While younger lives reveal themselves easily through an interview, autobiography lends itself especially well to the lives of those more advanced in years since the genre itself shares with the middle years that tendency to reflection and analysis (Butler, 1963; Cockshut, 1984; Coe, 1984; Spengemann, 1980). In lengthy autobiographies, like some we will treat here which have been written at different stages in the writer's life, this genre serves as a longitudinal study as well, allowing us to compare reactions at the different life stages when the books were written.

Selection of Materials

Material for analysis was selected for specific historical and cultural reasons as well as literary merit. The autobiographies of French women born between 1873 and 1930 were selected for several motives discussed below.

First, France has a long tradition of producing internationally recognized and celebrated women writers and, in the last few years, women authors of established literary reputation have produced an overwhelming number of autobiographies. One might say, in fact, that it has become very much à la mode in France today to write autobiography in lieu of fiction.

Only modern 20th century writers have been included in order to provide some consistency of social values and historical experience. For example, some subjects of this study may have experienced two world wars, each of which had devastating national impacts; and in some instances, a concern for morality or separation might be more a consequence of war and philosophies of life that emerged from it rather than of a universal female psychology. Literature after the 40's includes not only overt themes of war but also reflects the effects of the wars on intellectual history by revealing different ways of looking at the meaning of life and of the human condition.

As works of literature, then, these autobiographies will also reflect post-war trends such as existentialism, the philosophy of the absurd, and post-modernism, which was a movement to break down existing structures with a view to opening new possibilities for artistic expression. The meaning of one particular life as explored

by one writer´s autobiography can assume as well an exploration of the meaning of life itself, since the writing of the self is at times consistent with a more universal existentialist philosophy, as in the case of Simone de Beauvoir.

In the course of the research an additional shared cultural factor was revealed. This was the fact that all the writers under consideration were strongly influenced by the French writer Marcel Proust, who was born in 1871 and is considered by the literary academy to be one of the greatest and most influential western writers of the 20th century. It is noteworthy that his masterpiece, In Search of Lost Time, is autobiographical.

Francoise Sagan, for example, confesses her admiration for Proust in these terms which also reflect the spirit of investigation of this dissertation:

> It was along this path that I led many friends to love Proust, friends who had been put off by Swann. Like me, there were at once gripped by Albertine Disparue. But I discovered something else in this book that I have never ceased to reread, along with the other volumes, of course; I discovered that there was no limit, no point beyond which you could not go, that truth - human truth, that is - was everywhere, and everywhere open to investigation, that it was both unattainable and the only object of desire. I discovered that the subject matter of any work, from the moment the work concerned itself with human beings, was boundless; that if I wished one day - and were able - to describe the birth and death of any feeling whatsoever, I could spend my whole life doing it, write millions of pages on the subject and never complete the task, never reach the end of it, never be able to say, "That´s it. I´ve done it." I discovered that one would never - that I would never - get beyond halfway, beyond a fraction of the way toward achieving my goal .... In fact, I learned everything through Proust (1984, pp. 173-175).

Yourcenar, in turn, comments in With Open Eyes:

> What I like in his work is the vast thematic architecture, the exquisite perception of the passage of time and of the way it alters individual personalities, and a sensibility unlike that of any other writer. I've reread Proust seven or eight times (p. 197).

From these comments which are representative, it becomes evident that Proust influenced the selection of themes in these women writers' works and consequently, upon reflection those which emerged from this study. The main thematic structure of his monumental <u>In Search of Lost Time</u> is composed of Time, Memory, Love and Death - themes that interlace, become distant and come to the foreground again, like a prelude of musical notes that will rejoin in the composition to form a harmonious whole.

Finally, although our focus here is not on social class but rather on the transcendent class we call writers and artists, it is important in a sociological study to place the writers in their social context.

By birth, all the selected writers belong to the middle or upper-middle class: Françoise Sagan was the daughter of a rather prosperous industrialist; Marguerite Yourcenar, was born to a well-to-do French father and a Belgian mother; Colette was the daughter of a military captain and a mother who had been a wealthy widow by a previous marriage. Simone de Beauvoir, whose father was secretary to a lawyer at the court of appeals and whose mother came from a rich provincial family, chose however to identify ideologically with the lower classes, as did Marguerite Duras. Duras was the daughter of a professor of mathematics and a mother who taught school in Indochina, but Duras felt closer to the poor Vietnamese than she

did to the French colonial class.

In the case of these subjects, their commonality is not due so much to the class they share as to the marginality they share - each one for a different reason. No more did Duras identify with the French, when she was young, than Colette with the Parisians; to the end of Colette's life she felt uprooted from her native Provence of Burgundy and different because of her bi-sexuality. Simone de Beauvoir shared this marginality in another way. She severed herself from class and gender groups, moving from the world of women to that of men and experienced a general lack of social acceptance - except for a selected few intellectuals. Sagan felt her marginality, her deviance, in a way altogether different. A child prodigy who wrote an outstanding book at the age of nineteen, she was not accepted by the intellectual world due to her youth. Rather than a genius, she was considered a monster and it took her years to establish herself as an extraordinary writer. Yourcenar's difference lies in her homosexuality and in the fact that she is an expatriate who has lived for most of her professional life in the United States.

The commonality of this group, then, lies not in their belonging to a class but precisely in their "not belonging."

Literary merit was obviously an important criterion for selecting from among the innumerable existing autobiographies by authors of international fame.

Colette (Sidonie Gabrielle), the most famous woman writer of her day, was a member of the Belgian Royal Academy and the first woman member of the French Academie Goncourt. Simone de Beauvoir won the

prestigious Prix Goncourt, as well as international fame for her feminist manifesto The Second Sex. Marguerite Duras, well known in the literary field and for her film scripts, won the Prix de la Sélection des Librairies de France, the Prix Fémina and the Prix René Juillard. Françoise Sagan has been awarded the Prix des Critiques. Marguerite Yourcenar in 1980 became the first woman to be made a member of the Academie Française, a private society of men of letters founded by Richelieu in 1635. All these honors and prices become the more remarkable as they are granted by the male establishment and seldom are awarded to women.

Autobiographical Texts

Although some of the authors selected have written several books which belong to the genre of autobiography, only those judged pertinent and influential in the emergence of themes are quoted in the body of this dissertation. The reading and analysis of the complete works, however, have influenced the analysis and conclusions. Below is a list of all autobiographical texts of the five selected authors.

Colette (1873-1954)
1900 - Claudine at School
(La Maison de Claudine)
Trans. Antonia White.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957.

First of the Claudine series, which together with Claudine in Paris, The Indulgent Husband, and The Innocent Wife, was published under the pen name of "Willy," Colette's first husband's name. Colette fictionalizes here reminiscences of childhood and adolescence. Claudine at School was published when Colette was 28 years old.

1901 - Claudine in Paris
(Claudine à Paris)
Trans. Antonia White.

New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958.

Claudine's feelings are a reflection of Colette's marginality vis-à-vis Paris. Colette is now 29.

1902 - The Indulgent Husband (Claudine en Ménage)
Trans. Frederick A. Blossom.
New York: Rinehart and Company, 1935.

Through Claudine, the character of the book, Colette reveals her love experiences and marriage disillusions. Published when Colette was 30.

1902 - The Innocent Wife (Claudine s'en va)
Trans. Frederick A. Blossom.
New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934.

Reflections on Colette's own marital crisis and on her destiny as a woman. Colette wrote this book at the age of 31.

1922 - My Mother's House (La maison de Claudine)
Trans. Una Vicenzo Troubridge and Enid McLeod.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.

Here Colette recaptures the days of her childhood, drawing at the same time a portrait of her mother. Colette was forty nine years old when she wrote My Mother's House.

1929 - Sido (Sido)
Trans. Una Vincenzo Troubridge and Enid McLeod.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.

Published together with My Mother's House, it was written seven years later than the former. Colette was almost 55 when she wrote Sido. It is also a book of fragments about her mother and an exploration of past, present and future.

1932 - The Pure and the Impure

(Ces plaisirs)
Trans. Herma Briffault.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975.

The book explores, through anecdotes and remembered incidents, various forms of love and impure feelings like jealousy. It was written at the age of 59.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986)

1958 - Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter
(Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée)
Trans. James Kirkup.
New York: Harper and Row, 1959.

This was the first of Beauvoir's autobiographies - from date of birth to the time when she met Sartre in 1958. When the book appeared Beauvoir was 50.

1960 - The Prime of Life
(La Force de l'âge)
Trans. Peter Green.
New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

The Prime of Life was published two years after Memoirs. It covers the period from summer 1929 to the Liberation of Paris in August 1944. Beauvoir is 52 at this point.

1963 - Force of Circumstance
(La Force des Choses)
Trans. Richard Howard.
New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

It is an account of Beauvoir's life from the Liberation to the fall of 1962. Written when Beauvoir was 54.

1964 - A Very Easy Death
(Une mort très douce)
Trans. Patric O'Brian.
New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

An account of her mother's bout with cancer and her death, written at the age of 55.

1972 - All Said and Done
(Tout compte fait)
Trans. Patric O'Brian.
London: Andre Deutsch/Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974.

Focuses on some aspects of the 10 years elapsed since she wrote Force of Circumstance, like her writings, her contact with art, and mainly involvement with politics. Beauvoir is 64 years old at this stage.

1981 - Adieux
(La cerémonie des adieux)
Trans. Patric O´Brian.
New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Here Beauvoir recounts the illness and death of Sartre. Beauvoir is now 73 years old.

Simone de Beauvoir-
Alice Schwarzer
1983 - After the Second Sex
(Simone de Beauvoir heute)
Trans. Marianne Howarth.
New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

These are interviews in the form of dialogues, extremely important because they reveal Simone de Beauvoir´s view on important topics at the age of 75.

Marguerite Duras
(1914-)
1984 - The Lover
(L´amant)
Trans. Barbara Bray.
New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

This is an account of Duras´ affair at the age of 15 1/2 with a Chinese lover. Duras is 70 years old at the time of publication.

1985 - The War
(La douleur)
Trans. Barbara Bray.
New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.

Autobiographical account, written in the form of a diary during the years of the war, and published when Duras is 71 years old.

Françoise Sagan
(1935-)
1984 - With Fondest Regards
(Avec mon meilleur souvenir)
Trans. Christine Donougher.

New York: E.P. Dutton, 1985.

An autobiography composed of lyrically treated fragments dealing with states of mind (gambling, speeding); people (Billie Holiday, Jean Paul Sartre, Orson Welles, Tennessee Williams); and places (Saint Tropez) that had great impact on Sagan's life. Sagan was 49 at the time this book appeared.

Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-)

1974 - Souvenirs Pieux
Paris: Editions Gallimard.

Autobiographical account in two parts. Starts with the narration of a birth: her own. The main purpose, as point of departure, is to find out about her mother, her family, herself. Yourcenar is 71 years old when she writes this book.

1977 - Archives du Nord
Paris: Editions Gallimard.

Second part of the autobiography. Like in Souvenirs Pieux, Yourcenar continues the research of her origin. She is 74 years old at this point.

1980 - With Open Eyes
(Les yeux ouverts: Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey)
Trans. Arthur Goldhammer.
Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

Series of interviews with Matthieu Galey on subjects ranging from the author's childhood to her opinions on love, friendship, life, sources of the self, etc.

Yourcenar is, when this book appears, 77 years old.

With only one exception, After the Second Sex. which appeared first in German, all the other autobiographies were published in French. These texts were all read also in their original language, thus making sure that the meaning of the original version was

preserved in the translations and quotations.

Theoretical Framework

Because no single theoretical perspective has been established as the best approach for studying women´s life-cycle, the most suitable procedure seems to be the use of grounded theory.

Grounded theory is a research method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) which underlines the importance of bringing forth theory that is grounded in the data instead of testing already established theories. Glaser and Strauss´ position is that the theory arrived at in this fashion will "fit," that is, "categories will become readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study ..." (p. 3). This procedure allows the researcher to generate theory based on analysis of the data rather than viceversa.

In grounded theory, in spite of its general openness, there is, of course, a technical terminology and there are certain parameters which the researcher must take into account. The technical terms used in this study include the following:

1. Themes or Categories

   A theme or category - the terms will be used interchangeably in this study - is, as defined by Glaser & Strauss, an element in a theory that can "stand by itself."

2. Properties

   Following Glaser and Strauss´ definition, properties are just aspects of the conceptual element. As part of a category, properties help define, interpret and illuminate

the category once analysis has begun. Glaser and Strauss stress the fact that "both categories and properties are concepts indicated by the data (and not the data itself) ..." (1967, p. 36).

3. Hypotheses

In grounded theory research, "hypotheses have at first the status of suggested, not tested, relations among categories and their properties, though they are verified as much as possible in the course of research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 39). In other words, what is characteristic of grounded theory is that the process is one of hypothesis building rather than testing.

4. Concepts

Glaser and Strauss state that concepts should have two fundamental traits:

> First, the concepts should be analytic - sufficiently generalized to designate characteristics of concrete entities, not the entities themselves. They should also be sensitizing - yield a "meaningful" picture, abetted by apt illustrations that enable one to grasp the reference in terms of one's own experience (pp. 38-39).

These two essential features should help the reader identify with the subjects under study. In addition, concepts should also give the reader an idea of the distinctive elements that will constitute the hypothesis. A constant comparison among data and standard sociological perspectives, should give researcher and reader the dimension of the new concept.

Glaser and Strauss cite as example a study by Louis Wirth which compared the Chicago ghetto with the European ones in order to determine the characteristic changes in the new-world ghetto. As new categories and properties emerge, then, the sociologist becomes aware that the boundaries of standard sociological concepts can change, thus establishing the need for a redefinition.

Grounded theory is a systematic, inductive, sociological approach to data collection and interpretation. To prove the value of a theory generated from autobiography, a codified procedure becomes essential. Grounded theory provides this rigorous approach by the constant comparative technique of confirming or rejecting categories and properties as the study progresses. Although literature or autobiography could be used in a general way to uncover new insights into the life-cycle of women, it would prove to be an impressionistic study rather than the systematic, disciplined investigation which sociology requires.

Several broad themes or categories emerged from a first reading of the autobiographies: Time, Death, Love, Self and Sense of Permanence. The next stage of the analysis was an in depth reading and coding, with a view to either reaffirm or reject the emerging themes. The in depth reading took the form of a particular style of literary analysis, "explication de texte." This method involves close textual analysis, where not only broad stylistic trends and patterns are explored but, in some cases, every word of the text under consideration is given serious attention.

"Explication de texte" as a method of literary analysis is, in fact, very close in structure to the sociological method which we have explained as grounded theory. Explication of a text begins with isolation of possible themes and proceeds to an in depth reading to reaffirm or reject the presence of these themes in the text. The end result of an "explication de texte" is the critic's hypothesis as to the author's intent.

For the purpose of this study, literary themes can be compared to sociological themes or categories, and stylistic peculiarities which are produced by the close analysis and which explain or refine these themes, can be compared to the sociological term "properties" in the following way.

A theme or category in sociological terms is a broad concept that stands by itself. The properties of the theme or category represent elements or characteristics that allow the researcher to differentiate structures within a broad and rather universal context. The same is true in literary analysis. Major writers address the basic human conflicts and concerns; these are all themes. However, great writers distinguish themselves one from another in the properties that attain to their style.

As the close textual analysis was done here, findings were written down in different notebooks by author, by book and by tentative category. Clusters of quotes, statements and passages that seemed connected were extracted and analyzed in the same manner. Generation of theory, like "explication de texte," requires that the analyst constantly take apart and reconstruct the different literary

passages. It is in the integration, through a constant comparative process, that the categories and properties result. Some categories are eliminated because they are more pertinent to one author than the other. The category Sense of Permanence which insinuated itself at the beginning, was dropped as it became obvious that as a theme it was touched explicitly only by Sagan and Yourcenar, while it was implicit in all the writers as a property of the category Time. Analysis also revealed that most important at the stage under study was a search for meaning. That search for meaning included a search for self - but the self was defined in a context of relationships and structured or restructured according to those relationships and their meanings. Search for Meaning, then, replaced the initial category Self. This example of process of elimination and integration of themes and properties briefly shows how as categories shape up, through constant comparison, the analyst is forced to make continuous theoretical sense of the comparisons and rethink carefully the initial conclusions.

Summing up, after all the works were read and the data recorded, all notes were reviewed for a final verification or rejection of categories. The final list holds two categories: Time and Search for Meaning. The properties of the Time category are: Physical Decline, Nostalgia and Death. The properties of Search for Meaning are: Love and Demystification. Throughout the process of analysis the researcher tried to stay sensitive to what the data revealed about middle age and beyond and what it suggested in the way of new questions, new perceptions and new insights. Other researchers using the same sources may come up with other themes, depending on their

insights and their focus of analysis. Or, to cite Glaser and Strauss:

> ...the theorist's task is to make the most of his insights by developing them into systematic theory. His sociological perspective is never finished, not even when he writes the last line of his monograph - not even after he publishes it, since thereafter he often finds himself elaborating and amending his theory, knowing more now than when the research was formally concluded (p. 256).

CHAPTER I

Footnotes

[1]Neugarten (1968) defines the "social clock" as a sense of regulation originating from an internalized perception of social norms, social expectations and social roles. This sense of social time can act, according to Neugarten, either as an accelerator to accomplish a goal or as an indicator to slow down, according to the social situation.

[2]Gould (1978) does not share with Levinson the belief that individuals discard old structures, but his concept of "transformation" stresses the importance of shifting from values appropriate for earlier stages to a reformulation in accordance with the new stage.

[3]Louis Wirth, The Ghetto (new ed.). (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

CHAPTER II

TIME AND PHYSICAL DECLINE

> The recognition that there is "only so much time left" was a frequent theme in the interview.
>
> -Beatrice Neugarten

> What time is it? Eleven o'clock already! You'll understand later on that one keeps on forgetting old age up to the very brink of the grave ..."
>
> -Sido

Students of the life-cycle, like Buhler (1968), Jung (1933), Erikson (1968) and Neugarten (1968), have consistently pointed to an awareness of aging during the middle and later years and a shift in time-perspective, from time elapsed to time still left ahead. Neugarten (1968) states that:

> Both sexes, although men more than women, talked of the new difference in the way time is perceived. Life is restructured in terms of time-left-to-live rather than time-since-birth. Not only the reversal in directionality but the awareness that time is finite is a particularly conspicuous feature of middle age ... The recognition that there is "only so much time left" was a frequent theme in the interviews. In referring to the death of a contemporary, one man said: "There is now the realization that death is very real. Those things don't quite penetrate when you're in your twenties and you think that life is all ahead of you. Now you know that death will come to you, too" (p. 97).

Merriam (1980), in her analysis of male fictional characters, comes to the same conclusion:

> ... a growing awareness of one's own aging is a major concern for those in mid-life. Unlike a young person who is future oriented, whose life stretches ahead almost indefinitely, the middle-aged man begins to realize that his life is finite. He becomes aware of his physical aging, an

> irreversible process, which, he realizes, leaves him left with a limited number of years. This awareness of aging is more fully understood by explaining its properties of a reordered time perspective, concern with physical deterioration, intimations of mortality ... (pp. 28-29).

Both the above studies agree on a reordering of life at middle age prompted by an awareness of aging that brings with it the anxieties of physical decline and death.

Physical deterioration seems to be one of the major worries of the characters studied by Merriam. She found that Moses Herzog (Bellow, 1964), for example, was disturbed because "he was losing his hair" and called himself an "old fool" (p. 31). Also Bob Slocum, the character in Something Happened (Heller, 1975), worried "about his future deterioration with a foreboding equal to his present concern with the physical" wrote Merriam, to the point where he complained:

> I am growing forgetful. My eyesight is deteriorating. I wear reading glasses now and require a stronger prescription every year. Peridontal work will save my teeth only for a while. I know that I repeat myself at home with my children and my wife ... Soon I will repeat myself with everyone everywhere and be shunned as a prattling old fool (Merriam, 1980, p. 32).

Intimations of mortality are no easier to deal with for these same characters. Bob Slocum, according to Merriam, "tries to avoid dealing with death," and refuses to relate to anyone "in whom I begin to perceive the first signs of physical decay and approach death" (1980, p. 38).

The autobiographies of this study also suggest the theme of time and within this main theme or category an interlacing of the properties of physical aging, nostalgia and death. Those most relevant to the theme of time and the property of physical decline

are: My Mother's House (Colette); A Very Easy Death (Simone de Beauvoir); After the Second Sex (Simone de Beauvoir); Force of Circumstance (Simone de Beauvoir); The Prime of Life (Simone de Beauvoir); The Lover (Marguerite Duras); With Fondest Regards (Francoise Sagan) and With Open Eyes (Marguerite Yourcenar).

An awareness of aging and physical deterioration is a major theme in Colette's My Mother's House. However, in this text, a calm acceptance of fleeing time emerges in sharp contrast to the despair expressed by the fictional characters studied by Merriam. The fragments in My Mother's House that refer to physical decline seem at first reading to deal mostly with Colette's mother. However, a textual analysis of certain passages uncovers a double referentiality to both self and other, daughter and mother.

In most of the fragments that make up the book, Colette starts with a description in the past tense - that is, at the time when the action took place. For example, in a fragment called "where are the children" (p. 18) , Colette begins with: "The house was large ... The back, invisible to passers by, was a suntrap, swathed in a mantle of wistaria and bigonia ..." And she continues: ... "Is it worth while, I wonder, seeking for adequate words to describe the rest?" A jump into the present tense lets the reader know that this is Colette now that talks, thinks and reflects. When she wants to convey the feeling of uncertainty, she moves into the conditional, as in this example: "It would happen sometimes long ago ..." and the combination of both the adverbs of time ("sometimes" and "long ago") and the conditional make the whole situation and notion of time ambiguous.

Another sample taken from the same fragment starts like this:

> It was then, from beneath the ancient iron trellis sagging to the left under the wistaria, that my mother would make her appearance, small and plump in those days when age had not yet wasted her. She would scan the thick green clumps and, raising her head, fling her call into the air: "Children! Where are the children?" (p. 7).

This phrase is once again started with was, verb in the past tense, and followed by then, adverb of time. Thus put together, it states clearly that the action took place in the past. A transition is indicated by the conditional, would, and by the adverb where. A return to the present tense - "Where are the children?" - bring both reader and Colette back to the present time. This suggests that it is Colette who is identifying with her mother, and, most importantly, Colette herself who is wondering in a figurative sense where the children are.

This structure follows throughout My Mother´s House. Whenever identification with the mother occurs, whenever it is Colette´s interpretation or reflections that we are reading, the present tense is used. Let us move to examples explicitly connected with the category under analysis, time and physical decline. For instance:

> Without replying, I watch her throw off her old garden hat with a youthful gesture that reveals her grey hair and her face, fresh colored, but marked here and there with ineffaceable lines. Is it possible - why, yes, after all, I am the youngest of us four - is it possible that my mother is nearly fifty-four? I never think about it. I should like to forget it (p. 18).

In this fragment the present tense is used throughout. In addition, in the second phrase of the sentence, the verb "watch" is preceded by the pronoun "I" which means that it is the narrator who is

reflecting and explaining. The double referentiality to self and other - Colette and her mother - is also confirmed by the fact that at the time she was writing My Mother's House Colette was nearly fifty years old and when she finished Sido (also fragments about her mother published always together in the Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition) she was fifty-four which made Colette herself "nearly fifty-four."

The way the mother is described corresponds more to how someone Colette's own age would reassess her looks rather than how someone nine years old, the age Colette was supposed to be when the action took place, would react. Children that age have a tendency to want to ignore that their parents are aging. If confronted with the fact, they will think of the parent as just old. This contrast of a "youthful gesture" with "grey hair" or a "fresh coloured face" corresponds more to an adult's recollection of her mother.

Another example that follows the same structure belongs to fragment #25, My Mother and Illness. While she lies in bed, her mother reflects on aging and says:

> But I am not always thinking of the way in which age has altered me, and it's when I look at my hand that I realize the change. I am astonished not to see under my eyes my little hand as it was when I was twenty (p. 124).

In both of the above cases, the narrative in the present tense suggests that Colette's mother's image is present in her mind and also that she is writing about herself. The structure applied previously can also be applied to the second quotation where Colette speaks about her mother's hand. It is not only the mother who is astonished that she does not recognize her hand; it is also Colette who finds herself

in the present confronted with a hand which is no longer that of a twenty year old.

In Colette the effect of the passage of time is simultaneously lyrical, nostalgic and realistic. The quotation from the fragment My Mother and Illness is part of an account of her mother's preparation for death. While this passage will be further discussed in the chapter of Time and Death, it is important to mention it here as an example of anticipatory socialization. While an unexpected death may make the surviving significant others experience remorse over what could have been done or said, death which has been anticipated, as in this case, can preclude some of the sad feelings and help the close relative (in this fragment the daughter) "experience all the preparatory sentiments and actions" (Lopata, 1986, p. 697).

The absence of despair vis-à-vis aging apparent in Colette's writing is obvious also in the autobiographical interview with Marguerite Yourcenar, With Open Eyes (1984). Asked by Matthieu Galey (her interviewer) how she felt about her age (seventy-seven when the book was published) she replied:

> And I don't feel any age. From time to time I notice I am no longer as strong as when I was twenty, but such weakness might have afflicted me when I was forty. I might have suffered from sciatica or circulatory problems at that age just as easily as now. Apart from that, age means nothing. If anything I feel that I'm still a child: eternity and childhood are my ages (p. 10).

Eternity and childhood. The end and the beginning of the cycle.

An in depth analysis of this quote reveals Yourcenar's perception of aging. At first sight it would seem that the important words in this passage are the adverbs of time. Were it so, we could have said

that Yourcenar seemed affected by physical decline. A careful reading, however, shows that those adverbs - "from time to time" and "no longer" - qualify a verb that is that of an observer, detached and devoid of feeling: "I notice." The objectivity of the remark and the sentimental distance are stressed by the use of the past conditional tense: "may have affected me when I was forty." The subjective perception of aging, that tells how she really feels now and how she felt through a whole stage of her life-cycle, from forty to seventy-seven, is expressed in the strength of two subjective verbs: "feel" and "am". How does she feel? Ageless, synonymous with eternal, and at the same time at the very beginning of the cycle: "I am still a child." Yourcenar is expressing in her own language the words of Colette's mother, "but I am not always thinking of the way in which age has altered me," which corresponds to Yourcenar's "from time to time I notice I am no longer as strong as when I was twenty..."

Time is for Marguerite Yourcenar an important theme. Within the corpus of her work, time makes sense as part of history and it is this notion also that moves Yourcenar to say "eternity and childhood are my ages."

It is a common assumption that in Yourcenar's two works, Souvenirs Pieux (1974) and Archives du Nord (1977), she writes little about herself. The general impression, as stated in the brief outline of her books in Chapter I, is that these autobiographical attempts just provide historical background within which Yourcenar is seen as part of a larger, more general plan. What adds to this general impression is that Archives du Nord ends when Yourcenar is only a few

weeks old and that in neither book does she talk explicitly about aging, passing of time, transitions, crisis or time reordering in the way, for example, a sociologist would.

The other reason her books are considered just autobiographical "attempts" is that they do not resemble in form or structure anything the reader is accustomed to see in a text belonging to this genre, that is, a chronological account of the events of an individual life. At first sight then, Yourcenar's texts appear to be historical or philosophical in nature rather than autobiographical. However, as we will attempt to demonstrate, the writing of these ambiguous texts (ambiguous as to the genre into which they fall) was prompted by a desire to look into herself and by the intention to elucidate her "own" structure within the context of history. Although the first impression may be that of an historical account, what Yourcenar is really doing is a "life review."

In other words, an alert reader trained in sociological analysis could easily refute Matthew Galey's comments like: "... Marguerite Yourcenar, unlike most of her colleagues in the literary profession, has so persistently refused to talk about herself" (p. xvi), or "Once again it is surprising that you didn't talk about yourself in this book (Archives du Nord) " (p. 171), through an analysis of the following passage:

> I embarked on this adventure at the age of sixty or so. When we are allowed the time, there always comes a moment when we want to sum up our accounts, a moment when we all ask what it is we owe to various ancestors known or unknown, to various incidents or accidents long since forgotten, and possibly even (what comes to the same thing) to other lives ... Obviously, there is no hope of recovering all their

> names, of identifying all those individuals for more than a few centuries back, a very short time indeed. They are lost forever, except within ourselves (p. 170).

Words like "sum up our accounts," "recovering," "a moment when we ask what we owe to our ancestors" reveal a desire to be involved in a process which sociologically is that of reordering of time and reconstruction of reality, a process achieved by letting memory provide "various incidents and accidents long since forgotten."

What becomes important and can be seen from the above passage is that Yourcenar is involved in what Berger and Luckman (1967) call "in toto selection," according to which some categories are nihilated and others brought back to a very prominent place. Yourcenar has chosen to reconstruct the "incidents" and "accidents" in her history that, as she says in this passage, will help her to identify with the individuals who allowed her to become what she is at this time. In other words, those figures of the past that have contributed to the creation of the present writings and to the creation of her own self. Instead of cutting off her past, she has chosen to bring it together, to "sum it up," to "recover" all the identities that may seem lost except "within herself." By recovering all those figures from the past, she selects the specific characteristics which she now sees as comprising her own identity, that is, specific figures which now live within herself.

In view of this analysis, Galey's remarks are not on target. Yourcenar's text does offer a personal and subjective autobiographical portrait of the self. It is not simply an account of an historical, philosophical, far removed past but of a self that completes its

structure through identification with subjectively selected figures from the past. Here Yourcenar can be compared to Françoise Sagan, who reconstructs her own marginal personality by selecting for her autobiography marginal characters with whom she can identify; people like Billie Holiday, a black woman, Orson Welles, the misunderstood genius and Tennessee Williams, the quintessential homosexual artist.

A sociologist who wished to do an in depth study of the reconstruction of self in either Marguerite Yourcenar or Françoise Sagan, then, would find rich data sources in the life histories or biographies of the figures each has selected to represent herself. A project of this kind, of course, would differ in intent from the present study.

Literary analysis, then, can lead to referents which might not be immediately apparent when reading from a strictly sociological perspective.

Let us now move to a more explicitly autobiographical text, With Open Eyes (1984), where now, talking specifically about herself, Yourcenar says:

> I feel that I am an instrument through which currents, vibrations, have passed. That is true of all my books and I would even say of all my life. Perhaps of all life ... Everything began before us and will continue after we are gone. Everything surpasses us, in other words, and we feel humble and amazed when we serve as instruments in this greater scheme (pp. 259-260).

Here, once again, if we examine the words in the above passage we see the language of the "self" as an integrative force. While the noun "instrument" may not give in itself a notion of identity, it is the subjective verb "I feel" that describes the intensity and the

importance of being an instrument through the words "currents" and "vibrations." So, being an instrument, becomes the force that will link all together, the "currents" and the "vibrations" and be assembled later on in books of reconstruction. Feeling "humble" and "amazed" at being an instrument should not mislead us - the humility is not in regard to the "self" but in relationship to everything that is great: "this greater scheme," - "all of life." The amazement comes from the realization of the importance of the woman and of her integrative power to serve as an instrument in this greater scheme.

This restructuring of self does not bring a sense of despair to Yourcenar but of permanence: "everything began before us and will continue after we are gone." Yourcenar draws her language here from something she remembers her father saying when she was twenty-two, in front of a sculpture by Michelangelo in Florence:

> For a man my age, what is most impressive about this moment is that I shall probably never have the opportunity to return to this place, but these statues existed before me and will remain after I am gone (p. 12).

This contributes to the sense of continuity we have discussed earlier in this chapter.

With reference to time, neither Yourcenar nor Françoise Sagan, whom we will discuss now, are explicitly concerned with physical deterioration or how time has affected them personally. Simone de Beauvoir and Colette, on the other hand, as we will see, discuss time with specific reference to their own persons or bodies. This is a consequence of the intimate relationship between the mother and restructuring of time in the texts we have explicated.

Françoise Sagan in With Fondest Regards expresses the passage of time at the age of fifty in a more metaphorical and implicit way than Colette and Beauvoir. Colette, as we remember, moves back and forth in time and physical decline through her account of her mother's illness and through a description of an aging face and hand that refers, we feel, not only to the mother but to herself. Beauvoir, in turn, speaks frankly about how she feels about her own aging in After the Second Sex and even more explicitly in her book A Very Easy Death, where she describes her mother's physical decline and her own identification with her mother.

Sagan, on the other hand, comes to life through her interaction with the fascinating characters whose portraits make up most of her autobiography and they, in turn, come to life in their interaction with each other and with her. Sagan, unlike Yourcenar, does not try to see where she fits into the great scheme of things but, on the contrary, stresses her own deviance and marginality as well as that of the characters she portrays. Sagan highlights individuality and "joie de vivre" in statements like: "I am myself, I am alive, this is what living means" (p. 72). The reader is aware of the importance to Sagan of the survival of feelings, caring and of an active, creative mind over physical deterioration. Her admiration for a lucid mind in spite of old age shows in the following compassionate passage describing an aging Jean Paul Sartre:

> I liked holding him by the hand and his holding me with his mind ... the clumsiness of his blindness did not bother me at all. I admired the fact that he had been able to survive his own passion for literature ... I liked to listen to music with him; and most of all I liked to listen to him (p.

154).

Interestingly enough it is in writing of Jean Paul Sartre that Sagan exhibits a close affinity with the next text of our study which is by Simone de Beauvoir, who also speaks about the relative importance of the mind and the body in aging, in a collection of interviews that were published under the title: After the Second Sex. When she was asked how the passage of time had affected her, the interview went like this:

q. Has losing your looks bothered you?

a. When I was thirty, thirty-five, forty, I sometimes looked in the mirror and quite liked what I saw. But it has never been the obsession that it is for some women to whom looks are everything and who have a lot of difficulty coming to terms with growing old. For me the most important thing was my mind, everything else took second place (p. 86).

And then Beauvoir added:

When I wake up, when I walk or read a book, I never think of myself as any age at all, just as one does not think of age when one is young ... Cocteau put it neatly when he said that the bad thing about growing old is staying young (p. 87).

This last quote bears a striking resemblance to Yourcenar's discussion earlier on, where she talked about "eternity and childhood." While Yourcenar employs "eternity," Beauvoir uses "any age at all," which means ageless and eternal. While Yourcenar writes "childhood," Beauvoir uses "young," but the essence of the language is the same: the fusion of old and young, the sense of circularity, the lack of despair.

Specifically about mid-life, Beauvoir had this to say:

...in my view, the most radiant period in one's life is

> between thirty and fifty, when one has set the framework of one's life and one is free of the constraints of youth - family matters, career pressures - it is the time when one is free and there is a lot to come (p. 88).

What becomes interesting at this point is a comparison between Beauvoir's remark about "other women" and herself like: "... for some women ... who have a lot of difficulty coming to terms with growing old," and some sociological studies on women and their perception of middle age. For instance, Rubin (1974) says:

> The midlife transition is, in fact, a difficult one for most women - a time often filled with turmoil and self-doubt, a time when old roles are being shed and the shape of new ones not yet apparent; a time of reordering long-held priorities, of restructuring daily life. From that small truth, however, has grown a large lie - a fabrication based on the one-sided and distorted view of women and womanhood; a view that insists that womanhood and motherhood are synonymous, that motherhood is a woman's ineluctable destiny, her sacred calling, her singular area of fulfillment. Until quite recently, this view has remained largely unchallenged - one of the accepted verities on which our social and economic system was built. Man worked outside the home, woman inside. Her biological destiny was to nurture, his to provide the safety within which she could do it (1967, p. 24).

While an initial reading of this passage may suggest a large gap between the thoughts of Beauvoir and Rubin, a closer look at this text reveals that this is not so. Rubin is not stating, like Beauvoir, that midlife is a brilliant stage, yet she is saying that the belief that midlife transition is a difficult one for women, is only a small truth that gave way to the myth that womanhood and motherhood are a woman's destiny. On this point there is total agreement between Rubin and Beauvoir. Asked what she had to say about motherhood, Beauvoir replied:

> That motherhood is not a woman's life work. That the

> capacity for biological motherhood (i.e. giving birth) does not automatically mean a duty to be a social mother (i.e. bringing up the child). That motherhood is not in itself a creative act. That in current conditions, motherhood often makes slaves of women and ties them to the house and/or their role. That we must therefore put an end to this kind of motherhood, and the division of labor along male/female lines. And finally, that the basis of this male/female division of labor is the concept of a "feminine" maternal nature, invented by men - a maternal nature that is by no means inherent in women, but imposed on them by education (After the Second Sex, 1984, p. 19).

As for the importance of looks at middle-age, Rubin's findings resemble Beauvoir's statement quoted before about "other women." Most women, says Rubin, define themselves listing physical characteristics:

> Most start with some description of their physical attributes: I'm short, tall, blond, fat, pretty, not so pretty any more, average - testifying to the primacy of their appearance in their image of self. No surprise in a culture where a woman's looks are her most highly valued commodity. No surprise either that few are satisfied with their looks, least of all those who are quite beautiful. Indeed, it is the beauties who now have the most trouble with aging - who peer worriedly at every wrinkle, speak anxiously of every bulge... Not one said, "I'm a teacher," "I'm a secretary," "I'm a psychologist," "I'm a seamstress," "I'm a personnel manager," "I'm a lawyer." Few included the words competent or capable in their definition of self (1974, pp. 54-55)

and this is the result of their having been socialized to be "pretty." However, the resemblance between Beauvoir's and Rubin's statements about looks has to be analyzed carefully. To begin with, Beauvoir uses her statement to separate herself from other women - thus possibly exaggerating the whole notion by the inclusion of the word "obsession." Secondly, what "other women" is Beauvoir talking about? Career women? Middle-class women? French women" It might be a helpful reminder at this point to note that French socialization varies in many instances from the way American women are socialized.

French literature, an influential socialization force on the women of this group, stresses the beauty of the feminine characters far less than their strength and personality. Most of the best known characters in French literature - from those depicted by Racine (seventeenth century) to those created by Proust (twentieth century) - are powerful, manipulative, aging women, admired precisely for these characteristics. Socialization for this group of women writers may be based far more on literary models than on those "other women."

Bernice Neugarten (1968) found that women generally associate middle age "with the launching of children." Even those women who have never been married guide themselves by the family they could have had at a particular age. Men, instead, take as a clue of the passing of time either career problems or physical decay or the illnesses or deatns of their friends. Neugarten states:

> Men perceive a close relationship between life-line and career-line. Middle age is the time to take stock. Any disparity noted between career-expectations and career achievements - that is, whether one is "on time" or "late" in reaching career goals - adds to the heightened awareness of age (p. 96).

Being "on time" or "off time" is part of the notion that Neugarten (1968) called the "social clock." Neugarten and others suggest that women follow a family clock, no matter how successful their career has been (Rubin, 1979; Gilligan, 1982), while men follow mainly a career clock. Therefore, even if at middle age or beyond, females ask themselves "what am I going to do with the rest of my life?" (Rubin, 1979), lack of success in the career seldom seems as devastating to women as to the male who has defined his life and

identity by what he accomplishes at work. Or, as Rubin puts it:

> For him, there is no being without doing. For her, it works the other way. All her life, she's been expected to be - be good, be pretty, be patient, be kind, be loving. To be - the quintessence of woman (1979, p. 59).

The passages by Rubin and the explanation by Neugarten, can help us reduce the ambiguity of what the writers in our group are and are not. As the rest of the study will show, they resemble other women in their emphasis on love, affiliation and integration. They seem to differ (explicitly stated by Beauvoir and Duras) in the relative unimportance of the need to be physically attractive. Of primary importance to these writers is to be creative; their priorities are there. Or to repeat Beauvoir's words: "To me the most important thing was my mind, everything else took second place" (p. 86).

This is an important distinction between these authors and samples of representative middle-aged women, yet it may be misleading because without a broader sociological and literary analysis the tendency may be to compare these creative women to men with careers. While career and creativity may be important and take "first place," this group attaches a very significant importance to attachment, love, integration and to drawing resources from affiliatory relationships; this is not the case in studies of male subjects. For women in general, according to life-cycle studies (Rubin, 1979; Gilligan, 1982; Neugarten, 1968), identity is still strongly linked with affiliation:

> Because of their investment in the relationship; because of their history of assessing themselves by other's responses, and because they really do perceive reality in interpersonal terms, they overwhelmingly define and evaluate identity and femininity within the context of this relationship (Bardwick, 1971, p. 211).

Men in general equate career and life-line. A study by Pleck and Sawyer (1974), which appeared under the title Men and Masculinity, argues that "getting ahead" is a strong theme in male socialization. To establish a reputation does not seem sufficient; men often think that they have to continue winning and attaining new positions. This establishes a constant competition and a continual reevaluation in relation to others. Such a competitive orientation achieved through constant effort and struggle, can lend itself to chronic vulnerability and instability which can, in turn, precipitate a crisis. If the definition of the situation is that of career failure, this crisis can lead to a rupture of the line and to the beginning of a new career. The beginning of a new career entails the readjustment of one's aspirations or goals (Kimmel, 1980) and a new awakening to the notion of time - in this case time remaining to the men to achieve more ambitious career goals. For these males the different processes - breaking out, looking for a new job, changing careers involve changes in the self as each new career implies resocialization.

The data under consideration here are already beginning to reveal a different pattern. Neither Colette, nor Yourcenar, nor Beauvoir view physical aging as a moment of crisis or perceive a need to restructure their lives according to time remaining. There is awareness of time, aging and physical decline in this group but the paramount feeling seems to be one of agelessness: "no difficulty coming to terms in getting old;" "I never think of myself as old;" "eternal and childhood are my ages." There is a feeling of transcending time. This time

transcendence seems obviously connected with literary creativity that allows one to start anew at any age, ignoring all "clocks" but that of the subjective feeling involved in writing. Time perception then is one of freedom from social constraints; of a transcendence that fuses past and present through literary creation making the present richer and projecting this richness or "brilliant period" into the future.

The property of physical deterioration is touched upon these writers but without despair. While Colette expresses this notion through a lyrical language that is connected with the mother, Yourcenar and Beauvoir transcend notions of physical decline by declaring that the dominant feeling is that of being ageless. "Eternity and childhood," when fused, convey the fluidity and the circularity of the life-style.

Although we are dealing with women who have established careers as writers, we find it difficult to compare what they say about their aging to the results of the empirical research done on men and career. In fact, as far as time and physical decline are concerned, this group of women defy a complete affinity with empirical studies done on either women or men. While they stand close to other women in their valuing love, affiliation, integration, and time-reordering, they differ in what may be their socialization models, found in literature, and in their possibility of reordering time at will through literary creation.

On the other hand, they differ from men in that in spite of their careers they do not seem to follow a career clock. They follow the subjective internal clock of their own creative process, and through

the metaphor of time, they fuse past and present, and project a seamless transition to a future that does not appear to be foreshortened. No crisis is experienced because time is transcended.

CHAPTER II

Footnotes

[1]"Where are the Children?" is the first fragment in this text which is made up of vignettes from the author's life.

[2]Butler (1963) defines the Life Review as: "... a naturally occurring universal mental process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts; simultaneously and normally, these experiences and conflicts can be surveyed and reintegrated" (p. 66).

CHAPTER III

TIME AND NOSTALGIA

> Symbolic interactionists emphasize the importance to humans of the ability to define the present, anticipate the future and not only remember but also reconstruct the past.
>
> -Helena Lopata

> A little later will come other curiosities, other questions, other silences ...
>
> -Colette

A very broad definition of the symbolic interactionist perspective is that human action is intersected by thought and interpretation; in other words, mediated by reflection.

Symbolic interactionism is further characterized by subjectivity: a subjectivity that includes a continuous availability of the self. According to Berger (1967, p. 29) to make the self available requires that one stop and "arrest" that continuity, turning the attention back to oneself to reconstruct a part of that self. That reconstruction can be part of a personal need and yet be social, as it is usually brought about in connection with a need regarding others. From this point of view, while the reconstruction includes others, it is not as highly fluid as, let us say, a "face to face" situation. In a "face to face" situation, subjective definitions have the immediacy and continuous influence of the "other."

The written language shares Berger's notion of "reconstruction." Though it may not appear at first sight to have the immediacy and intimacy of a "face to face" situation, a genre like autobiography

falls clearly into the structure of interactionism. First, the author of an autobiography expresses subjective, intimate thoughts through the different stages of her life, and stops to "define the present, anticipate the future, and not only remember but also reconstruct the past" (Lopata, 1986, p. 695). Second, an intimate link is created with the reader through the interest produced by the writing and also because, when reconstructing, the autobiographer takes the "other" (the reader) into account. Writing, then, is social, and the inclusion of the reader produces a "quasi" face-to-face situation: the text is being continuously modified through the writer's anticipation and manipulation of the reader's reaction.

Not only does autobiography as genre fit the interactionist perspective, but this approach also applies to the group under study. All these women reconstruct a past through the definition or redefinition of their lives. They include not only those "characters" that played an important role in their life histories, but the one that will be also the ultimate "other", i.e. the reader.

Berger claims that in the redefinition or reconstruction of reality, an "in toto" selection takes place. This involves retrojecting to the past some current subjective views, like "then I thought ... now I know" (1967). This selection involves eliminating old categories; as a matter of fact, they are now given a prominent negative place in the redefined situation. One of Berger's examples is: "When I was still caught in bourgeois consciousness" (p. 160).

In other words, one can exaggerate from this vantage point by either over-emphasizing negative categories from the past or inventing

new incidents which harmonize with the new reconstructed totality. Since the new "reality" is now in the foreground, an individual may believe this process to be completely authentic. Berger explains that it is not a dishonest procedure; it is usually an effort to balance a new reality with what was formerly perceived of as reality and to create a new "truth" which envelops and comprehends both the past and present realities. Literary writing, of course, does this all the time and we call it "metaphor."

A combination of literary and sociological analysis will help us form a clearer picture of what Berger means by a rejection of old values and of what the linguist would mean by saying that certain values persist in the language in spite of the writer's claims to have abandoned them. For example, when Simone de Beauvoir writes Force of Circumstance in 1963, she admits:

> I was - like Sartre - insufficiently liberated from the ideologies of my class; at the very moment that I was rejecting them, I was still using their language (p. 68).

The underlined words in the above passage are rather revealing and bring to the surface something that Simone de Beauvoir had thought she was nihilating, or to use her own words "rejecting." An in depth word by word analysis points to the central key word: "rejecting." The French word used in the original text is "repousser." Interestingly enough, while rejecting is a correct translation, the word "repousser" has a second meaning. The prefix "re" means "again" and the verb "pousser" can be translated as "grow" or "push." Hidden in the text is the truth that Beauvoir had been trying to negate. In spite of her rejection, her old values were still pushing away the new

ones.

Liberation, a notion so important in the existentialist philosophy embraced by Beauvoir, is basically absent from this passage. It is constrained by the adjective "insufficiently" and by the word "like." This last adjective rather denotes similarity to and not freedom from, which is one of the basic notions of existentialism: the creation of the "own" self.

As for liberation from the "ideologies of her class," this statement brings out two different issues. First, the basic premise of existentialism is freedom from and complete rupture with all pre-established doctrines; and here language plays an important part for existentialists like Beauvoir who are also writers. For two advocates of freedom of choice, it sounds almost like an admission of "mauvaise foi" (bad faith) to have been proclaiming the re/creation of self through language for three decades without having been able to shake-off the old language ideologies.

In the second place, the above quote becomes also an important sociological statement because it forces us to consider carefully the role of language in the reconstruction of the past. Beauvoir's subjective view of the present is rooted in a language based on primary socialization, which points to the importance and influence of primary socialization on the individual.

Primary socialization, as defined by Berger (1967) is: "the first socialization process an individual is exposed to in childhood, and through which he becomes a member of society" (p. 130). It is taken for granted by sociologists that primary socialization, the

initiation into the social world through the mediation of significant others, is extremely important to the individual. Even though secondary socialization "internalization of institutional or institution based sub-worlds" (Berger, 1967, p. 138) may break with the basic one, residues can remain in spite of the individual's subjective feeling of a new reality.

The primary socialization point is important to this analysis. The "significant other" who socializes and selects aspects of the world in accordance with her own position in the social structure (in this case Beauvoir's mother) seems to have left traces that were far deeper than Beauvoir realized or wanted to admit to herself until the time she reached the age of fifty-five. Then she wrote A Very Easy Death and reached a state of attachment and identification with her mother. The question for the researcher then becomes this: was there ever a complete rupture with the past or, in spite of herself, did Beauvoir strive through and in her language for a continuity, an integration of past values into the more recent structure?

Berger's concept of reconstructing the past lends itself to an analysis of the series of autobiographical works by Simone de Beauvoir. Her autobiographies demonstrate a constant effort to fuse new philosophies or structures with former values. In Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, especially, there are statements such as:

> I went on submitting myself to her decisions. Everything was as before: the concept of duty; righteousness; sexual taboos (p. 139).

or:

> I couldn't help seeing myself through the eyes of others - my mother, Zaza, my school-friends, my teachers even - and through the eyes of the girl

> I once had been (p. 139).

or:

> So my relationships with my family had become much less simple than formerly. My sister no longer idolized me unreservedly, my father thought I was ugly and harboured a grievance against me because of it, and my mother was suspicious of the obscure change she sensed in me (p. 111).

The language, once more, gives us a clue to how successful Beauvoir has been in her reconstruction and what it is that she in fact emphasizes by omitting, or by rendering ambiguous.

Quote No. 1, with words like "submitted," "myself" and "to her," speaks of oppression, submission. Finally, the application of the term "her" referring to the mother, adds a feeling of tyranny to what had been already expressed. "Duty," "righteousness," "sexual taboos," under the above circumstances, become negative qualities that fit into Berger's concept of nihilation.

Quote No. 2 reinforces the feeling of helplessness: "I could not help seeing myself" and adds to the drama by adding: "through the eyes of the others." A change of tense, an anterior past, does not introduce here either a completed action or a sense of rupture with the more immediate past. On the contrary, the inclusion of the anterior past <u>had been</u> ("the girl I once had been") adds an additional pair of eyes - her own - to the classical Cooley "looking glass" perspective whereby one judges him/herself as others do.

Quote No. 3, undoubtedly uses words that are meant, at least in appearance and in a first reading, to give a sense of rupture. Adverbs like "no longer" and "formerly" are there obviously to convey to the reader a new reality. This represents what Berger calls the

"in toto selection," that is, retrojection into the past of some present perception of subjective views like "then I thought ... now I know." What becomes interesting then is to find out, beyond the apparent transparency of the language used by Beauvoir, what it is that she now knows.

While Beauvoir is "nihilating" the way everybody - her sister, her father, her friends, her teachers - thought of her, with either negative sentences like "I couldn't help" or adverbs like "no longer" and "formerly," when she finally refers to her mother in the last quote, she uses an affirmative, simple past tense "my mother <u>was</u> suspicious of the obscure change she <u>sensed</u> in me."

This last sentence inverts the meaning of all the other quotations. What Beauvoir is talking about and what becomes even more poignant through a comparison with the previous negative emphasis, is not rupture but continuity; that of the mother who understood and knew all along the <u>meaning</u> of the obscure change. This becomes obvious by Beauvoir's use of the word "suspicious" in connection with the mother. What the mother "sensed" was not an obscure change, but she had "suspected" all along the "cure" contained in obs/cure, that is, time, its healing unifying effect, and a sense of attachment and continuity in spite of itself that could only become obvious to Beauvoir now, at the age of fifty-five, when she resumed her dialogue with her mother in <u>A Very Easy Death.</u> This explication is stylistically substantiated by Beauvoir's constant use of the simple past tense, which indicates an action which has not been completed in the past, and by the use of words which are contained in their antithesis, such as "other"

(thought of at first as the enemy) and "mother" which contains and represents the "self" in the end through her identification with the mother.

What strikes the literary reader, then, is that in spite of the desire and the effort to reconstruct a new "reality," this new self perception does not come across in Beauvoir's autobiographical writings. Although there is a radical change in the pattern of Beauvoir's life and in her philosophical and existential philosophy after 1929, a period described in Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, the literary language is neat and conformist. It is as bourgeois as the "submission" she talked about in Memoirs, and as conformist to the rules of the written language and genre as if the autobiographies had been produced in the seventeenth century. While in real life Beauvoir rid herself of "sexual taboos" and lived freely with Sartre without ever getting married, or got rid of the concept of "duty," her texts, so bourgeois and conformist in essence, could easily be those of "the girl she had once been," the dutiful daughter. In 1962, when she wrote the Prime of Life, Beauvoir was expressing ideas that reflected not only the effect of the war but her deep belief in existentialism. This book abounds with existentialist concepts like "authenticity," "commitment," "creation and re/creation of the self" and "rupture with doctrines and ready-male rules." At that same time, Beauvoir's autobiographical text reads like a detached self-analysis.

In other words, what Beauvoir's language reveals through an in depth textual analysis of her works is a continuity with some early values of socialization and a certain sense of attachment and

nostalgia in spite of her new perception of self. Disclaimers notwithstanding, her language shows that a complete rupture with the past was not her goal (conscious or unconscious) when restructuring her life. Her need for continuity, however, is not expressed in sentimental, emotional, affective terms.

The word nostalgia comes from the Greek "nostos" - which means coming home - and "algia," a yearning to return (Fred Davis, 1979). According to Davis, the sociology of nostalgia is concerned with "tracking down the sources of nostalgic experience in group life and determining what general relevance and meaning nostalgia has for our present life ..." (p. vii). For that purpose, he has categorized three different kinds of nostalgia with their consequent different roles in the life-cycle.

Davis´ three different orders of nostalgia: Simple Nostalgia, Reflexive Nostalgia and Interpreted Nostalgia, fall under the perspective of symbolic interactionism, as Davis states that:

> ...whatever set of conditions may have occasioned his nostalgic (or for that matter, any other) reaction, he does not merely "react" and leave it at that. From time to time, at least, he is wont to question the reaction, examine it more closely, interpret it, and, perhaps, even conciously seek to manipulate its occurrence or outcome (p. 17).

What varies among the three orders is the degree of reflection. It goes from basic thought about the past to intricate examination and interpretation.

Simple Nostalgia or nostalgia of the first order, is an evocation of the past with a tendency to think of it, as seen from the present vantage point, as having a glowing quality that the present may lack.

Davis claims that in this first order, there is a conservative tendency. Even in its

> ... alienation from the present it still envisions a better time, it is a time we have already known. It reassures us of past happiness and accomplishment and, since these still remain on deposit, as it were, in the bank of our memory, it simultaneously bestows upon us a certain current worth, however much present circumstances may obscure it or make it suspect (p. 34).

In the Second Order or Reflexive nostalgia, the person goes further into the reflective process and questions some of the aspects of the initial reminiscence. For example, was the past so glowing or is there a certain forgetfulness surrounding those times? In other words, this is a way of reflecting that brings past and present closer, that is, through this procedure one comes to ask oneself not only whether the past was so good but also whether the present is so bad. There is also an anticipation of the future; one wonders whether what is now the present will look as good as the past looks to us at this point. The role of this kind of nostalgia is basically that of correcting "the excessive romantic claims of the nostalgic impulse" (p. 24).

Interpreted Nostalgia or nostalgia of the third order, shares with the second one the questioning process, yet goes further by asking other questions. It questions the reasons for the nostalgic impulse being there:

> The actor here seeks in some fashion to objectify the nostalgia he feels. He directs at it ... analytically oriented questions concerning its sources, typical character, significance, and psychological purpose (p. 24).

This last order, because it takes apart, analyzes and interprets,

fulfills a restorative and creative function as regards the self.

As Davis pointedly remarks, "it is important to distinguish nostalgia from an antiquarian feeling, a condition with which it is sometimes confused" (p. 8). The fact that nostalgia derives from a past, personal, idiosyncratic experience does not mean that it is the past that causes or explains the present nostalgic feelings. Davis claims that:

> On the contrary, since our awareness of the past, our summoning of it, our very knowledge that it is past, can be nothing other than present experience, what occasions us to feel nostalgia must also reside in the present, regardless of how much the ensuring nostalgic experience may draw its sustenance from our memory of the past (p. 9).

This statement closely resembles the Proustian notion of time. We have already pointed out Proust´s importance as a cultural influence on our writers. Proust (1871-1922) in his work <u>In Search of Lost Time</u> (1928) states that the time of our nostalgic experience is inner time or duree, lived time, which is not ruled by calendar dates or hours of the day. Our past, according to him, can be activated only by the mediation of a present sensation from which it gathers vitality. In other words, the core of the Proustian concept of temporality and memory, which he calls "involuntary memory," is that memory of the past cannot be induced at will. It is an immediate sensation that triggers the memory in a completely involuntary way and recaptures the past as an inner subjective experience, in its pure state. What Proust means by "pure" is not necessarily that the past memory would be recalled at first in clear and precise detail, nor as we remember it, but rather that it is brought back in a way that

enables the subject to recapture lived moments with the intensity of the original happening while simultaneously revealing aspects that might have been hidden or obstructed by other events, experiences, or sensations at the point in time when they were actually taking place.

Sagan expresses well this concept of Proustian temporality:

> But there is today one thing that I must confess, as I think back to the first time I read those books and to the landscapes they evoke: that if I am today unable to explain, or even understand, the progress of my life; if I know nothing, have learned nothing in the course of a life that could readily be described as turbulent, nonetheless these four books, of which I now value no more than half, have always been there, serving me as springboards or compasses. For years my soul has taken its bearings from them; it is to them that my most vivid, fullest memories are attached. It was not just my mind, but my sense of smell, hearing, sight and even touch that were marked in those instants (p. 175).

Like Proust, Sagan recaptures time not as an experience of homesickness nor of the desire to be young again, but as the present awareness of the totality of an experience, certain aspects of which were perhaps not accessible at the time it happened. Sagan's affinity with Proust is also obvious in the following quotation:

> The brilliance of an eye close against one's own, of first love, the smell of coffee and rain during one's first breakup are heightened in the extreme, but at the cost of everything else. Was it raining during that first kiss? Did he say goodbye with downcast eyes? I don't know, I was living too intensely. And it was only when I let others live in my place, when I read about them, that my own existence became at least wholly accessible to me (pp. 175-176).

The recapturing of time and the reconstruction of self is achieved in this passage completely through the senses and through the joyous process of the writer's creation and recreation. "First love" is recovered through sight - ("the brilliance of an eye"), sense of

touch ("an eye close against one's own"), and the desire to hear - hear the noise that surrounded their love. ("Was it raining during our first kiss?") The reconstruction completes itself in a sensorial way as well as in the reproduction of the sensuality of love. Not only is Sagan trying to recapture "first love" but she is also attempting to relive the very beginning of that first love by trying to remember the first kiss. The sensuality of the language is so eloquent that everything else disappears, like it did at the time it happened - when she was "living too intensely." It is the sense of creation, of writing, that brings out in Sagan a voyeuristic kind of sensuality: love is rekindled "when I let others live in my place" (the subject of the autobiography becomes, in writing, "the other") and rekindled once more reading about that "other."

The sensorial, sensual way in which Sagan writes is very revealing as to what happens in the "restructuring" process. The restoration of the past, for Sagan, is made possible primarily through writing. Restoration through writing and recovery of time through memory bring us once again to the recurring sense of circularity we have been discovering as a constant structure in the texts under analysis.

As so well expressed by J.E. Rivers in Proust and the Art of Love (1980):

> What is involuntary memory if not the creation of a temporal metaphor linking the past and the present, and what is metaphor if not a discovery of similarity where only difference was thought to exist? (p. 227).

In other words, the metaphor mentioned by Rivers is

linguistically achieved by Sagan in a temporal fusion achieved by a sensual, sensorial reconstruction produced by writing. The fusion and completion of self and time become available through the distance of the text or rather through becoming the "other" - "let the others live in my place" - and reading herself as a text. It is then that part of the scenery previously blocked from her sight, because she "was living too intensely," becomes at last wholly accessible to her.

Another way of recovering unadulterated time for Proust was through dreams or a state of drowsiness. Francoise Sagan uses this device in With Fondest Regards in the fragment "Saint-Tropez." A rainy day in Paris takes Sagan to Saint-Tropez, the perfect place for youthful vacations where in her own youth, as she remembers it, the sun always shone. But for the first time in her life, the sun does not shine; the sky is as lead grey as it was in Paris, the city she was fleeing. But, when she dozes off, the past emerges the way she remembered it. On waking Sagan realizes that the picture may be bleaker twenty-five years later but that in a way it does not matter. Now, in fact, in reality it is no longer raining and the sun is shining. Yet, that is not the important point either. As Sagan says:

> Not that it matters terribly. The sun is here in the palm of my hand and without thinking I hold out my palm toward it. One should no more try to keep a hold on the sun and life than one should on time and love (p. 144).

We are confronted here, in exquisite language, with the restorative power of nostalgic memory. As Davis notes, in many instances a nostalgic memory "reassures us of past happiness" (p. 34). In this case it tells also of Sagan's growth and maturity. The

process here is not an attempt to retain youth but rather to retain a sense of permanence which memory provides. Or, as Sagan puts it:

> Time passes but memory holds fast, thank God. Just as, two thousand years ago, a forty-year-old Roman came in his chariot as far as Ostia and bemoaned his fate on the beach, or a hundred miles or so from there a Greek woman lamented the infidelity of her husband, so now we stand at the blue-waters´ edge bewailing our mortality and the transcience of youth. Did it occur to that Roman or that Greek that the sea would continue to lap the warm sands into which the soles of their feet were sinking, and that the sun would continue to rise and set lengthening the shadows of trees and houses on the earth´s surface even when their eyes no longer beheld it, even when they no longer breathed in and out in time with the beating of their hearts? And did not the sea, the sun, the smell of pine, salt and iodine inspire in them a delicious pleasure quite incompatible with the notion that all this would survive them? (pp. 139-140).

The above is a striking example of what Fred Davis would call "reflexive nostalgia." A present experience, a day at the beach, sets in motion a whole intellectual, reconstructive process, merging or fusing present and past. Once more, in a very Proustian way, a sensual pleasure "the delicious pleasure of ... the sea, the sun, the smell of pine, salt and iodine" bring forth, this time, the intellectual restructuring of history "two thousand years ago," of philosophy "mortality and the transcience of youth" and poetry "the sun would continue to rise and set lengthening the shadows of trees and houses on the earth´s surface even when their eyes no longer beheld it in and out of time with the beating of their hearts ..."

This reflexive nostalgia, far from conveying sad feelings, conveys the marvel, the wonder that what was there 2000 years ago is in one way or another still alive - "that all this would survive..." Words like "mortality" and "transcience of youth" lose their power

when next to "did it occur to that Roman or that Greek that the sun would continue to rise ... that the sea would continue to lap the warm sands ..." Once more, a close reading of the text shows that what at first sight could have looked like Roman and Greek ruins becomes transformed, through the reflexive process, into a very solid structure of present and future.

Reflexive nostalgia also traverses Colette's autobiographical text, My Mother's House. It is interesting that the title in translation resonates with nostalgia, a return to the mother's house, the place where the primal sensations resident.

An analysis of the structure of the book reveals that it is, however, feelings experienced in the present, at the time when the book is written, that provide the return through memory to the mother's house and to the past. We find language clues to the relationship between present experience and recollection of the past in the last two fragments of the book: "The Hollow Nut" and "The Sempstress." A close examination of the structure of the book, a series of fragments, shows that its structural composition is time in reverse, as it were. My Mother's House starts at the end, in the present time, in these last two fragments which take place in the present. In "The Hollow Nut" Colette's daughter is nine years old and Colette is almost fifty years old. The time of the fragment corresponds to the time of the writing of the book, 1922. In the scene described, Colette observes her daughter who in turn observes a hollow nut. Silence, emptiness and listening create the tone of the action. Watching her daughter, whom she calls Bel Gazou, Colette

thinks:

> She listens, her mouth slightly open, her lifted eyebrows touching her fringe of straight hair. Standing thus motionless, and as though alienated by her preoccupation, she seems almost ageless (1983, p. 140).

In the previous chapter, "The Sempstress," where the two are again alone, mother and daughter, one sewing the other watching, silence is once more invoked.

> But Bel-Gazou is silent when she sews, silent for hours on end, with her mouth firmly closed, concealing her large, new-cut incisors that bite into the moist heart of a fruit like sawedged blades. She is silent, and she - why not write down the word that frightens me - she is thinking (p. 136).

All of a sudden, the flood gates of memory are opened. When Colette asks Bel-Gazou: "But where are you?" we are reminded of the first words of the first fragment which were spoken by Sido, Colette's mother:

> Where are the children ... Where indeed? Nowhere. My mother's cry would ring through the garden, striking the great wall of the barn and returning to her as a faint exhausted echo. "Where...? Children ...?" (p. 7).

And now, at this point, when we read or rather reread the fragment "Where are the children," at the very beginning of the book, we are not at all surprised that the passage cited above takes place in the present tense. A present silence has brought back the memory and nostalgic feeling of another silence felt long ago. Now recapturing this old feeling, Colette reflects on all the things that at the time escaped her childish mind - the mind of a nine year old, the age her daughter is now. Years ago, neither Colette nor her brothers and sisters were, or could be, aware of the torment of the

mother who "had despaired of trying to reach us."

To emphasize the uneasiness, Colette adds the time of day. "Four o´clock and they haven´t come in to tea? Where are the children? Half-past six? Will they come for dinner?" (p. 7). Colette understands now and gains, though her own relationship with her child, an understanding of events that escaped her when she was Bel-Gazou´s age. Like Sagan, Colette is able to reconstruct the past with an understanding that was not accessible to her at the time it happened. Through the double process of writing and memory, Colette understands her own present situation vis-a-vis Bel-Gazou, reconstructs the past and her mother´s anguish vividly and projects into the future.

> A little later will come other curiosities, other questions, other silences (p. 136) ... What are you thinking, Bel-Gazou? Nothing mother. I am counting my stitches. Silence. The needle pierces the material ... Silence ... (p. 137).

A close analysis of Colette´s language reveals in this passage her own process of reconstruction. What strikes us most is the repetition, at the beginning of the quote, of the word "other." What seems at first sight a simple addition of curiosities, questions and natural silences, turns out after an in depth reading to be Colette´s perception of the other-ness that starts to take place in a girl of Bel-Gazou´s age, a separation that now becomes vivid in her memory when she asks "what are you thinking Bel-Gazou" and gets this answer: "No-thing mother." A "no-thing" that Colette remembers well meant many things - but above all the exclusion of the m/other from a world that was beginning to be her own. The "silence" also repeated three times reinforces the word "other," that is, reinforces the notion of

rupture, of exclusion that Colette herself felt she had imposed on her mother until the time she felt grown enough to re-identify with her. The silence is also there to make more audible the noise of the needle piercing the material ... The needle piercing the cloth may represent a woman's need to inscribe herself, to make her "mark" in a man's world, but in this case the piercing is also that of Colette's heart which understands through reconstruction - her own and her mother's - her daughter's future "curiosities," and "questions," silences and sufferings.

It is also a present experience that moves Marguerite Duras to revert to the nostalgic past in her 1985 autobiography <u>The Lover</u> which begins like this:

> One day, I was already old, in the entrance of a public place, a man came up to me. He introduced himself and said: I've known you for years. Everyone says you were beautiful when you were young, but I want to tell you I think you're more beautiful now than then. Rather than your face as a young woman, I prefer your face as it is now. Ravaged (p. 3).

That comment unleashes a series of memories that result in the writing of <u>The Lover</u> where Duras reconstructs the past and says:

> I often think of the image only I can see now, and of which I have never spoken. It's the only image of myself in which I delight ... (p. 3). The people who knew me at seventeen, when I went to France, were surprised when they saw me again two years later, at nineteen and I have kept it ever since, the new face I had then. It has been my face ... (p. 4). Very early in my life it was too late when I was eighteen. Between eighteen and twenty-five my face took off in a new direction. I grew old at eighteen (p. 4).

The change at eighteen is expressed in the following way:

> My aging was very sudden. I saw it spread over my features one by one changing the relationship between them, making the eyes larger, the expression sadder, the mouth more

final, leaving great creases in the forehead (p. 4).

This is an important quote as it allows us to understand the writer's reconstruction of aging. It is literary license that lets Duras be "subjective" and "objective" at the same time. Her subjectivity is shown in the perception of aging at age eighteen; an aging that was very sudden but definite: it made, for example, "the mouth more final." On the other hand, Duras, like Sagan, becomes objective by letting the "other live in her place." In other words, through language the self becomes an/other that one can read with the objectivity of a text. This explains why at the realization of her transformation, of her sudden aging, Duras is not moved to despair, like the despair expressed by the fictional characters studied by Merriam. Duras herself reflects on this: "Instead of being dismayed I watched this process with the same interest I might have taken in the reading of a book" (p. 4).

It is the gift these writers have for language, then, that reveals their feelings at the stage of the cycle they are in now. Language is a freeing force that permits them to reject cliches about aging, without the fear of sounding ridiculous and without the fear of going against "social clocks." This freedom allows them to express their own perception of aging; in this case, "I grew old at eighteen." In this, the "writer" may differ from ordinary women but is free to make a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the relative importance of aging for all women, not just for them.

Duras does not reject the older face, although she may not like it as much as the former one. There is no explicit desire expressed

to rejuvenate either. What we detect in the language is a desire to recover the meaning of the former face and the feelings of the young woman who wore it. This recovery of meaning will emerge later in the dissertation as a category.

To confirm the validity of our interpretation here, we viewed this passage on "the face" in the context of the works of Duras as a whole. Neither elsewhere in The Lover nor in The War, Hiroshima Mon Amour or Moderato Cantabile - to cite just a few - is there what we could characterize as an emotional looking back. Rather there is an effort to interpret and to understand the significance of each act and of each gesture. The process of understanding involves a typical Durasian technique of putting herself in the place of others. An example of this "Verstehen" approach can be found in her book Moderato Cantabile (1958). In Moderato Cantabile a crime has been committed. A woman has been murdered and while nobody knows exactly why, rumor has it that victim and murderer were lovers. Anne, the main character in the novel, goes into the cafe where the crime took place and together with Chauvin, a worker in her husband's factory, tries to reconstruct the feelings of the characters of the novel. In a word, she becomes the victim, in her own imagination. And she entices Chauvin to play the role of the murderer. The result is a blurring of the two relationships or what might, in more generally understood terms, be called "a play within a play."

This technique is also used in The Lover, where Duras sees herself as an object, or as the "other" in order to recapture how she must have felt when the earlier face was transformed into the later

one.

Textual analysis reveals no expressions of emotional despair in this reconstruction of the past. Let us look again at the following passage, this time more closely.

> My aging was very sudden. I saw it spread over my features one by one, changing the relationship between them, making the eyes larger, the expression sadder, the mouth more final, leaving great creases in the forehead (p. 4).

What we read is a sequence of acts written without emotion. Verbs like "aging," "was," "saw," "spread," "changing," "making" and "leaving" are an account of what happened. What we may see as emotional, the adjectives "sadder" and "larger" are nothing but the consequence of the action: they have no relationship to the woman writing, but are described as an art critic might describe the expression on a face in a painting. There is less feeling attached to the experience of transition than to the curious observer's reaction to the visual effects of the transformation.

Other passages in The Lover prove interesting for our study.

> Now I see that when I was very young, eighteen, fifteen, I already had a face that foretold the one I acquired through drink in middle age. Drink accomplished what God did not. It also served to kill me; to kill. I acquired that drinker's face before I drank. Drink only confirmed it. The space for it existed in me. I knew it the same as other people, but, strangely, in advance. Just as the space existed in me for desire. At the age of fifteen I had the face of pleasure. There was no mistaking that face (p. 9).

> So, I'm fifteen and a half. It's on a ferry crossing the Mekong River. The image lasts all the way across. I'm fifteen and a half, there are no seasons in that part of the world, we have just one season, hot, monotonous, we're in the long hot girdle of the earth, with no spring, no renewal (p. 5).

A textual analysis of this last passage reveals only one

important verb: crossing. After that, there is no action but an enumeration of adjectives and nouns that tells us what it was like after the river had been crossed: "hot" and "monotonous," with no "spring" or "renewal." What makes this passage important for the study of the life-cycle is that, like in the passage that precedes it, we are given a subjective perception of aging. While Duras had started by saying: "my aging was very sudden" in the last two passages quoted she describes the process: the lag between the doing and the understanding of its meaning, that is, the beginning of a stage that is only completed in perception many years later. In retrospect, the "middle-aged" face started at fifteen-and-a-half prompted by the awakening to pleasures. One ages then, seems to say Duras, not chronologically, but because an erotic experience can make the difference between a girl and a woman. Under this light, words like "monotonous" and "no spring, no renewal" are not a depressive manifestation of middle age or beyond, but the subjective expression that once a girl becomes a woman there is in the cycle of nature, or as she puts it, "earth" (a term used often by female writers) only "one season" with a possibility to return only through a written nostalgic restoration. The circularity of this restoration is suggested by the words "girdle" and "earth," both round. While at first the noun "girdle" looks constraining, it is not as it is used in conjunction with the word "earth." In fact, in this light, it does not have a restrictive connotation but on the contrary that of liberation: it is not Duras' girdle but that of the earth. As we tried to show previously, Duras at seventy-seven, when <u>The Lover</u> was

published, has, through literary license, taken off her "girdle" to express freely how she feels about aging and the life-cycle.

The significance of crossing the river, of becoming a woman at fifteen-and-a-half is further emphasized in the following passage:

> I think it was during this journey that the image became detached, removed from all the rest. It might have existed, a photography might have been taken, just like any other, somewhere else, in other circumstances. But it wasn´t. The subject was too slight. Who would have thought of such a thing? The photography could only have been taken if someone could have known in advance how important it was to be in my life, that event, that crossing of the river (p. 10).

To sum up, in this chapter we demonstrate that nostalgia seems to be an important property of the category of time and an important descriptive element of later-life female reconstruction.

From a definitionist point of view, that is, through the analysis of the authors´ definition of the present through the past, nostalgia helps the researcher understand the process of reconstruction. And, in cases like Colette´s My Mother´s House, it also shows how nostalgia is linked to a process of anticipation of future events and to a better understanding of the present.

According to Davis´ study, nostalgia serves a restorative purpose: this is obvious from the examples taken from Sagan. Through nostalgia, she is reassured of past happiness and also of how much she has grown, what is now important, and what ceases to be.

This perspective provides an alternative understanding of the concept of nostalgia. Nostalgia seen through the eyes of these women is not a sad yearning to go home - to be young again - but a desire to go back and draw from the past and make whole and continuous a line

that at times seemed fragmented but which, upon reflection, is made whole and circular.

And so when we look at time and aging through a Proustian lens, nostalgia serves as a metaphor to fuse past and present.

Beauvoir is the only author in this chapter who does not lend herself to an analysis with precisely the same tools. However, by using a combination of Berger's reconstruction of reality and textual literary analysis, we have seen, even in Beauvoir a line of continuity going back to early socialization which reveals a kind of nostalgia in spite of the writer's disclaimers.

One could suggest that reconstruction of time for all these women involves a continuous integration of past and present, either through an explicit expression of nostalgia - as in Sagan - or through the meaning of the text itself, that is, in the language of reconstruction, as in Beauvoir.

CHAPTER IV

TIME AND DEATH

> Marya goes through a period of feeling genderless, which is an experiment for women in our era. Then the trajectory is back toward the mother and family that's been left behind. She realizes she is her mother's daughter. It's one of the currents in a woman's life.
>
> -Joyce Carol Oates

> It was perhaps nothing else but a need to face death, to conquer and master it, to come out of it alive - a peculiar form of denial of our own mortality?
>
> -Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

The last stage of Erikson's model of the life-cycle, Integrity vs. Despair, constitutes one of the developmental crises humans face as they approach death. According to Erikson, the beginning of the end of the life-span comes when we become aware of the proximity of death and realize, at the same time, that it is too late to change the course of our life. Signs such as illness, advanced age, or the death of a significant other, trigger changes in an individual's psychology and in the way in which one perceives the structure of time.

Here Erikson is in agreement with Neugarten (1968) that an awareness of the finitude of time brings with it a reordering of time from birth to "time-to-live" and that this awareness is linked with death.

However, from middle age on, Erikson's last stage takes into account some notions that are not discussed by Neugarten. For example, this stage, for Erikson, encompasses not only the general

questions of what to do with the rest of one's life, but raises also the questions of meaning, that is, how one's life intersects with history and the degree to which one's life has been and still is a worthwhile venture. The result of this self-analysis can be either a sense of despair, and here Erikson draws a conclusion similar to Neugarten's, or a sense of what Erikson calls integrality: "This in its simplest meaning is, of course, a sense of coherence and wholeness ... What is demanded here could be simply called "integrality," a tendency to keep things together" (1982, p. 65).

It seems suitable here to point out these theories in view of the categories which are emerging in our study. Erikson's and Neugarten's theories are particularly important with respect to the category of Time. When we combine time and death, other sociological theories also provide appropriate insight, such as Kubler-Ross' conclusions in <u>Death and Dying</u> (1969), studies on the acceptance of death, such as Lieberman and Coplan's (1970), or fear of death (Kalish, 1976; Riley, 1968). Important, too, is the concept of the Life Review process (Butler, 1963) explained on page 52.

Kubler-Ross' internationally celebrated research was based on information from terminally ill patients themselves about their subjective view of the process of dying. Kubler-Ross views death as the last stage of growth in the life-cycle and aims to integrate this stage in the most positive way possible into the totality of the life of the dying, as well as into the lives of those nearest to them. Among the most original and significant contributions of her research is the delineation of reaction to death: denial and isolation, anger,

bargaihing, depression and finally acceptance and the lack of fear by those facing death once they felt that they had put "their house in order."

Lieberman and Coplan's study takes a different approach to the acceptance of death. Their speculation is that death becomes more significant for middle-aged people than for those who are older. While middle aged respondents in their study had stormy reactions to any sign of approaching death, older people reacted as "if they were dealing with a developmental task that they were coping with adequately" (p. 82).

Kalish's study (1976) found that only one out of four respondents in an older bracket expressed fear of death. Riley (1968) found results similar to the above conclusions in his research: in a sample of 1500 adults of all ages, there was in general more evidence of an attitude of acceptance than of fear.

Merriam (1980) reports a fascination with the theme of death at middle age, a fascination resembling fear more than anything else. Merriam cites Bob Slocum in Something Happened by Heller (1975) as saying: "Men my age are starting to die of cancers, strokes and heart attacks" (Merriam, 1980, p. 36).

Much has also been written about Simone de Beauvoir's fascination with the theme of death (Marks, 1973). However, there is a marked difference between Bob Slocum's fascination and Simone de Beauvoir's preoccupation with death.

While Bob Slocum's singular attitude towards death in Something Happened is a real fear of death, resulting from anxiety about cancer,

strokes or heart attacks, in Simone de Beauvoir's work we discern not one attitude toward death but several. One of these we can call "existential" anguish, in keeping with Beauvoir's expressed commitment to the philosophy of existentialism. However, even prior to the emergence of existentialism as a major philosophical and literary movement in France in the 1940's and 50's, the connection between time and death was central to French literature. In the case of Proust, for example, death is transcended, in literary terms, by fusing through writing certain privileged moments in time, thus creating the illusion of immortality.

From an existential point of view, the fear of mortality is overcome by a constant creation, or more properly, recreation, of the self through writing:

> What I rejected, with all my heart and soul, was the horror of that endless night, which, since it did not exist, would never be horrible, but held infinite horror for me, who did exist. I could not bear to think of myself as finite and ephemeral, a drop of water in the ocean; at times all my endeavors seemed vanity, happiness became a false lure, and the world wore the mocking, illusory mark of Nothingness (Beauvoir, Prime of Life, p. 145).

A textual analysis of this selection will show what we are trying to say. "Endless night" does not correspond to actual death but is a poetic expression that translates an existentialist issue: light can become dark, day can become night and seem "endless" if we do not create and recreate ourselves. What holds terror is not to think of oneself as "finite" but to think of oneself as "being" and not "existing," which is the core of Sartre's Being and Nothingness. It is through writing, then, that being becomes existing and that

"finite" becomes "infinite" and "ephemeral." The process of creation and recreation is not an easy one and can at times become discouraging: it is then that "at times all my endeavors seemed vanity" or that the effort can seem like a "drop of water in the ocean."

And so, Beauvoir is haunted, not by the fear of physical death itself, but by the problems of philosophical death, or what Jean-Paul Sartre would call "etre de trop," being superfluous, literally, from the French, "being too much."

In Force of Circumstance (1964), Beauvoir´s second volume of her serial autobiography, after having experienced what she called a "crisis", Beauvoir writes: "Suddenly I was becoming a stone and steel was splitting it: that is hell" (p. 128).

A literary explication of this passage would be based on an examination of two words that are fundamental to French existential philosophy: the words "stone" and "hell," which invoke Sartre´s Being and Nothingness (1943) and No Exit (1947). A stone is an inanimate object, a thing, like the ornament of the mantel piece in a room that represents hell in Sartre´s play, No Exit. A stone does not have the ability to create and recreate itself and that is what constitutes "hell" for the existentialist. De Beauvoir´s crises concerning death and mortality stem from metaphysical anguish, that is, from the fear of no-thingness in contradistinction to be-ing.

We can see Beauvoir´s view of life and death, as an attempt, then, to confront the question of the general meaning of life and, up to a certain point, the problem resembles Erikson´s crisis of

Integrity vs. Despair.

A Very Easy Death, a book written by Beauvoir about her mother's encounter with death, at first seems to exhibit also a rather detached attitude towards death. When Beauvoir learned that the mother had cancer, she commented: "I was not very much affected - after all, she was of an age to die" (p. 12). Yet, A Very Easy Death is not only the description of her mother's illness, but also of Beauvoir's own crisis of meaning: "I took had a cancer eating on me - remorse" (p. 57). The levels of this book are many: the portrayal of the mother's encounter with death; the daughter's reaction to it; the reconstruction of the meaning of her past relationship with her mother; and, last but certainly not least, the restoration of a dialogue with her mother:

> ...broken off during my adolescence and that our differences and our likenesses had never allowed us to take up again. And the early tenderness that I had thought dead forever came to life again ... (p. 89).

The recovery of that dialogue uncovers a complex network of feelings between mother and daughter, and of an intricate pattern of alternating stages of rupture and identification.

> There are photographs of both of us, taken at about the same time: I am eighteen, she is nearly forty. Today I could almost be her mother and the grandmother of that sad eyed girl. I am so sorry for them - for me, because I am so young and I understand nothing ... (p. 103).

Words like "photographs," or "them" or "nothing" give us an idea of the detachment and objectivity with which Beauvoir goes into the past to dig into her relationship with her mother. Photograph means time that stops, and a possibility of looking without really experiencing

any feelings. "Them" is also a literary device to speak about themselves as if they were others. The "nothing" that follows "I understand," gives the ultimate "picture" of their rupture and lack of dialog. But the attachment is resumed in content and time by the word "today." The time that had been reified in the past becomes fluid and fuses: Beauvoir is herself, could be her mother and her own grandmother, that is, of the girl that understood nothing. "Today" she does: today she identifies not only by becoming her mother but her mother's mother at the same time. The severed line has been fused. At this point of understanding she becomes ageless, she becomes eternal.

Beauvoir's previous sense of severe rupture and the hurt that she felt can be seen in this telling passage:

> For, if she embittered several years of my life, I certainly paid her back though I did not set out to do so. She was intensely anxious about my soul. As far as this world was concerned, she was pleased at my successes, but she was hurt by the scandal that I arouse among the people she knew. It was not pleasant for her to hear a cousin state, "Simone is the family's disgrace ... (A Very Easy Death, p. 103).

Who was really hurt? The one's hurt is intimately linked to the other's, through the process of identification: "How could she have tried to understand me since she avoided looking into her own heart?" (p. 104).

Here a linguistic link belies the stated rupture. If her mother had been hurt, so had she. In the above phrase the "me" and "her" are one and the same thing. Beauvoir's mother could not understand "her" because she could not understand "her/self."

Sociologically it would appear that reconstruction of the past

heals many of the old wounds. Yet more than simple reconstruction, it seems that it is the proximity of death that speeds up reconciliation and identification with the mother. Or, as put by Marilyn Yalom (1985):

> In the face of her mother´s impending death, de Beauvoir was able to transcend the judgmental stance she had adopted in adulthood and rediscover the profound and simple attachment that bound her and her mother together (p. 57).

and the following statements illustrate the "new" very positive feelings (A Very Easy Death, 1965):

> I had grown very fond of this dying woman (p. 76).

> and: Her vitality filled me with wonder ... I respected her courage (p. 109).

> or: What touched our hearts that day was the way she noticed the slightest agreeable sensation; it was as though at the age of seventy eight she was waking afresh to the miracle of living (p. 5).

Even the beauty of the mother is fully recovered in her eyes:

> Maman´s relaxed face had recovered a surprising purity and I thought of a Leonardo drawing of a very beautiful old woman. "You are as beautiful as a Leonardo," I said (p. 48).

Anticipation of Beauvoir´s own death emerges as another layer of interest for the sociologist:

> We walked through the cold morning fog; we took our seats, Poupette between the driver and one of the Messieurs Duran, I at the back, next to a kind of metal locker. "Is she there?" asked my sister. Yes. She gave a short sob. "The only comfort I have, she said, "is that it will happen to me too. Otherwise it would be too unfair. Yes. We were taking part in the dress rehearsal for our own burial" (pp. 99-100).

It is interesting to note here that social scientists, too, have found that the death of a loved one equals rehearsal for one´s own

death (Neugarten, 1973).

What strikes the researcher most in A Very Easy Death is the continuous integration of past into present and the author's awareness of this dynamic: "... and the older I get the most my past years grow together" (p. 103).

So the beginning of the reconciliation that is triggered by the imminent death is activated by a renewed desire to restore, to recover, to make whole a relationship that would seem otherwise prematurely and abruptly cut off. "And the early tenderness that I had thought dead for ever came to life again, since it had become possible for it to slip into simple words and actions" (p. 89).

Marilyn Yalom makes the following cultural note:

> ... the French seem to have been generally more successful than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts in evoking the positive aspects of mothers and daughters and in remembering the child's early years of adoration, untainted by adolescent and adult transformations. The greatest French women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Colette and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, to name two of the most prominent, have left us eloquent testimonials to motherlove. Almost uniformly, French women authors, regardless of their different experiences, remember maman as the bedrock of early chodhood, the dominating presence, beloved, feared, and enduring. Little did it seem to matter if the mother was, as in the case of Colette's cherished Sido, a source of living strength to her daughter for more than half a century or, as in the case of George Sand, an erratic, impossible flaky woman from whose tantrums the daughter had to learn to deliver herself; when they look back to their earliest memories, they remember maman with an affection verging on idolatry (1981, p. 80).

Death, in Beauvoir's A Very Easy Death, is not seen as separation and rupture but rather as the recovery of the mother and, at the same time, of that part of the female self that identifies with the mother:

Amazement. When my father died I did not cry at all. I had

> said to my sister: "It will be the same for maman." I had understood all my sorrows up until that night: even when they flowed over my head I had recognized myself in them. This time my despair escaped from my control: someone other than myself was weeping in me. I talked to Sartre about my mother's mouth as I had seen it that morning and about everything I had interpreted in it - greediness refused, an almost servile humility, hope, distress, loneliness, the loneliness of her death and of her life - they did not want to admit its existence. And he told me that my own mouth was not obeying me any more: I had put Maman's mouth on my own face and in spite of myself, I copied its movements. Her whole person, her whole being, was concentrated there, and compassion wrung my heart (p. 31).

The beauty of A Very Easy Death, in French Une mort très douce (literally "a very sweet death") lies then in the rediscovery through her mother's death of a love that was long buried but not dead: "It revived with all its strength when Maman's accident, her illness and her death shattered the routine that then governed our acts" (p. 103). Erikson's words about the process of recovery are so apt here: "... integrality, a tendency to keep things together" (p. 65).

Another beautiful chapter in the history of French literature on the subject of time, death, and mothers and daughters is Colette's description of her mother's illness. Once again, Colette uses the present tense to express identification with her mother. My Mother and Illness is a moving chapter in Colette's My Mother's House. It is about what the reader assumes to be her mother's last hours when she makes a desperate effort to keep her composure and to look her best for the son who is about to visit her. Death is related to time very powerfully in the following passage: "What time is it? Eleven o'clock already! ... You'll understand later that one keeps on forgetting old age up to the very brink of the grave" (p. 123). Here

it is her mother speaking and, as in Beauvoir, she is a role model, an example of a gallant attitude toward death:

> Even illness can't force one to remember it. (old age) Every hour I say to myself: "I've a pain in my back, the nape of my neck aches atrociously. I've no appetite. That digitalis goes to my head and makes me feel sick! I'm going to die, to-night, tomorrow, no matter when ... But I'm not always thinking of the ways in which age has altered me ... (p. 124).

This passage is closely linked, as an attitude, to the passage quoted above. "... one keeps on forgetting old age ..." means the same as "... but I am not always thinking of the ways in which age has altered me ..." namely that the life-line ahead acquires an unlimited proportion. What confirms this interpretation is the way in which Colette makes use of time. Far from the anguish of the immediacy of death, the actual chronological progression transcends chronological time - "to-night," "tomorrow," "no matter when" - and becomes in-finite. The use of the verb "altered" at the end of the quote does not suggest despair either. It is abstract and detached and is the perfect bridge to show the mother's sense of humor in her final stage of life: "No, decidedly, I can't accustom myself to old age, neither my own nor other people's. And, seeing I'm seventy one I'd better give up trying as I shall never succeed" (p. 124). Then, the last cavalier effort before the son comes in:

> But at my age there's only one virtue: not to make people unhappy. Quick now, put the second pillow behind my back so that I shall be sitting up when he comes in. And the two roses there, in the glass. It doesn't smell like a stuffy old woman in here, does it? Am I flushed? He'll think I'm not so well as I was yesterday, I know I ought not to have talked so much. Close the shutter a little, Minet-Cheri, and lend me your powder-puff (p. 126).

The previous phrase "even illness can´t force one to remember old age" seems to lose its validity here. The "pain in the back" and the "digitalis that goes to her head," become real and remind Colette´s mother of the face of death, an image she would not like her children to remember. And to create that younger image, the beauty of youth, she uses everything that may help create the illusion: "the second pillow," to make her look erect; the dimmed light "close the shutter a little;" the "powder puff" to make her face look softer, and the "roses" that will change the color of her cheeks and the perfume of the room.

In both Beauvoir´s and Colette´s mothers, there is a desire to live up to the very last moment, to make the most out of life, a return to "beauty" in a renewed face, or as Kubler-Ross would put it, a desire to "put their house in order" and "to live until they say good-bye." Although both mothers rebelled against the notion of aging - Colette´s mother could not get used to the idea that she was seventy one and Mme. de Beauvoir did not admit to her age until she was seventy eight - they both faced up to it with humor and optimism. Once more, the subjective relativity of the life line is shown in Mme. de Beauvoir´s words:

> I would not admit that I was old. But one must face up to things: in a few days I shall be seventy eight, and that is a great age. I must arrange my life accordingly; I am going to start a fresh chapter (A Very Easy Death, p. 17).

The other authors in our group approach the theme of time and death also. Yourcenar, for example, envisions death like Kubler-Ross, as a last stage of growth, a stage that she wants to experience.

> Death, the supreme form of life - on this point my thinking is exactly contrary to that of Julius Caesar, whose wish (more or less fulfilled) was to die as quickly as possible. For my part, I would like to die fully conscious that I am dying, of an illness whose progress would be slow enough to allow death insinuate itself into my body and fully unfold ... so as not to miss the ultimate experience, the passage ... (With Open Eyes, p. 260).

Like Erikson, Yourcenar is interested in how her life intersects with history and, like Colette and Beauvoir, she goes back at a late stage in life to find the traces of a mother she never knew, a mother who died giving birth to her. This emerges in an interview in With Open Eyes:

> q. How do you explain the need to bring back to life a mother about whom you had concerned yourself very little until then.
>
> b. Because she existed. I embarked on this adventure at the age of sixty two. When we are allowed the time, there always comes a moment when we want to sum up our accounts, a moment when we all ask what it is that we owe to our ancestors (p. 170).

This is the repetition of a structure we have seen: there is in Yourcenar at this stage a need to integrate the past into the present - to go back to the mother, to complete the line or as she puts it "to sum up our accounts."

Sagan's autobiography is an interesting case where death and time are concerned. She, too, retraces her steps to the moment in the present from which she writes and so views her life. There is in Sagan, too, a search for the very essence of life, which may be found here as for the others in the mother. Sagan does not mention her mother in the text but the entire autobiography is dedicated to her.

As we have said, With Fondest Regards is a recollection of

important moments and important people in Sagan's life. In putting them all together, Sagan reconstructs the meaning of her own life and those of the people she loved. Their deaths, Billie Holiday's, Tennessee Williams', Sartre's, are approached, again, not as rupture or separation but as an absent-presence, a new space where her love for them lives, a space which has the dimensions of the void they left in her life. Here are two examples:

(Tennessee Williams) Whether I think of the fair haired suntanned man with blue eyes and a blond moustache who carried Carson McCullers up to her bedroom, laid her against her two pillows like a child, sat at the foot of her bed and held her hand until she fell asleep because she was afraid of nightmares; or the gray-faced wreck of Tennessee, drained of life by the irrevocable loss of Franco; or the Tennessee who so kindly came such a long way ... I shall always miss the unvarying directness of his gaze, his unvarying strength, tenderness, vulnerability ... A poet, no less, I miss you, poet, and I fear I shall miss you for a long time to come (p. 61).

The void is linked to time in a positive way in the last words: "for a long time to come."

(Sartre) How I miss him. I liked holding him by the hand, and his holding me with his mind ... I liked to listen to music with him; and most of all I liked to listen to him ... Sartre was born on June 21, 1935; I was born on June 21, 1935, but I do not think - nor is it my wish - that I will spend another thirty years without him (p. 158).

Again, in a similar structure the void is filled by herself, a positive dimension is added to her own life by the connection of birth dates. Time and death are inextricably linked in Sagan's words. But the most striking aspect of Sagan's book is the notion of death as an

allegory for life. As with Yourcenar, death is something to be experienced to the fullest. This is brought home dramatically in a chapter on driving at top speed - a pleasure which in 1957, brought Sagan to death's door when she had a terrible automobile accident.

> And while taking all these precautions to remain alive, who has not thrilled to the awesome and fascinating silence of imminent death, at once a rebuttal and a provocation? Whoever has not thrilled to speed has not thrilled to life - or perhaps has not loved anyone (p. 66).

or:

> Just as speed is tied with the idea of risk taking a chance, so too is it tied with the idea of the joy of being alive, and therefore the vague death wish to which there is always a trace where there is joie de vivre. Well, that is everything that I believe to be true ... Speed is neither signal, nor proof, nor provocation, nor challenge; it is a surge of happiness (p. 73).

Actual fear of death seems almost absent in the group of women under consideration here. If anything, the death of a significant other removes the actual fear and is integrated into one's own life line as a rehearsal for one's own death.

From this viewpoint, this group fits the Eriksonian model of integrality; there is a pulling together of previous stages of the life-cycle expressed in a communion with the mother and a search for the essence of life, which in the last analysis seems to be synonymous with identification with the mother. Acceptance of death appears to be more linked to integrality in all its dimensions than to the physicality of age or death itself. That this acceptance is made easier by "putting one's house in order" is evident in both <u>A Very Easy Death</u> or <u>My Mother's House.</u>

CHAPTER V

SEARCH FOR MEANING: LOVE AND DEMYSTIFICATION

> Intense mutual erotic love, love, which involves with the flesh all the most refined sexual being of the spirit, which reveals and perhaps even ex nihilo creates spirit as sex, is comparatively rare in this inconvenient world.
>
> -Iris Murdoch

> It is always difficult to describe a myth; it cannot be grasped or encompassed; it haunts the human consciousness without even appearing before it in fixed form. The myth is so various, so contradictory, that at first its unity is not discerned ... Woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is an idol, a servant, the source of life, a power of darkness; she is the elemental silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip, and falsehood; she is health presence and sorceress; she is man´s prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his raison d´etre.
>
> -Simone de Beauvoir

One of the themes often cited by researchers of the life-cycle in connection with the middle-years is a search for meaning. Merriam (1980) finds in her study of male mid-life that "a property characteristic of this mid-life male search for meaning is an intense questioning of life in general and one´s own life in particular. The questioning of life leads the men to feel that they are losing their bearings" (p. 40). As example, Merriam cites a fictional character, Godfrey St. Peter from Willa Cather´s novel <u>The Professor´s House</u> (1925) who in an effort to grasp meaning " ... is reviewing his life, trying to see where he had made his mistake, to account for the fact that he now wanted to run away from everything he had intensely cared for" (1980, p. 40). In addition, Godfrey St. Peter looks back on his

boyhood and decides that it was the

> ... realest of his lives and that his career, his wife, his family, were not his life at all, but a chain of events which had happened to him. All these things had nothing to do with the person he was in the beginning (p. 40).

The above quotations carry a negative connotation for mid-life. They convey a "loss of bearings" and obviously a desire to erase whatever took place prior to the present review or, if that is not possible, a desire to run away. This result of the quest for significance parallels Levinson's notion of "breaking out," that is, a de-structuring of the present life pattern in an effort to form a new life structure.

Furthermore, Merriam suggests still another desire typical of this stage in the male search for meaning: that of a completion of the self through the self, that is, within a new structure that will also distance himself from the "others" to finally forge an individual identity. Dick Diver, the character in <u>Tender is the Night</u> (Fitzgerald, 1934, p. 245), fears that perhaps "for the remainder of his life he was condemned to carry with him the egoes of certain people ... and to be only as complete as they were complete themselves" (Merriam, p. 41).

So from the above examples, at least according to Merriam's findings, the conclusion could be reached that for the male at mid-life, questioning the meaning of life results in an identity crisis or, as expressed by Willy Loman in <u>Death of a Salesman</u> (Miller, 1949, p. 66) "all of a sudden everything falls to pieces" (Merriam, p. 41).

For purposes of comparison with female empirical findings on this theme and stage, we turn to Lillian Rubin's study Women of a Certain Age (1979). Rubin's book is an inquiry into female mid-life and what this stage means to them. Answering the interviews, when women were asked to define themselves or to ask themselves the question "Who am I?" they felt uneasy. Rubin explains it this way:

> A lifetime of doing what they are supposed to do, of putting the needs and wishes of others before self, gives a particular urgency and poignancy to the question. Who am I? No easy question precisely because for so long women have mystified themselves and others as they sought to comply with socially prescribed roles, sought to obey external mandates about who they are, how they should act, what they should feel (p. 42).

Rubin found that:

> Almost always the words they use are those that stereotypically define feminine personality: warm, sensitive, kind, outgoing, considerate, caring, concerned, responsible. And almost always the words mother and wife are included in the list (p. 54).

Confronted with yet other questions, definitions started to hold somewhat less well. And along with the beginning of a re-definition came a sense of struggle or fear - fear of change and of a transformation of self that, for the first time, might not include others. In spite of this incipient apprehension, there was no crisis or loss of bearings. Just a scary feeling at the novelty of looking at themselves as an entity. If anything, these women began to feel ambivalent; a bit fearful and a bit thrilled by the possibility of a redefinition of the self: the self as differentiated. Differentiated, however, did not mean for them separation from others, or breaking out; it just meant, from what could be gathered from their

answers, the acquisition of a fulfilling self that, at the time it shared with others would also fulfill individual needs.

In Rubin´s chapter <u>The Empty Nest</u> (pp. 13-40) we come across other differences between male and female search for meaning. This chapter dispels the myth that it is women who seem at a loss at middle-age when their children leave home. As Rubin pointedly remarks:

> Since mothers usually don´t miss any part of the process, the end of active mothering doesn´t come with any sudden wrench. Indeed, for women who can look at their children and think: `There´s a job well done,´ the sense of accomplishment transcends any feelings of loss; the relief is unequivocal. For those who suffer disappointment, the relief is mixed with painful feelings of failure. And yet, not one of those women yearned for another chance. For good or ill, they were glad the job was done, ready to move on to the next stage of life (p. 38).

It is men who seem more at a loss when the children leave:

> But the cost, especially for father, is high. Just when he has more time, just when they´re old enough to be talked to like real people, just when he´s beginning to notice what he´s missed - his children are gone. No wonder he wants to shout, "No, don´t go, not yet!" (Rubin, p. 38).

Another myth debunked by Rubin is that of "women of a certain age" not being sexual beings any longer. Her interviews lead to an overwhelming response: "Sex? It´s gotten better and better" (p. 74). In 1953 Kinsey found that the degree of sexual pleasure experienced by women in marriage as years went on increased through time. Rubin´s findings parallel this one. "So it is with the women I met. `I´m enjoying sex more than I ever did in my life before - maybe even more than I ever thought I could´ - common sentiments, spoken repeatedly" (p. 80). So while at this age sex became better, the memories of previous years, younger years, were full of disappointment and anger

at the husbands who had wanted them to be virgins and madonnas at the same time. This is sociologically explained by Rubin:

> What parts were they playing? Who was pulling the string? The parts were those assigned by the culture - the stereotypic versions of sexuality with which girls and boys of that generation grew. These are women and men who came to adulthood in the 1940s and 1950s when the wave of sexual liberation that brought the Victorian era to a screaming end was past. By the time they reached sexual maturity, it was clear that the Victorian heritage was not entirely gone, the double standard of sexual behavior not wiped out by the revolution of the 1920s. It had simply changed its form. By the 1940s, it was granted that women were capable, even desirous, of sexual pleasure. But the time, place, and manner were carefully circumscribed - limited only to one man, only in marriage (pp. 75-76).

Thus, many questions got answered, many notions demystified. One conclusion is that life-cycle and culture influence women's sexual response, making them move into a more open admission of sexuality.

In the group of women writers under study one also finds, as with Rubin, a search for meaning that involves demystification. In this case, a demystification of the whole notion of love and of certain myths about sexuality, explained by a philosophy of love which emerged during the Philosophical, Theological and Literary Movement of the 19th century, which is known as Romanticism. Romantic love centers on the woman as the ideal; the untouchable other half of the Romantic hero, she represents his quest and his desire. The absence of desire on the woman's part is necessary to maintain the intense religious and poetic feelings of desire on the part of the male. Eventually, women began to model their own sexuality or expression of it, on this male philosophy of love.[1] Ideal erotic love prior to the advent of Romanticism, however, always involved intense physical and spiritual

desire for fusion on the part of both the man and the woman. This is evidenced in love stories of couples in literature from Tristan and Isolde to Dante's Paolo and Francesco, to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, and so on through the ages.

This does not refer to the current of spiritual or chaste love, where the woman is not erotically desired but represents a higher quest; this is something entirely different. Here we are talking about eroticism in its most ideal form, mutual love and desire. In Romanticism, this passion and desire were seen to exist only in the male lover and not in the female object of desire. She was supposed to receive his desire, to become his desire, to become his better half, and thus complete him.

Yourcenar (1980) speaks about de-mystifying Romantic love:

> The French have in a sense stylized love, created a certain style of love, a certain form. And having done that, they proceeded to believe in what they had invented, they forced themselves to love in a particular way when they would have experienced it in an entirely different way had there not been all that literature behind them (p. 52).

and re-introducing the senses into the concept of ideal love:

> If love means to adore another person, if it means the conviction that two people are made for one another, that they complement one another by virtue of their unique qualities, then a thoughtful person is likely to see it all as a mirage and to say to himself, Look, there's nothing that exceptional about my beloved either. This sort of love might be called "sympathetic" and it comes close to what the Gospels call agape; the senses have their part in it ... It is a bond - which may or may not be carnal but, like it or not, is always sensual ... we have lost the sense that love, or, more simply, sensual bonds between two people ... are sacred. Sensual relations are sacred because they are universal ... What needs to be restored is the feeling that pleasure is a gateway to knowledge or to God, if you want to put it that way, or to another being in all its divine poverty. I am convinced that pleasure can serve as a

> gateway, though no European poet or novelist has ever used it that way, or even felt the possibility (pp. 52-54).

Yourcenar does not recognize that there was a strong tradition of physical pleasure being equal in intensity to spiritual love in European literature, but she does see, however, the need to restore pleasure as a valuable bond in a relationship.

Romantic love served the bourgeois establishment well: it extracted from this complex philosophy only the fact that pleasure was a taboo for women and young women have since been socialized to think that sexual pleasure is a social taboo and a sin, and, what is worse, unfeminine.

Simone de Beauvoir is an interesting case in point. This passage, taken from Simone de Beauvoir's _Memories of a Dutiful Daughter,_ comes as close as we will find to passionate prose about Beauvoir's intimate life and about her affair with Jean Paul Sartre, which was, on the other hand, so public and internationally discussed:

> Sartre corresponded exactly to the dream companion I had longed for since I was fifteen: he was the double in whom I found all my burning aspiration raised to the pitch of incandescence. I should always be able to share everything with him. When I left him at the beginning of August, I knew that he would never go out of my life again (p. 345).

However, in _After the Second Sex,_ when Beauvoir is asked whether there is anything she would add _now,_ at this stage in her life, she replies:

> Yes, I would have liked to have given a frank and balanced account of my own sexuality. A truly sincere one, from a feminist point of view: I would like to tell women about my own sexuality because it is not just a personal matter but a political one, too. I did not write about it at the time because I did not appreciate the importance of this question, nor the need for personal honesty (p. 85).

What Beauvoir is saying here is that from a feminist point of view, the woman's body and female sexuality should be celebrated, not hidden from view. Simone de Beauvoir understands that part of the political oppression of women has been a repression of their enjoyment of their bodies. Sexual pleasure is considered in modern western culture to be a male privilege; sexuality is perceived from the male libido, woman being the "other," the "second sex," an instrument for male pleasure. And, until women as a group can enjoy and own their own bodies and perceive sexual pleasure from the position of the female libido, both sexual pleasure and political power, which are inextricably linked for Beauvoir as for most feminists, will be out of reach for women.

What is perhaps even more interesting for us here is that Beauvoir understands now that there was a difference between her behavior and her writing, also in what concerns sexuality. Although in her personal life she did not submit to sexual taboos, in her writing Beauvoir had internalized the objectified vision of woman constructed by men, thus writing in what she herself would call a constant state of "inauthenticity." Beauvoir blamed this "inauthenticity" to what she called her intelligence:

> To some extent, I have always submitted. Not to the taboos, but to my head. Because I think my head has always exerted a stronger pull on me than my body. Perhaps there was a degree of hysteria involved; at times when there was no possibility of a sexual life, I did not feel sexual desire. In fact, the only desires I ever had were always linked to a specific person and capable of realization; and if that was not possible, for one reason or another, I did not feel sexual desire (After the Second Sex, p. 85).

We have found from an analysis of Beauvoir's autobiographies that her sexuality as such became focused after the age of twelve:

> In fact, sexuality has always gone hand in hand with love for me, except perhaps when I was very young. When I was twelve, I thought, 'Heavens, do I really have to wait until I am fifteen to get married?' That seemed terrible to me! At that time, I was prey to an overwhelming sexual urge, without knowing what it meant. I felt, even if only vaguely, that I needed a body, caresses, something. But that was just about the only time in my life when I experienced sexuality in this unfocussed way (1984, p. 85).

After that it was always linked to a "specific person." It is in Beauvoir's later writings that we find the search for the meaning of love and the need to de-mystify some notions that have been attached to the love concept for too long a time. One of the most common myths about sexuality is that women have no physical desire in the middle years and that men are only interested in sex. In <u>After the Second Sex</u> Beauvoir debunks this myth very candidly:

> In fact, the sex act in the strict sense did not interest Sartre particularly; he liked touching. In the first two or three years, sexual relations with Sartre were very important to me because I discovered sexuality with him (p. 108).

Even more openly, Beauvoir continues by affirming that a new understanding of female sexuality should even include homosexuality. In a word, Beauvoir comes late in life to a place where the world for her is eroticized. This apparent "new feeling" is a product of her quest for meaning and a reconstruction of sexual feelings that goes as far back as the age of twelve.

Beauvoir's experience confirms our findings to date a propos other categories, that is, that the woman's restructuring of the self is integrative and has a circular form. Integration, in this case,

includes also homosexuality within the notion of love and desire.

> Women should not let themselves be conditioned exclusively to male desire anymore. And in any case, I think that these days every woman is a bit ... a bit homosexual. Quite simply, because women are more desirable than men ... because they are more attractive, softer, their skin is nicer. And generally they have more charm. It is quite often the case with the usual married couple that the woman is nicer, more lively, more attractive, more amusing, even on an intellectual level (p. 113).

We find this process of "demystification" in Sagan's work also. She de-mystifies the culturally referred "two," the perfect couple, which in turn - instead of emphasizing identification - reinforces binary polarity, a formula necessary to phallocentrism, which takes man as the norm and the woman as what is different from it. In Sagan we find a collapse of the phallocentric notion of difference as hierarchical, as white and black, good and bad, heterosexual and homosexual, male and female. Sagan, whose autobiography as we have seen is structured on the notion of marginality, writes of the beautiful and moving friendship between two homosexuals, Tennessee Williams and his lover Franco, and the sensitive woman poet and novelist, Carson McCullers:

> Franco linked arms with these two people of genius, two loners, and enabled them to laugh together, to endure together the life of the scapegoat and misfit, a life familiar at that time to every ... nonconformist (p. 46).

Here the image of Franco "linking arms" with both allows for the circularity of the relationship with eroticism at the centre in the figure of Franco, bringing together two outcasts, neither of which would otherwise erotically be linked the one to the other. This enveloping erotic figure allows the inclusion within its borders, as

metaphoric as they may be, of the figures of the "nonconformists," among whom is, of course, the writer of the passage, Françoise Sagan herself.

And so, it is once again through love that the meaning of the individual life at this stage of restructuring surfaces as paramount to the woman writer. That love is linked, in turn, to a figure of maternal care and nurturing. The following passage describes the relationship between love, friendship and what is universally understood as "mothering."

> Tennessee Williams preferred the company of men in his bed to that of women. Carson's husband had committed suicide not long before, and she was half paralyzed. Franco liked both men and women, but he preferred Tennessee. And he also loved poor, sick, tired Carson very dearly ... I saw how these two men, whom people would then refer to with a kind of prudish distaste as 'pederasts' and who nowadays would be described as gay (as if they should somehow be cheerful when they are despised by every Tom, Dick and Harry for loving the way they do), I saw how they took care of this woman, putting her to bed, getting her up, loving her - in short, giving her all that friendship and understanding and attentiveness one can offer to someone who is too sensitive, who has seen too much, and perhaps written too much about from what she has seen to be able to bear it or endure it any longer (p. 47).

What Sagan shows us in this passage is not only the capacity for true friendship and love that we are culturally conditioned to ignore when someone is "deviant," but even more important, the fact that an ability to care for another lovingly and in a motherly way transcends all traces of sexual preference. Words like:

took care
putting her to bed
getting her up
dressing her
entertaining her
warming her

loving her

transform the "label" of "pederast" or "gay" into a word that is the highest symbol of human love and nobility: mother. We see, then, in Sagan a fusion between the erotic and the maternal in a most fascinating form.

In Colette we notice the demystification of the notion - like we did in Rubin´s text - that older people do not feel erotic desire or that feminine love is not composed of erotic elements. For Colette, as for Beauvoir and Sagan, the world is eroticized through language. Colette´s reader savours the pure pleasure of the words themselves. For example:

> Nine o´clock; summer; a garden looking larger in the evening shadows; rest before sleep. Hurried steps ... a little high-heeled step ... Sitting close to the ground upon an uncomfortable little foot stool, I rest my head, as I do every evening, against my mother´s knees and guess with my eyes closed... In the failing light I remain leaning against my mother´s knees. Wide awake I close my useless eyes ... If I move my face a little away from the fragrant gardening frock, my head plunges into a flood of scents that flows over us like an unbroken wave; the white tobacco plant opens to the night its slender scented tubes and its starlike petals (pp. 44-45).

This passage is from fragment No. 8 in <u>My Mother´s House.</u> It´s title is <u>Father and Mme. Bruneau.</u> It is about a middle aged lonely neighbour, Mme. Bruneau, who comes every evening for some company, and is attracted to Colette´s father. In the fragment, everything seems set for a night of passion. Summer, nine o´clock, the time when the shadows get larger and take on romantic shapes. And then, hurried steps - the lover who runs to a rendez-vous, and the eroticism of those steps when they are "high-heeled." Later we see other clues

that make this passage erotic and also disturbing for the child Colette was when this scene took place. The fifty year old woman now understands the erotic overtones of the "tobacco plant that opens into the night" and the "slender scented tubes and its starlike petals." She now understands, and, we emphasize, through her own language, the meaning of the recalled scene. What takes her by surprise though is that in her reconstruction she remembers Mme. Bruneau, not as a young, slender woman that would arouse her father's passion, but as "the plump, flabby little woman with greying temples" (p. 46).

As for the father, he was not that young either when these scenes took place. Or, as Colette puts it, once more using the present tense, indicating that it is the mature woman who is reflecting:

> But suddenly today, a new uneasiness assails me, because for the first time I have noticed the prominent veins and wrinkles on my father's strikingly white hands, and how the fringe of thick hair at the nape of his neck has faded just lately. Can it really be true that he will soon be sixty years old? (p. 18).

The fifty year old Colette now knows why the little girl she was at the time this scene took place had such ambiguous feelings; why, although wide awake, "I closed my useless eyes." She closed her eyes so as not to see her mother jealous: "I follow her, vaguely disturbed for the first time that she should be worrying about my father" (p. 18).

Now that Colette herself is the age her mother and possibly Mme. Bruneau were then, Colette does not want to close her eyes any more. What she does is integrate this scene into her life story and reconstruct her mother as a woman with erotic feelings, a woman

capable of jealousy and passion. And in this light, the erotic description of the beginning includes not only the feelings of Mme. Bruneau but also of three other people; her mother and father - still capable of all the feelings we attribute only to the young - and Colette herself.

In Marguerite Duras´ autobiography, The Lover, the very title of which is a celebration of erotic love, the young fifteen and a half old Marguerite Duras embarks on her first sexual adventure vested, almost ritualistically, in her mother´s clothes and perfume. The identification with the mother and the implication of the meaning of life as rooted in love, come together here in a striking and most unusual beginning of an autobiography.

The Lover tells the story of a fifteen and a half year old French girl in French Indo-China (now Vietnam) who meets a Chinese millionaire twelve years her senior clandestinely each afternoon when she is supposed to be in school. Until the moment in the present (1985) when the book is written, Duras thought that she had given herself to him exclusively for money to help out her mother and brothers, who were poor French living as outcasts in a Vietnamese community. However, once the writing begins, she realizes through the dynamics of her writing and language - that the erotic feeling did not originate in the Chinese lover but that it was in fact, herself, who gave birth to this intense sexual desire:

> You did not have to attract desire. Either it was in the woman who aroused it or it did not exist. Either it was there at first glance or else it had never been. It was instant knowledge of sexual relationship or it was nothing. That too I knew before I experienced it (p. 19).

When Duras says "before I experienced it" she means before she wrote about it, a sort of pre-conscious knowledge which had since been repressed.

It is of particular interest how Marguerite Duras moves into the present tense to express the past, which is, as we will see from the following passage in direct contrast to Colette's double referential use of the present to evoke the present: "She doesn't feel anything in particular, no hate, no repugnance either, so probably it's already desire. But she doesn't know it" (p. 36).

So, what does she feel then? We can conjecture that it is, and was then (in the eternal present evoked by the linguistic manipulation), erotic desire: "... she suddenly knows: she was attracted to him already on the ferry. She was attracted to him. It depended on her alone" (p. 37).

She now can move back linguistically to the past tense. She has established what happened through the restructuring of this "other self" whom she sees as a third person: "Suddenly I see myself as another, as another would be seen, outside myself, available to all, available to all eyes, in circulation for cities, journeys, desire" (p. 13). Making an object of herself, she can now write her history in the traditional historical tense.

This constant moving between past and present tense in this extraordinary text - <u>The Lover</u> - reveals one of our major findings in this study and one which was discussed in the chapters on Time, that is, the circularity and fluidity of the female perception of the life-line. And in this circular vision, elements which were dropped

along the way are picked up, recuperated as it were, in Duras' understanding of love. In a way, "the lover," a blatant reference to sexual taboos, was the missing word and now emerges as the dominant term on the cover of the book.

We are then at the zenith of de-mystification. Slowly desire becomes love. Marguerite Duras learns through the writing that her sexual feelings were LOVE. This, of course she had had to deny until this time, because she had been socialized to believe that for a woman love was not rooted in desire and, moreover, it was a social taboo for a French girl, as poor as she might have been, to fall in love with an Oriental, from whatever social class.

> This is because he adores me, but it's taken for granted I don't love him, that I'm with him for the money, that I can't love him, it's impossible, that he could take any sort of treatment from me and still go on loving me. This because he is a Chinese, because he's not a white man (p. 51).

Finally, she says:

> We are lovers. We can't stop loving each other ... He gives me my shower, washes me, rinses me, he adores that, he puts my make-up on and dresses me, he adores me. I'm the darling of his life (p. 63).

If we compare this passage with the one from Francoise Sagan which we analyzed above, we see the recurrence of phrases like:

he gives me my shower
washes me
rinses me
puts my make-up on
dresses me
he adores me
I'm the darling of his life.

The relationship of the erotic elements to maternal care appear again and the repetition is striking. There is also an insinuation of this

relationship in Beauvoir's A Very Easy Death. In her own words:

> The sight of my mother's nakedness had jarred me. No body existed less for me: none existed more. As a child I had loved it dearly; as an adolescent it had filled me with an uneasy repulsion: all this was perfectly in the ordinary course of things and it seemed reasonable to me that her body should retain its dual nature, that it should be both repugnant and holy - taboo (p. 20).

And then the maternal feeling:

> The next morning I went to buy the nightdresses that the nurses had asked for ... 'Do you want shorties? Baby-doll nighties?' asked the shop assistants. I fingered frothy night-things as nonsensical as their names, in pastel colours, made for young, happy bodies. It was a lovely autumn day with a blue sky: I made my way through a lead-coloured world, and I realized that my mother's accident was affecting me far more than I had thought it would. I could not really see why. It has wrenched her out of the framework, the role, the set of images in which I had imprisoned her: I recognized her in this patient in bed, but I did not recognize either the pity or the kind of disturbance that she aroused in me. Finally I decided upon some pink three quarter nightgowns with white spots (p. 21).

The fifteen and a half year old Duras is her mother (the clothes and make-up are borrowed from her mother) and so is the lover (he dresses young Duras and takes care of her and bathes her). She is after all only fifteen and a half and still very close to that age where the mother performed these functions - as close to that age as Tennessee Williams and Carson McCullers were far from it. The need and the erotic implications of that need persist.

Duras leaves the Chinese lover. A year and a half after the affair started she remembers: "We kissed, we wept, and again it was unto death, but this time, already the pleasure it gave was inconsolable" (p. 83). Pleasure is getting deeper, but Duras is still unwilling or unable to use the word "love" with reference to this

relationship. It is not until the last pages of the book The Lover that Duras finally completes the cycle of love by admitting:

> ... and suddenly she wasn't sure she hadn't loved him with a love she hadn't seen because it had lost itself in the affair like water in sand and she rediscovered it only now, through this moment of music flung across the sea (p. 114).

This rediscovery of a sensation and the re-naming of it - now LOVE - is Proustian and Durasian as well. Duras' concept of love at this point in her life coincides with the notion of ideal erotic love. It embraces eroticism and the purest nurturing, caring love.

In studies like Merriam's and Levinson's the male search for meaning produces the desire to erase the past life or to "break-out" at mid-life, thus restructuring the life pattern. Search for meaning then entails an evaluation of identity that, more often than not, according to the above researchers, result in an identity crisis or the fragmentation of self. Sexuality at this stage of male mid-life represents a mechanism through which they try to reassure themselves that they have not lost their virility. Statements like: "I often wish I were driven now by that same mixture of blind ardor, haste, and tension ... (Bob Slocum in Something Happened, Heller, 1975, p. 111) voice the fear of losing sexual potency.

In Rubin's research, sexuality at middle age represents a new awakening into a facet of love women had not been able to experience when they were younger.

The writers in our group, one by one, demystify old cultural sexual values in order to get to the center of the reality of woman's love at middle age and beyond.

Yourcenar states that the notion of romantic love, that of two people who are made for each other, is a "mirage." According to her, there is in this romantic notion a missing element - that of a sensual bond and of physical pleasure.

Beauvoir, in turn, also demystifies notions that have been attached to love: women were not supposed to experience desire, men were only interested in sex. Beauvoir feels that a resocialization is necessary - women should be socialized to feel free to desire and even include homosexuality within this new freedom.

Sagan demystifies the perfect couple, the single kind of love, by adding to it notions and people that appear marginal. Completeness of love in Sagan's hands is such that it transcends marginality and sexual preference. Its essence is that of the tenderest of feelings: nurturing, caring love.

Colette in turn makes another important contribution to the notion of eroticism in the later years. Through her own sensual language and life reconstruction - reverting to the past to understand the present - she sees her father and, especially her mother, as erotic beings, capable of the passions that Colette herself is experiencing now in her fifties - jealousy and passion. Hence, through actual experience and a restitution of the past, emerges another demystification - that eroticism in love and the jealousy that can accompany passion are absent in older love.

With Marguerite Duras we turn full circle. The demystification of the notion of romantic love is now complete. The missing link - desire - and desire experienced by the woman first - forms the core of

this extraordinary reconstruction of experienced love. A further demystification takes place in The Lover. Love starts with desire; it starts with the senses.

In conclusion, this group gives great importance to the meaning of love in their search for meaning. As deeply concerned with the notion of love as all "other women," these women writers demystify the notions that are no longer valid in our time and restore to them the missing elements in the concept of female love. The sensual, the erotic are restored and added to the spiritual and maternal to complete the meaning of love as seen in this stage of the life-cycle.

CHAPTER V

Footnotes

[1]Williams (1987, chapter 1, pp. 1-12) offers a detailed analysis of woman's mythical evolution.

[2]For a lengthy discussion of the history of ideal erotic love in literature see Furber and Callahan (1982), especially chapters I and III.

[3]For an excellent discussion both of the images of female sexuality in writing and of Beauvoir's problem in this regard as well as of American and French feminist views on the subject, see two excellent studies: Crossing the Double Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism by Elizabeth A. Meese (1986) and Sexual Textual Politics (1983).

CHAPTER VI

COMPARISON WITH OTHER LIFE CYCLE FINDINGS

The area of the present study, the sociology of the life-cycle, has received considerable attention in the last few years. In this field the nature of growth and patterns of change from the time of birth to that of death are studied. This area of sociology holds great interest because it touches all of us directly: we all expect to grow older and strive to understand and be prepared for the issues and challenges that life holds in store.

This relatively new field of research is particularly exciting because they are still so many unanswered questions, so many aspects of the life cycle that need further exploration from a variety of perspectives. One of the dimensions of this expanding field in which to date there has been relatively little research is the life-cycle from a female perspective.

Literature on the life-cycle is not limited to any one discipline. The major contributions so far have come mainly from the fields of psychology (Buhler, Erikson, Gould, Levinson) and psychiatry (Jung, Vaillant). Although studies have been conducted in other fields such as biology (Buhler, Kuhlen), human development (Neugarten) and sociology (Elder), there is a need for more comprehensive research which would be inter-disciplinary and speak to the nexes of issues stemming from studies in the individual fields.

Following is a review of literature in those areas where there is a need for further research in order to advance the sociological interpretation of the mid-life and beyond, especially as it concerns the female and the process of reconstruction which occurs for her over a period of years in the life-cycle.

Psychology, as noted, has contributed significantly to this field, especially in theories of human development. Erikson (1963, 1968, 1976, 1980, 1982) presented a staircase perspective of human or ego development, based primarily on clinical data. His study of eight crucial stages which mark turning points along the life line from birth to death is one of the most comprehensive developmental investigations in the literature to date.

In the Eriksonian model the focus is on childhood and adolescence because in Erikson's opinion these early stages form the foundation of ego development. The later stages are less exhaustive and present problems when taken out of the context of the entire life-span model. Erikson's Generativity stage, corresponding to mid-life, leaves little room for sociological explanations. In broad terms, the outcome of Generativity is Care, or as defined by Erikson: "Care is a widening commitment to take care of the persons ..." (1982, p. 67). The model is general and suggests that caring or "to take care of" at mid-life is just the outcome of the successful resolution of former developments in the ascending order (hope, will, purpose, love, etc.). This leaves little room for a sociological explanation, such as what is the influence of different cultural values on generativity and what is the gender difference. Some societies stress more the value of

"taking care of" than others, and the meaning of caring may not carry the same connotation for males and females.

Gilligan (1982) has challenged Erikson's conception of Generativity as " ... narrowed to development in mid-adulthood and in the process made more restrictive in its definition of care" (p. 92). Gilligan's study continues:

> For generativity to begin at midlife, as suggested by Erikson and Vaillant (1977), seems - from a woman's perspective - too late for both sexes, given that the bearing and raising of children will have taken place primarily in the preceding years (p. 110).

Though well taken, one may argue that Gilligan's last point is also restrictive as "care" and "generativity" are not necessarily reduced to childbearing, as this study has shown.

As for Erikson's next stage, Integrity, our data reveal a close proximity with Erikson's model. In his last book <u>The Life Cycle Completed,</u> Erikson developed and changed some of the stages. Integrity, which formerly had basically the meaning of "coherence" and "wholeness" was redefined in 1982 to the term "integrality." "... \`integrality', a tendency to keep things together. And indeed, we must acknowledge in old age a retrospective mythologizing that can amount to a pseudointegration ..." (1982, p. 65). Both integrity and integrality share the meaning of "whole" but the difference with integrality lies mainly in the potential to integrate, make whole from past experience or as Erikson puts it: " ... \`after' should mean only a later version or a previous item, not a loss of it" (p. 63). Our women authors have shown this tendency to keep things together and retain those moments from the past that make their present stage whole

and coherent.

One student of the life cycle, the psychologist Roger L. Gould (1978), included females in his study. Among the most important of Gould's discoveries is that aging makes women more dynamic in so far as they see themselves in later years more as creators of their own lives. He considered this "positioning" of the self in mid-life useful as this perception reinforces the idea that adulthood is not a plateau. Aging is a dynamic process whereby previous values and views are not thrown away; they are rather transformed to include the present situation. Again here is a similarity to the French authors under study. We do not find in their texts either fragmentation or a desire to go back to youth but rather a desire to recover, that is, retrieve and at the same time cover the spaces that may fragment the life-line, thus weaving past experience and the present situation into a coherent whole. This is where the language of our data made a significant contribution. Keeping with Erikson, the "covering" process we detect in our data does not involve loss, but as in Gould's study, a transformation into the generative or creative stage.

Some of Gould's other findings cannot be explained as easily. One of Gould's conclusions is that a central issue for women at any time is giving themselves permission to try new roles. " ... a role change is really a definition change so that woman's liberation requires a woman to license herself to use her own power" (1978, p. 332). Gould further states that

> ... if a woman decides not to have children (or to postpone having them) then, like a man, her dominant concerns will be work and satisfying her ambition. This is as true of a

> woman who is part of a couple as it is for a single woman (p. 97).

What is assumed in this model is that motherhood is the only variable separating the female from the male model. Otherwise, separation and autonomy, as opposed to affiliation and attachment, may be the same for both women and men. Our conclusions are not compatible with this statement. To begin with, among our authors there are two who have never been mothers (Beauvoir and Yourcenar) and three who have had children (Colette, Sagan, Duras). All five of them, however, mothers or not, have remained highly creative and autonomous and, at the same time, retain a high sense of affiliation and attachment most notably in their relationships with their own mothers (Colette, Beauvoir - Sagan - who dedicated the book to her mother) or their friends (Beauvoir, Sagan, Yourcenar).

Levinson (1978), working mostly with male samples and influenced by Freudian psychology, has stated that transitions from one stage to another represent crisis and turmoil and that the midlife transition is especially marked by such a crisis. The crisis is basically connected with man's "dream" and the dream, in turn, is associated with work and achievement. It is the accomplishment of or failure to realize that dream, says Levinson, that is responsible for fragmentation; if the dream does not proceed according to schedule the process of restructuring begins by "breaking out ... Breaking out includes a distinctive marker such as leaving his wife, quitting his job or moving to another region" (pp. 205-206). What follows is a process of "restabilization" or in Levinson's words: " ... a new life

structure begins to shape and provide a basis for living" (p. 255).

According to Levinson the concept of life structure is vital in the study of the life-cycle. Externally, he explains, it refers to the individual's overall pattern of roles and memberships, while, internally, life structure includes the meaning those roles have for each individual. Levinson also claims that mid-life entails a review and reappraisal of previous stages and a modification of the elements that were not satisfactory in the previous life structure; this modification involves starting to test elements of a new structure. What he is basically saying is that after a period of crisis or de-structuring comes a period of restructuring or, in his terms, starting a new life structure.

Our study sheds a different light on the notion of "restructuring." There is no doubt that for our authors, middle age was also a time of reassessment and search into their past. For none of them, however, was it a time of crisis. The only evidence of fragmentation is in the fact that several of the books were written in the form of fragments. However, those fragments were not a cry of desperation; they reveal a genuine desire to re-create the past. The fragments of the texts, being only words and sentences, being as it were only form, allow these women to create a paradoxical, symbolic whole - to integrate in concrete form fragmentation with continuity. Restructure, then, for these females meant recreate; not breaking away but integrating, not starting fresh but continuing, with the difference that they were availing themselves of past experiences - theirs and their mothers'.

While some of the existing empirical studies have brought to light characteristic traits of the mid-life stage of development and beyond, there are few theorists who have come up with an inclusive male-female explanation. Even those studies that take into account female mid-life (Rubin, 1979; Neugarten, 1968) have their limitations. Rubin's findings, although they point to important issues and demystify long held concepts about female mid-life, do not give us an insight into the process of female restructuring in the middle-years and beyond. In our study, the findings show a continuous re-covering of the self through time, nostalgia, reattachment to the mother, and through the creative process, which is indeed a way of recreating the self. In addition, Rubin studied primarily women who earlier in their lives were concerned exclusively with marriage and motherhood. A more complete picture would include women primarily interested in a career, as well as married and unmarried women who have not raised families.

Neugarten (1968) has made a major contribution to the study of the female life-cycle, especially with respect to mid-life and beyond. She offers a structuralist adult socialization model that emphasizes and explains the importance of normative impositions. The normative perspective, however, does not tell the whole story; it does not explain how the subject feels about those normative impositions. For example, expectations concerning age-appropriate behavior can become pervasive in a culture and act as a "social clock." Neugarten finds that women, more than men, feel in general greater constraints in connection with age-appropriate behavior. This refers clearly to the actual roles played by women over time. However, carrying out the

role does not necessarily mean that it coincides with the subjective perception of that role. Our contribution to the picture is an analysis that serves as a vehicle for understanding the subjective perception of aging. Duras is a case in point. She aged, or so she felt, at the age of fifteen and a half - and it had nothing to do with the social clock. Aging for the others was perceived through their mothers (Colette, Beauvoir), through nostalgic memories of their youth that brought past and present together (Sagan, Colette), through the desire to go back to the roots and put it all together (Yourcenar), or through the desire to heal old wounds (Beauvoir).

In other words, equally as important as the normative approach used by Neugarten, is a definitionist approach that includes the individual's reconstruction of reality and, as a consequence, of the self.

Buhler (1968) studies the course of human development somewhat differently from the researchers reviewed so far. Her main interest was to examine parallels between the life course, as it appeared in the biographies she studied, and the biological course of life. Her view stressed the similarity between the biological process of growth, stability and decline and the psychosocial process of expansion, culmination and decline, which, according to her, is goal related. For Buhler, the turning point follows the culmination phase of mid-life and is that of assessment. She concludes that a sense of not having fulfilled one's goals plays a more fundamental role in a crisis than a sense of biological decline in middle age. Although the mid-life stage was not studied in particular depth, but as part of the

whole life-course model, Buhler´s study is relevant in that it does take into consideration self-perception at mid-life. This concept may also contribute to a better understanding of the authors that constitute our data; part of their positive view of aging may be due to their having fulfilled the goal they had set for themselves early in life: writing.

Kuhlen (1964) elaborated on the Buhler model of growth, culmination and contraction but dealt with it in a different way. His view was that the goals (such as creativity, achievement, power) which prevail in the first part of life may change as people move into new social positions with new goals appropriate to those positions. While this part of his concept is not relevant to this study, his idea that as people grow older they switch from active direct gratifications of their needs to others attained in more indirect ways may apply. We see a shift in all these writers, at this point in their lives, from novels and political and philosophical and literary treatises to autobiography. This might suggest a different source of gratification; one that may attract less external acclaim but gratify an internal need to restructure the self. Kuhlen´s study complements Elliot Jaques´ work (1965) based on the biographies of 310 male artists, including composers, painters, poets, sculptors and writers. He observed that intimations of mortality in the individual´s mid-life period influenced a shift in the direction of art "hot from the fire creativity to more sculpted works and from more lyrical and descriptive works in young adulthood to tragic and philosophical during the mid-life" (pp. 502-514). Our findings differ from Jaques´

in that we have found no vestige of tragedy in the works of female creators in later life stages. Quite on the contrary, Colette´s, Sagan´s, Yourcenar´s and Beauvoir´s works are highly lyrical and calm in spite of some of the tragic experiences that may have prompted the books.

A longitudinal study by Florine Livson (1976) gives us some insight into the midlife transition for different types of women. Livson followed a sample of 24 women from adolescence to midlife and divided them in two groups: the autonomous, intellectual ones she called "independent;" those whose personalities appeared to be suited to the traditional female roles of wife and mother she termed "traditional." Independent women showed more of a tendency for a midlife crisis at age forty, although by age fifty they had bounced back intellectually and emotionally. Traditionals, on the other hand, had by the age of forty formed close relationships, were liked and were socially successful and experienced no crisis. Livson suggested that the crisis experienced by the independents did not inhibit their psychological health since at age fifty there was strong evidence of one of Erikson´s aspects of the stage of Generativity: that of being nurturant and caring. Livson explains this in the following manner:

> Independents do not so easily fit conventional definitions of femininity. By age forty, when children are moving into adolescence, they seem unable to connect with a workable identity. I would suggest that it is a disengagement from the mothering role by fifty that stimulates these women to revive their more assertive, goal oriented skills (1976, pp. 112-113).

Livson´s findings are not easily connected with ours. While our group fits the Generativity stage defined by Erikson in terms of care,

creativity and productivity, it does not seem related to a "disengagement from the mothering role." In our study, there is no evident relationship between procreativity and goal perception. Some of our authors never assumed the role of wife and mother.

Vaillant (1977) also researched the life-cycle with emphasis on mid-life. Working mostly with males and under the strong influence of Freudian psychology, Vaillant saw the lives of the group he studied in connection with their ability to cope, and unlike Levinson found little evidence of emotional crisis. Like the women in our study, Vaillant stressed the feeling of challenge experienced by individuals at this stage of life, and attributed this as well as the lack of crisis to a sense of liberation after the severe constraint of the previous stage.

The last study we will mention here is Merriam's (1980) in which fiction was used as data for a systematic analysis of male mid-life. Although the themes that emerged in Merriam's study are similar to this research, the meaning attached to them is not the same. Concern with physical decline is one of the most substantive traits of the subjects of Merriam's study. Merriam concludes:

> The psycho-social literature is fairly conclusive on this point also. Levinson's study of men (1974) revealed that a sense of bodily decline and aging are major issues of mid-life. That this finding is perhaps more applicable to males is supported by Neugarten's discovery (1968b) that many men in her sample described "bodily changes as the most salient characteristic of middle age" (p. 96) (Merriam, p. 90).

The findings in our study, then, are closer to Neugarten's observation that this phenomenon is not widely found in females. In

our chapter on Time and Physical Decline, we showed that a calm acceptance of physical aging emerges from all the readings.

Merriam, like Neugarten, found an element of time reordering. Neugarten stated that "life is restructured in terms of time left-to-live rather than time-since-birth." Merriam found that mid-life males perceive time in a similar fashion. Our study points to a different restructuring that draws continuously from time-lived.

Search for meaning stems, in Merriam's study, from the protagonist's dissatisfaction with their careers: "most of the protagonists feel bored, a sense of inertia and/or trapped" (p. 91). Merriam continues: "In the empirical literature, men, more than women, define themselves in terms of their career, and middle age is a time for review" (p. 91). In this study the authors of the autobiographies also defined themselves in terms of their careers basically but at the mid-life point or beyond they did not experience what Merriam calls "career malaise." Search for meaning for these women is not, as for the fictional characters studied by Merriam, an evaluation that leads to despair or suicide, or an eventual "break out," but rather it is a search for the meaning of love and of the feelings that play such a primary role in defining a woman's life.

Intimation of mortality in Merriam's study duplicates other empirical studies that connected mid-life with fear of death. However, in our study it is shown that for these women intimation of mortality is not connected with actual fear of death but with identification with the deaths of significant others, or as in some parts of Beauvoir's autobiographies, death is one factor which

contributes to "existential anxiety." In Yourcenar's case, it is the final stage of the life-cycle, a stage she wants to go into with "Open Eyes."

In the case of Sagan, death is a metaphor for pleasure:

> When it happens, the words "prohibited," "fasten seat belts," "social security," "hospital," "death" no longer have any meaning, have been simply wiped out by a single word that men have used throughout the ages, a word that describes a silver racing car or a chestnut horse: the word "speed" ... certainly your control is so tenuous there's still room for pleasure, and still room for the possibility such pleasure will prove fatal" (pp. 70-71).

A review of the literature on the life-cycle shows that no clear distinctions have been made between males and females when studying themes such as aging, death, time reordering, or search for meaning. This study points to the need for definition and classification before the terms are used; in the present study at least, the connotation is not the same as in much of the literature.

The present research, then, raises questions as to the applicability of identical categories for both males and females and generates insights which will be introduced in the general conclusions from which a paradigm for female mid-life and beyond begins to emerge as a basis and hopefully a catalyst for further research.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

One of the aims of this study was to test the merit of using autobiographies as valid, useful and interesting data to generate new insights into sociological research on female mid-life and beyond. This study, we believe, shows that autobiography offers the sociologist a written and therefore concrete record of the life-cycle in a form which is, at the same time, open to the sociological imagination.

Data available in autobiography, and not so readily available in other kinds of life-histories, are literary symbols and figures which in the body of this dissertation are examined through the method of "explication de texte." Symbols and figures are literary devices through which authors "represent" reality. A symbol, defined as something that stands for or represents another thing, especially an abstract notion, may be a key to an entire life-history; to memory associations, to the unconscious and also to conscious fears and desires. The theme of Nostalgia which constitutes Chapter III of this study is an example of what is meant here by symbol. A figure, on the other hand, represents a definite form and gives shape to images and ideas. It is the graphic receptor of the mental shapes: a "receptor" of perceptions and social definitions which is projected as onto a screen from the mind and imagination of the subject. Franco, for

instance, the character in Sagan's _With Fondest Regards_ is such a figure. He, in turn, gives shape to the notion of eroticism. In both symbols and figures, the researcher holds the key to conscious and unconscious structures of the self, which are both captured and liberated on the pages of the autobiography.

The use of the combined methods of explication de texte and grounded theory has proven to be helpful when using literature as data. If literature is used, it must be done in the way it was done here: it must be scrutinized in the same vigorous way as other empirical data. Our analysis has shown, sometimes to our surprise, that if a method is used consistently it yields consistent results.

Let us now review the aims of this dissertation as stated in Chapter I with the goal of showing what issues have emerged in the course of the research and writing.

We have begun this concluding chapter with a remark concerning the merit of using autobiography and note that this research goal persists in and colors all of the other goals.

Our findings regarding the main issues, problems and concerns that emerge in female mid-life and beyond can be discussed in two parts: 1. The issues themselves; 2. How they differ from those which emerge in studies of men.

At first sight, the categories Time and Search for Meaning which result from studies of mid-life and beyond, appear to be the same for both sexes. The properties of Time - Physical Decline and Death - too, appear to operate in the same way for males and females. However, even when the properties are the same, differences emerge in

the way in which men and women experience and cope with the problems and concerns of mid-life and beyond.

To reiterate the most outstanding conclusions: First, a frequent male reaction to signs of physical decline is panic. As expressed by Merriam (1980): "The awareness of aging manifested itself in the protagonists' distress with their physical deterioration -- receding and greying hair, decreasing muscle tone, and weight gain" (p. 115). Not only do they exhibit panic but they also show the need to "erase" and "break out." And so, they start a new structure or what Levinson calls a "restructuring." Death, according to Merriam, is also seen in similar terms. It is perceived as looming, as imminent.

On the other hand, the women in our study, at mid-life and beyond, do not erase, rupture, or break out. Rather, they integrate past experience and the present situation. They do this in many ways: through an identification with the mother, which heals former separation from her; through nostalgia and restitution of the self; through role modeling and anticipatory socialization to death through the experience of the death or deaths of significant others.

Marilyn Yalom (1981) makes the connection between all of these properties in the following description of the mother: "Death brings to life the alienated self, as well as the alienated mother, slumbering for decades in the unconscious ..." (p. 79).

What we have found then, is that Time for women represents fusion, restoration, integration. We will borrow the words of Marguerite Yourcenar who states it so succinctly, in writing of woman's tendency at this stage of life to restore, to make whole, to

recover from the past and, in a word, to frame:

> What the frame gives is a precise location of a moment in the past - it is precisely because of this ability to locate the moment that lessons drawn from the study of the past still have validity for us, even if the conclusions seem to be based on a letter or monologue in which a historical figure appears to speak merely for himself (1984, p. 41).

Framing does not mean to enclose or render fixed and immutable. Framing, for the women in our study, is a process of making sense, of providing a structure for a life review. This structure might be described as a line. The line is broken along the way, or may appear to be broken by separation and rupture in relationships, especially with the mother. At the period in the life-cycle in question, the dots of the imaginary line are, so to speak, fused and the life to that point appears, once again, in the imagination, as a whole uninterrupted line. Even if it still appeared as dots, Yourcenar once again, uses the following exquisite example to illustrate the value of women's flexibility: "Mexican potters, for instance, leave a broken line in their designs so that the spirit within won't be trapped ..." (p. 254).

The women in our sample deal with fragmentation, physical decline and death similarly. They feel "eternal," "ageless" and very much echo the words of Colette's mother: "one does not feel old until the very brink of the grave."

Nostalgia emerged in this study as a new and different property of Time than those that have appeared in other empirical studies of the life-cycle. Studied through the "ascending order" of Fred Davis' sociological study, and seen through a Proustian lens and the eyes of

our subjects, Nostalgia does not mean a "yearning to go back home" or to be young again, but rather a reconciliation with the past, a recuperation of aspects of that past which were formerly inaccessible. Another difference from studies of the life-cycle with males concerns the career clock. Although the subjects of our group are all career women, it became evident that they do not guide themselves by the "career clock" only. Yourcenar explains this best when she says, commenting on the relative importance of this dimension:

> I drew a small circle on a piece of paper and said: go ahead and divide this circle up into little slices, and well! See the portion my literary career represents? A tenth, perhaps, or a twentieth. You mustn't forget the rest (1984, p. 99).

The above conclusion regarding the career clock, leads us into the findings of the category Search for Meaning, where we have seen the most palpable difference between males and females.

For men in previous studies, like Merriam's, for example, Search for Meaning has been equivalent to an evaluation of whom they had become; a questioning of life and, as a consequence, an identity crisis. Men often expressed the desire to "be themselves" and, to achieve that, they expressed the need to break away and forge a new identity.

Women, on the other hand, define their identity in a context of relationships. According to Carol Gilligan (1980):

> ... in all of the women's descriptions identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care. Similarly, morality is seen ... as arising from the experience of connection and conceived as a problem of inclusion rather than one of balancing claims (p. 160).

Our study confirms Gilligan's. What our research will add to the existing literature, however, is that the term "relationships" takes on a new and we think very important dimension: the erotic. It is in the process of integration and restitution of the self that the women in our study discover, most emphatically and dramatically, the sexual self which was repressed, lost, ignored or negated through socialization. At mid-life and beyond, the sexual self is reconstituted, rediscovered (or discovered for the first time) and in the process of discovery, the notion of love becomes whole: spiritual, caring love is re-united to physical desire in an erotic ideal which completes not only the meaning of love, but demystifies views of female sexuality which influence and structure early socialization of women.

We have also discovered that the language currently used in the field to describe the phenomena which are associated with mid-life and beyond is inadequate and inappropriate. Specifically, Levinson's term "restructuring" has created serious problems for the studies of women. From what we see in this study, restructuring does not mean "breaking out" or forming a new structure: rather, it means transformation, drawing from the past to integrate into an existing structure of the self. We have avoided then, throughout our discussions of the "restructuring" of the self through Time and Search of Meaning, the word "restructure." Instead we have chosen terms such as "restore," "recover," "retrieve," "restitute," "reconstruct." Although what is really important is the difference in the process of restructuring by males and females, it is meaningful as well that the language reflects

this difference. Therefore, future studies of the female life-cycle should also take into account this semantic problem. The word "restructuring" has been preempted by Levinson and cannot be used with the same meaning in future research regarding females.

Another important sociological contribution of this study concerns time-reordering. Neugarten (1968) in interviews with middle-aged men and women, found "that both sexes, although men more than women, talked of the new differences in the way time is perceived" (p. 97). According to her study, life is restructured in terms of time-left-to-live, rather than time-since-birth.

Our study, on the contrary, seems to point to a "frame" as Yourcenar calls it, that starts at birth. As the group under study continues at mid-life and beyond to draw from the past, this would change the restructuring of time from time-left-to-live to time-since birth. Although the life-line from middle age on is shorter than that of time lived, this analysis has shown the shorter line to be enriched by the inclusion of past experiences, so that the time that counts is that of duree (lived time in the sense of depth) and not chronological time. Even if evaluation of the past may involve a sense of finitude, this sense is transformed to the point where past and future weigh equally. Eternity and childhood go together.

In conclusion, this study has shown clearly the value of using autobiography as data. Literature, and especially autobiography, for reasons already mentioned, offers the sociologist a vast data source for investigation. It has to be clear, however, that literature has not been used here either as it is used in "sociology in literature"

where examples are taken from literature to illustrate sociological theories or in "sociology of literature" where a text is studied to prove or test a certain sociological theory. Literature here, specifically autobiography, has been used as data to generate hypotheses. We have tried to put into practice Glaser and Strauss' notion that theorizing is the product of the "borrowed experience of others," in this case autobiographies. We have also tried to put into practice the notion that as sociologists, no matter what theories we generate, there should always be room for what Mills so aptly described as "the sociological imagination." The use of literature in this study, then, should not be misleading. What we have done is to use the sociological grounded theory research methodology combined with literary analysis. This combination, we hope, has made a significant contribution to the Sociology of the Life-Cycle.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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