Grace Paley: Life and Stories

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GRACE PALEY
LIFE AND STORIES

by
JUDITH ARCANA

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

May
1989
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work owes an unusual debt to its subject, Grace Paley, who gave many hours and days of her time, over a period of four years, to its author. Additionally, this work has been nurtured from its conception by Professor Joyce P. Wexler, whose support, editing, advice, and criticism have been invaluable. Professor Suzanne S. Gossett contributed critical readings and discussion, translation, and an ongoing analysis of the methods of the author. Professor Paul Jay assisted with thoughtful readings and criticism. Other Loyolans—faculty, students and staff—have given much assistance throughout the research and writing of this text. They include Gloria Conforti, Allen J. Frantzen, Carole Hayes, Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, Janice Mouton, Lorna Newman, Jill N. Reich, James E. Rocks, Judith Wittner, and Nancy Workman. The women of Northwestern University Library's Special Collections were of great help. Jonathan Arlook provided extraordinary support of almost every conceivable kind, from emotional sustenance through financial aid to technological instruction. Many others, friends, colleagues and relatives of Grace Paley and Judith Arcana, have also offered support, assistance and criticism
throughout the years devoted to this project. These include interview subjects Karl Bissinger, Sybil Claiborne, Jane Cooper, Victor Goodside, Bob Nichols, Danny Paley, Debbie Paley, Jess Paley, Laura Paley, Nora Paley, and Jeanne Tenenbaum; as well as Cathryn Adamsky, Daniel Arcana-Pildes, Peaches Blessington, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, Omie Daniels, Flora Faraci, Susan Koppelman, Susan Korn, Stuart Leven, Donna Lachman, Lois Nowicki, the late Nan Nowik, Stephanie Riger, and Jody Speckman.
We often read and write to discover what is unknown to us and apparently different from ourselves. But just as often we seek familiarity, similarity, a kind of homeground. As readers—Dorothy Parker's "constant" readers, Virginia Woolf's "common" readers—and as scholars and writers, we ask, what about me? Where in literature are reflections of my experience, my sensibilities, my world view, my politics? When I analyze and write about John Keats, or D.H. Lawrence, or Beowulf, as I have done recently, I am ranging far off, studying the history and possibilities of a distant "other" juxtaposed in contrast to myself. But when I study she who is most like me, I learn what has been—and might be—possible for myself.¹ This has always been true for readers of fiction.

¹ There is something insidious about Historians and Biographers and the ways in which they make women of achievement seem so different from the rest of us that we are unable to think of ourselves as emulating them. They are not different—at least not in ways that make their lives and achievements something we cannot use for models." (Susan Koppelman, in rev of Between Women [Ascher, et al]
Scholars need to allow for a variety of perspectives and genres in criticism; we need to write and read different voices in our research as well as in the texts we present to our students. If critics are female, Black, Hispanic, Asian-American, working class, gay or lesbian, but write in the voices of those who are not, taking on the dominant critical voice—which remains singular despite its apparently diverse ideological bases—their own identities are lost; they are effectively excluded, just as the stories of their people, written in their true voices, have been excluded.

Since 1985 I have visited with Grace Paley many times, a Boswell to her Johnson at readings, meetings, and kitchen tables. Though we drink more tea than coffee, and probably won't tour the Hebrides, we have managed to walk, talk and eat together in New York, Vermont and Illinois. Like our gentlemen predecessors, we have grown into mutual respect and affection, but we have gone beyond Boswell's memory and stenography by taping many hours of formal interviews as well. So this book is written by a woman who knows Grace Paley personally, a woman who has become her friend. Consequently, I write about her as "Grace." After serious deliberation, I have decided that the distance defined and implied by the traditional scholarly use of the subject's last name is inappropriate here. That usage rings v
false for a woman whom everyone calls Grace—including her
daughter, her son and daughter-in-law, and her undergraduate
students, as well as friends and colleagues.

I am aware of the concern of other feminist
scholars, reacting to the condescension of critics who
minimized and patronized the few women authors they bothered
to mention by writing and speaking of one "Emily" or
another, and of "Charlotte," "Jane," and "Virginia." The
subsequent choice—to write and speak of the women who are
our subjects by their full or family names—is made in
defense, in the spirit of reparation and homage. That
posture is a useful one, especially in the academic world,
but it has by no means calcified, and is not always
necessary. In this book, which offers Grace Paley as a
character as well as a subject, the use of her first name—and
the first names of others as well—suits the text in
both purpose and spirit. Additionally, accepting James
Boswell's precedent, I do not intend to address the issue of
scholarly objectivity—its elusiveness, its dubious value as
an ideal; instead I offer the results of a self-conscious
struggle toward an analysis and explication of Grace Paley's
lifework.

When she learned to drive—around the age of fifty—
Grace Paley loved driving so much she thought she would
become a New York City taxi driver. Probably the only reason she didn't was that her schedule couldn't accommodate another commitment. Her daily mail looks like the postal carrier's load for a whole route, her calendar like an intricate puzzle with no clues. Her schedule might prompt an observer to ask what the major political commitments and priorities are, in all that flurry of variegated action. And she'd answer, "When you say 'major things, important things'--and ask where most of my thought and energy is now--there's such a strong connection [among them all] that you really can't separate" one issue from another. And if the observer should remonstrate, "But you can't do it all, really," Grace Paley says, "Well, you can... You can do a great deal of it. There's no reason why you can't think about several things and work on several things."

"Some people are totally interested in Central American work, and that's real good. First of all, all of our money is going there. When we pay taxes, that's where the money is going: Central American militarization.... Then in some states, like Vermont, there's ERA stuff still. And all the stuff about women's reproductive rights. That's absolutely key. There's nothing that isn't terribly

2. Throughout this text, all quoted material which is not otherwise cited has been taken from my own interviews.
important. I mean, how can a woman think that their attack on our bodies is not a real attack? For me, my feminism is getting stronger all the time."

To get a sense of how she does what she does, I asked her, one day in the fall of 1987 in her Vermont home, to tell me her work schedule for the coming week. Teaching wasn't on the list that week, and we didn't include sweeping and laundry, or cooking, grocery shopping and washing dishes, or attending meetings and visiting with friends and family. That week she had three major commitments: "The writing that I get done will be non-fiction, so to speak. I have to give a talk on Monday on Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, in our local library. It'll be a small group of people probably, and I could have taken Edith Wharton. But I chose Freeman because I figured everybody reads Edith Wharton."

"And this way they'll have to read Freeman," I say, and she says, "Yeah, if they want to. If they want to talk to me on Monday, they'll have to read Freeman. So I use my local reputation to get people to read Freeman. Okay, so I have to give that little literary talk. No big deal, not too many people." I ask her to tell me, in each case, what her purpose is, what it's for. "My purpose?" she echoes, and I think she's indignant. "They asked me." I point out that a lot of people ask her to do things.

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"And I do them. First of all, I relate to this community. It's very local. I mean, it's the library down at the corner. It's my way of being part of this community. And I agreed to do it when they asked me to do it because it's my line of work, literature. And the second thing that I have to do is on Wednesday, to speak at the local women's network, which is a dinner for which people will pay $15 or something like that. It ain't Chicago or New York, but they'll pay. It's called, "Can Women Save the World?" But the truth is, it's going to be, it's surely gonna be, about militarism and about reproductive rights, and about what they're trying to do to women now. And I'll probably drag in some literature. And on Saturday I'm going to talk in Burlington at a conference. It's Disarmament Day, and I'm gonna talk at a General Electric plant where they make Gatling guns that they use in helicopters over Nicaragua. Okay. So you have my whole life there, next week. I can't tell it to you better than that."

But you can't really hear that conversation, can't really know what went on between us, unless you know that it took place in her kitchen/sitting room, in late Vermont autumn, and that while we talked--for hours, with tapes and recorder and microphone and wires all over the table with tea and creamed herring and bread crumbs and jelly--while we talked, her husband Bob and his son Duncan were hammering
repairs all over the outside walls of the house. Also the chimney sweep, a young musician named Steve, was working about eight feet away from us on the wood stove. So Bob and Duncan are banging while Steve is scraping pieces of metal together, or vigorously brushing bunches of thick wires across various rough metal surfaces. The noise is finally so much bigger, so much more than our conversation, that we stop talking, and then burst out laughing. Then we make more tea.

A twentieth century Boswell, I have all the appropriate electronic devices, but somehow that doesn't lessen the difficulty of getting my subject's words onto paper. Unlike Dr. Johnson, Grace Paley is uncomfortable being the center of attention for hours at a time. So until we'd been working together for nearly eighteen months, we never had an uninterrupted set, an interview without other people or phone calls—the record is nine calls in two hours. Until just recently, she would often invite people to join us, partly because she wanted me to meet them and thought we'd all enjoy each other—but mostly because then she wouldn't have to talk exclusively and extensively about herself.

Once an unexpected large package was delivered while we were taping. We set it aside, trying to be businesslike, but within half an hour had set aside the microphone...
instead, to open what turned out to be a hotshot camera with all imaginable attachments—sent to Grace as a "gift" from the manufacturer, "in recognition of" her "contributions." Maybe they want her to go on TV and say how nifty it is—but there were no strings attached; I read the letter over twice. They just gave it to her.

During that same session, one of the longest phone conversations was from a young woman who calls Grace every few weeks for sustenance; she's been in and out of serious depressions for many months, and Grace is one of her lifelines. Another call was from her son Danny, making arrangements to meet her for a trip to the park with his daughter Laura; another was from her sister, two were from close friends and others were from folks who want her to read, speak, petition, or otherwise join them in their efforts to raise the general consciousness of New York, New England, and the world.

Once in New York we went for a walk around her neighborhood and she bought a pair of shell earrings for her daughter-in-law Debbie's birthday. The merchant was a congenial woman who had spread her wares—from Morocco, Bolivia, Nepal, and Kenya—over a rug on the sidewalk. We both were certainly as interested in her as in each other. Another time, when I arrived in New York for an appointment we'd made long before, she explained that she had to leave
for a couple hours in the middle of our session "to go to a
meeting." This turned out to be--I discovered later--an
awards dinner at which she received one of the PEN/Faulkner
prizes. But she came back home after the "couple hours"
without mentioning it, and since I hadn't eaten, we went out
for Chinese food.

My sentimental favorite is the time we drove around
the back roads of central Vermont in her little car: I'm
strapped in with the tape recorder between my knees, my
folder of notes and questions across my lap, a pen in my
right hand and the microphone in my left--pointed at her
mouth as she answers my questions in a mostly thoughtful,
soft voice. But sometimes she says, in a much louder voice,
"Look at these fields. I want you to look at these fields."
And, "There's lots of cows up here. I'll tell Bob; he'll be
surprised. He thinks they're almost all gone already, but
look, the farmers up here on these hill roads still have
their cows."

The next day I listen to my tapes and find that--
after all our talk about Broner, Ozick and Olsen, Malamud,
Bellow and Roth--only the Vermont hills commentary is
audible over the sound of the tires on hard dirt and loose
gravel. So I say to her, "Grace, no more interviewing while
driving around in the car. I listened to those tapes and
they're crazy; it's impossible." She says, "No. You didn't
have the mike close enough." And later, when I'm not exasperated at the failed promise of Japanese technology—and my own lapse of judgment—I realize she's probably right. I think maybe I didn't have the mike close enough.

This work has been struggle and the struggle has been self-conscious because in coming to know Grace Paley, I have had access to sources of otherwise unobtainable information and exceptionally privileged insight. She has afforded me the opportunity, over several years, to literally be in her life, and has come into my life as well, so that I know her in ways that I could never know subjects studied only in a library. But there is—as my readers must realize—a limit to the use I have made of that information and insight. That limit has been primarily defined by Grace herself, and other of my informants, who have said, "Don't quote me on this," or "Please don't use this in your book." Knowledge beyond that limit has certainly informed

3. When I worry about those limits, and their effect on my work, I cheer myself by thinking of the worst example I know: the frustration of Virginia Woolf, writing about the life of Roger Fry, a project she was practically dragooned into accepting. Fry was no longer alive, of course, but she began soon after his death, and she had been his good friend, and knew all of his people quite well. The constraints she felt—some applied deliberately by the very family that had urged the work on her—thoroughly strangled her writing. This project, self-chosen and enormously rewarding, is nowhere near so constrained.
my analysis and my writing, but I came to see that even some of what was not self-censored by Grace, her family, her friends and colleagues was inappropriate for me to discuss at present.

Occasionally I disagree with Grace Paley about the construction of meaning or purpose in her texts, and even about interpretations of her behavior and personal history. In this, however, I have no fear of injuring her, and anticipate only vigorous argument or laughter from her in response. Other scholars and writers have dealt with this issue, and their work supports and encourages mine. Sandra Whipple Spanier, for instance, in her work on Kay Boyle, discusses her struggle with the question of how we can determinedly disagree with an author's view of her own work—when that author is right there in front of us, telling us that we are wrong. Claudia Tate, in her work with black women writers, takes some pains in her initial commentary and various introductory notes to discuss the intricate relationship between a writer's life and a writer's text—especially when dealing with writers who deny that any such relationship exists. Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo and Sara Ruddick, themselves involved in these endeavors, created an entire collection of essays by women whose lives and work are concentrated on the work and lives of other women; all of those essays, which include
expressions of doubt and anxiety about exploitation of our "subjects," as well as fear and resentment of their censorship, reveal the excitement and intense pleasure of this delicate, intimate, enterprise.⁴

⁴ See bibliography for Spanier's **Kay Boyle, Artist and Activist**, Tate's **Black Women Writers At Work**, and Ascher, DeSalvo and Ruddick's **Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about Their Work on Women**.
The author, Judith Arcana, is the daughter of Ann Solomon, Ida Epstein, and Norman Rosenfield. She was born February 5, 1943, in Cleveland, Ohio.

Her elementary education was obtained in the public schools of Cleveland, Miami Beach, Milwaukee, Gary, Chicago, and Skokie, Illinois. Her secondary education was completed at Niles Township High School--East, Skokie, Illinois.

In September, 1960, Ms. Arcana entered the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. She also attended DePaul University in Chicago, and Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, from which she received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English in June, 1964. In January of 1978, she received the Master of Arts degree in Women's Studies from Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont.

From 1964 to 1970, Ms. Arcana taught English, Creative Writing and Humanities at Niles East High School in Skokie. From 1970 to 1984, she was an independent scholar, writing, teaching and lecturing widely. She has published two books, Our Mothers' Daughters (1979, 1980), and Every Mother's Son (1983, 1986), and several articles, essays and poems.
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INTRODUCTION

By translating her life into art, a writer not only "saves"—in Grace Paley's terms—her own life, but offers others the revelation of meaning in that life. That offering and its integral revelation are at the core of this work, which is a biographical reading of a strongly autobiographical writer. A separation of "the work" from "the life" of an artist in biographical study is always artificial and arbitrary, performed with difficulty and resulting in necessarily false distinctions. We usually make that separation for ease of handling, accepting the partition as appropriate to academic and mercantile enterprise. But Grace Paley is a writer whose life and work resist separation, demanding an integrated analysis of her family, her political work and her writing.

Other critics have focused on Grace Paley as a Jew and as a woman. Their work develops analyses along single dimensions, studying Paley almost exclusively in the context of scholarship on "Jewish writers" or "women writers." Asserting the value of biographical scholarship and examining the relationship between biographical critic and
autobiographical writer, I read Grace Paley's work as the art of a specific contemporary American author who is a woman, a mother, a Jew, and a political activist. In contrast to the work of scholars who have analyzed one or another of these identities, my work is directed toward an understanding of the relationships among categories. I benefit from these specialized studies, but my own work places the individual artist within a matrix comprised of many categories and definitions. This matrix is enriched by current Paley scholarship, which concentrates on yet another single dimension, her use of language.

This study is undertaken at a time when the ability of readers to "know" the lives or determine the intentions of authors, like the ability of scholars to distinguish fiction from non-fiction or autobiography, is under serious scrutiny. Critical debate notwithstanding, we can see that much of Grace Paley's work is what literary critics have traditionally considered autobiographical: often her stories and characters are drawn directly from her own life. On the other hand, her work frequently includes apparent autobiography which is either disproved by the facts of her life or denied by her.

What are the relationships among these transformations and mistaken identities? Where are the writer's choices made, and why? I suggest that we can
understand that transition--from life into fiction--when we "read" both Grace Paley and her texts. We cannot read the texts as if they were the life; nor can we sever the life from the texts. But we can study the relationship between the life and the texts by examining the transitional space--that peculiar set of personal, socio-historical circumstances--in which the author chooses to render an actual room or boy or woman or tree into the room or boy or woman or tree in a story.

This book is a telling of stories about Grace Paley's life and work; it examines and comments on both, developing an analysis through the evolution of her career. In the earliest chapters, when Grace Goodside Paley is not yet a writer, there are references to stories and connections noted between the facts of her life and the "facts" of her stories, but little overt discussion of her literary work. As she develops into a working writer over time, a critical analysis develops as well; commentary is then interwoven throughout the biographical text. There are two extensive discussions in which analysis comes to the fore; these coincide with periods in which her publication and activism have brought her public recognition.

Litarcy scholars consider Grace Paley a writer's writer; they are impressed with her craft, her
characterization, and the extraordinary presence she projects in her prose. That presence—the apparent presence of the author in the work—is no doubt responsible for the widespread assumption among Paley readers that in her stories the characters, narrators and author are all one—and that the reader, by knowing the fiction, also knows the writer. Even various personae, differing in gender, race, class and age from their author, still seem to represent her; they convince their readers that they are "real," that the writer is "really" speaking to them.

In her early stories, Grace Paley did create one female character—like Katherine Anne Porter, Mary McCarthy and Hortense Calisher—whom several critics refer to as the author's "alter ego." Introduced in "The Used-Boy Raisers," in *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), Faith Darwin Asbury has become a touchstone, a central figure who appears in at least thirteen—fifteen or sixteen, if we count honorable mentions and unnamed narrators who replicate her—of the forty-five collected stories, as well as at least three short pieces published separately.¹ By 1985, despite certain clear and specific differences, Faith's personal

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¹. "Midrash on Happiness," "Conversations," and "The lion and the ox."
history, politics, and relationships still seem to mirror her author's.

By creating Faith and her parents, her children and friends, her history and community, and by having them move through what theater people call "real time"--aging and changing as the world does--Grace Paley has constructed an ongoing story cycle. Stories in a cycle are "linked" so that the reader has "successive experience on various levels of the pattern," which "modifies...experience of...[its] parts." In a story cycle, protagonists are "realized through recurrence, repetition with variation, association, and so on" (Ingram, 19-22).

As in the classic example of the story cycle in twentieth century literature in the United States, *Winesburg, Ohio*, each story may be read, understood and valued individually, but it is through their cumulative impact that the power of the writer's vision is

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2. Actually, by 1985, when her third volume of stories was published, Grace had also created another character, Ruth Larsen, who often resembles herself. Ruth and Faith are close friends. Since the late seventies, Grace has distributed the most personally autobiographical elements in her narratives between these two characters; perhaps no single character can be said to represent her so definitively now.

3. Forrest L. Ingram cites Kafka, Faulkner and Sherwood Anderson as examples of story cycle authors (14); we might add Salinger's Glass family stories, and suggest that some characters, like the detectives Sherlock Holmes and Peter Wimsey, are understood fully only when a number of their stories are known.
most fully experienced. Each of Grace Paley's forty-five collected stories is a scene in the cycle, a story from that spatial and chronological neighborhood, covering more than one country and nearly one century, from memories of her family's last years in Russia to the present, located most often in New York City—"in all [her] places of paying attention--the park, the school, our street" ("Friends," Later the Same Day, 72-3). 4

So powerful is the identification of this author with her characters that some readers—including scholars—are surprised, even resentful, when they discover that Grace Paley is not, and has not ever been, the single mother of two sons. They feel that they've been tricked because the author has been so good at making up Faith; readers believe in her, and seem to count on her. Certainly "Faith" and "Grace," two proper nouns that name spiritual or religious abstractions, are members of the same class, and refer to each other in their obvious association. 5 Perhaps a central

4. So far, less than a handful of stories seem to have originated outside the neighborhood, so to speak—i.e. "In the Garden"—and may be related to the others most readily by the familiar "sound" of the narrator's voice(s). (At that "sound," we assume someone from the neighborhood has brought in information or adventure to tell.)

5. Faith's sister, of course, is Hope, who never became a full character. Let us not consider capitalizing on that, however, nor on the symbolic value of her speedy disappearance from Faith's life—and the collected stories—in deference to Grace Paley's exasperated and repeated insistence that she created the siblings Faith, Hope, and Charlie Darwin as a joke.
point here is that for women who identify strongly with Faith, she becomes a kind of role model. Can readers, like Faith, "with one hand typing behind [our] back[s] to earn a living," get enough peanut butter and jelly sandwiches onto the table, and love our kids and be with our friends and stay sane and funny? Women read about Faith and think, well, if she can do it, I can do it.

Addressing the issue these readers raise, Grace Paley says, "The only thing you can say is that Faith is a real person....Every story I write is a story of what I think happened. Even if I invented it. I made up the story and here's what I think happened in the story....I think this is what might have happened, or this is what could have happened--you know, a person like Faith could have existed--that's important. That woman could have existed, and she could have been one of my best friends." This is essentially the answer made by the narrator in "A Conversation with My Father," in _Enormous Changes at the Last Minute_ (1974). She says to the reader, about a character she's created and has to defend against her father's criticism, "That woman lives across the street. She's my knowledge and my invention."
About the insistence that Grace Paley is her characters, or the resentment that she's misled us because she's not, the writer says: "That's just a false view of fiction; you can't say what these people are saying." She believes that the difference between "fiction" and "non-fiction" is an artificial thing, "and it's created partly for selling purposes," for merchandising, maybe even for ease of shelving. She uses the example of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. That book, "for instance, was sold as non-fiction. And it's obviously fiction. Well, maybe every mother in it might be her mother, like with my father," in the collected stories. "But it's obviously fiction. If anything is a piece of fiction, it's that. It's inventive, it's got facts, it's got truths. This is like an argument that's not real. It's an argument that's created but has no reality."

We read the stories of Grace Paley, and find out about Faith, her neighborhood, work, people, and politics. And then we "read" Grace Paley, and find out about her neighborhood, her work, her people, and her politics. And in the transitional space between the written life and the lived life, we try to see the relationship between them as she transforms one into the other.6 Asked about her

6. We do so, of course, with the caveat articulated recently by Thomas C. Caramagno: "As biographers, we hope to detect a pattern in the evidence of our subject's life and work, but what pattern we recognize may depend on our
childhood in the Bronx, she says, "Oh, it's in the stories, it's all in the stories." Is she saying that these stories are autobiography? "No. I'm not saying that. I'm saying that I wrote my life into the stories; don't you see the difference?" To make that difference clear, she explains that the first few lines of the first Faith story ("The Used-Boy Raisers," LDM) describe a scene she personally witnessed in the fifties. She went to visit a close friend, and found her there in her kitchen with her two husbands: "So I was thinking about her in my first paragraph....But all the rest I made up....after that first paragraph, none of it is real, none of it." She put words in the mouth and ideas in the head of that character that her friend "would never say, or isn't even interested in."

The reader wonders then: aren't they still the words and ideas of Grace Paley? Was George Willard "really" Sherwood Anderson? Or in that even more complicated case, in which memoir is fiction and memory is talking-story, is the voice of the narrator in The Woman Warrior "really"

preconceptions of what an artist is, what mentality is, and what a woman's mentality is." Caramagno knows that "[t]rue objectivity is impossible because the 'story' [we write] of our subject's life is, to some extent, the result of our having imposed a premature order on the evidence we have gathered, an order that we may fail to remember is fictitious [that is, created by us] itself." ("Manic-Depressive Psychosis and Critical Approaches to Virginia Woolf" in PMLA, 103.1 (January 1988) 10-23.)
Maxine Hong Kingston? The answer here must be "sometimes" or "sort of" or "in a way---yes." But the text is not the life. The crafting of fiction, in taking "real life" as its material, is like the craft of the artist who takes the sculpture out of the stone, or sees a figure in the newly-sanded wood.

That craft, invisible as we read--carried along by the story--appears under the light of analysis. For instance, Grace Paley's stories produce the effect of "reality" while they call traditional literary definitions and categories into question. They often lack conventional literary direction, so that readers must follow a story's movement from one voice, one year, or one scene to another out of order and without the usual markers--those hints and guides that literature used to offer before the radical postmodern rulebreakers got our attention. In Grace Paley's texts, there is no apparent line, no formal, defined separation between fictions, between fiction and non-fiction--nor between life and art.

Certainly her frequent use of the I-narrator and the style of her dialogue--now almost always without quotation marks--produce a spoken quality in tone and language, encouraging readers to feel that they are being addressed directly and personally, or overhearing an actual exchange. The occasional direct address of earlier writers, such as
the nineteenth century's classic "Reader,..." was suddenly and strikingly at odds with its surrounding text, but Grace Paley's conversational engagement of her reader is wholly integrated with her narrative. One of the principal devices she employs--producing the immediacy of an apparently live presence--is the overheard narrator: characters respond in dialogue to what narrators say--as if they had been reading along with us, and have "heard" the narrative voice.

Moreover, in her most apparently autobiographical work, characters reflect her well-known political stance, including her struggle to be responsible for her own consciousness: what she learns is learned by those characters. So Faith is revealed as less than lovable when the erstwhile racist and sexist Zagrowsky "tells," and when Cassie angrily points out that she--and all lesbians--have been "left out" of Faith's stories. Appearing at the end of Later the Same Day in 1985, Cassie's words echo the equally educational and disciplinary conclusion of Enormous Changes at the Last Minute in 1974, when the younger Faith lives "for about three weeks" with Mrs. Luddy, who tells her more than once, "Girl, you don't know nothing." And in the story called "Anxiety," the first person narrator is a verbal and political ringer for Grace Paley; she leans out her window and chides a young father who refuses to see himself as the power-wielder his daughter knows him to be. "Of course it
never really happened," the writer says. "I mean, I do have
a window, and they're in the school next door, and....I was
looking out my window...."

That narrator lives where Grace Paley lives, maybe
even in Grace Paley's apartment, where her own children
finished their growing up. That narrator sees and hears the
children go in and out of P.S. 41 every day and, in the
voice of Grace Paley, radical activist and wise woman, she
admonishes the young father, "Son, I must tell you that
madmen intend to destroy this beautifully made planet. That
the murder of our children by these men has got to become a
terror and a sorrow to you, and starting now, it had better
interfere with any daily pleasure." Grace Paley absolutely
intends to effect social change--if not revolution--in her
work. She is trying to save the world, or at least to "save
a few lives," as one of her narrators asserts.

Scholars have begun to analyze the intimate and
overtly personal translation of the family life of women and
children into art, and have defined autobiography as a
frequent and major subject--acting as both cause and effect
of sociopolitical consciousness--in the literature of women
and minorities. Autobiography in fiction offers a telling
of stories which have been untold or ghettoized, stories
that have been buried, warped, or shunted aside; ironically,
their telling realizes them in a world that has defined them

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as fantasy or denied them into nonexistence. Grace Paley's stories constitute and provide such realization. Indeed, her life's work is defined by its internal coalition of political action and literary production.
CHAPTER I

The Goodsides

Grace Paley believes that we are all creatures of our time, born and formed in history. Human motives or excuses, even when reified in the justifications and explanations of psychoanalytic theory, are subordinate to the inexorable movement of time's glacier. Her stories carry the past within their present, suggesting ways of understanding the relationship between them even as they turn amazingly into the future. Every story, she has said, is at least two stories, and her own stories, to the delight of readers, often include more than two plots, more than two sets of characters, more than two "central" themes. This is one of the ways in which her work is most true, and most autobiographical, for the stories of our lives never do separate and line up neatly into a readily diagrammable plot. Instead, they weave in and out of each other erratically, absorbing and eclipsing in turn, moving back and forth through time as history, which contains them all.

The stories of Grace Paley's own life begin before she was born, early in the twentieth century, maybe on a wagon piled with straw covering hidden trunks and boxes, or
in a train rushing through the night of eastern Europe, carrying hundreds of immigrants to the crowded North Sea ports where they boarded ships that would take them to America. Grace Paley's mother and father, Manya Ridnyik and Isaac Gutseit, came to the United States in 1906, when they were both 21 years old, he a few months younger than she.

In photographs from the old country, the young bride is dark and comely, serious and direct in her gaze; her groom seems milder, but no less attractive with his thick moustache and carved cheekbones. They had lived in the Ukraine, in a town then called Vzovka—later Stalino, still later, Donetz. Jewish socialists, they had both been exiled—he to Siberia and she to Germany—by edict of Czar Nicholas II, but then suddenly released in an amnesty declared in honor of the birth of that Czar's son.

Manya and Isaac were part of the swelling revolution, members of the growing network organizing resistance to oppressive feudal monarchy. One of Isaac's brothers, Russya, was killed in a workers' demonstration in 1905, at the season Jews call "bloody Easter"; his niece Grace keeps a framed antique photo of him in her New York apartment: there he is always a sweet-faced Russian boy, almost a man. And she memorialized him nearly eighty years after his death, explaining in the story called "In This Country, But in Another Language, My Aunt Refuses to Marry the Men Everyone Wants Her To" the grief her family hoped to
leave behind them in the old country. "He was a wonderful boy, only seventeen. All by herself, your grandmother picked him up from the street--he was dead--she took him home in the wagon." (LSD, 108) In the wake of that death, probably spurred by the retaliatory wave of pogroms, the family decided to leave Russia. Knowing the unpredictability of royal whim, Natasha Gutseit, Isaac's widowed mother, sent the young couple to America before the Czar could change his mind and snatch them back again.

Manya was pregnant when they arrived, and Victor, her first child, was born in December of 1906. The young people were ignorant in many ways when they came here; Victor Goodside explains that the immigration authorities were actually the first to know that his mother was pregnant.

They lived at various addresses in lower Manhattan, and then moved up to West 116th Street. The rest of the Gutseit family followed--Isaac's mother and two sisters came to New York, and they all lived together. The family spoke Russian at home, and Russian was the first language of the children born in New York. Victor still recognizes Russian colloquialisms, which he calls "shades of language," heard in passing. Yiddish was also spoken in the house, primarily by his grandmother, and most of the family soon became fluent in their heavily-accented English. That fluency, enriched by those accents and by Victor's "shades," is the root of Grace Paley's fictional "voices"--the voices of her
family, taught and inspired by sources beyond their conscious knowledge, speaking in tongues even as they spoke American English. The author's sensibility extends, in fiction, well beyond her family, into the community of voices she grew up through. So Grace Paley's most autobiographical figure in her first two story collections, Faith Darwin Asbury, relishes the sound of language:

"I like your speech, I said [to a group of Black people in the Bronx, in "The Long-Distance Runner"]. Metaphor and all....Yes my people also had a way of speech. And don't forget the Irish. The gift of gab." (ECLM, 181)

Actually, Isaac Gutseit's first "American" language was Italian, which he learned while working in a photography studio. He had been a photographer in the old country, and found similar work when he came to the States. In the same profession, Manya worked at home with glass plates, retouching photographs. Her daughter Jeanne, born in December of 1908, says that her mother would sit in front of a window with a black hood over her head, working---and "I remember she did that for years." Like most of the immigrant population of New York City, the Gutseits had little money, and struggled toward the American dream. Sheltered on the North American continent but untouched by the economic boom that accompanied World War I, such families painstakingly created new patterns for their lives. Victor says that they "must have had a tough time," for they were themselves still young, "saddled with two kids
practically immediately. They were twenty-three years old and they [already] had me and they had Jeanne. I remember apartments that were crummy, and winters that were cold, and clothes that were inadequate."

Isaac's mother took care of Jeanne and Victor while the young parents and aunts were working. In the summers she would take them off to a kuchelane in the country, usually in the Catskills. No forerunner of the giant summer resorts now scattered over those mountains, the kuchelane was a large collective house, in which everybody shared the kitchen. Each woman was assigned a burner on the stove, and the children's grandmother, whose sweetness made her everyone's friend, was one of the few cooks whose pots and pans were never pushed aside. The children and their grandmother spent summers in those cooperative homes in the years that their mother was working and their father was going to school. Manya Gutseit believed that time out of the city was necessary for her children's health and spirit, and she worked to make sure they could go away each year, to lie on their backs in tall grass, and look through green leaves into blue skies.

The family lore is that though Isaac Gutseit learned to speak Italian in his photography work, he taught himself English by reading Dickens' novels. While Manya did not attend, he finished all his American high school work in six months. By then surely his name, as well as his language,
had been Americanized. By 1914 he was facile enough in English to enter medical school, from which he graduated four years later, providing a model for Alexandra's father in the story "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute."

He remembered the first time he'd seen the American flag on wild Ellis Island. Under its protection and working like a horse, he'd read Dickens, gone to medical school, and shot like a surface-to-air missile right into the middle class. (ECLM, 122)

He first had an office in Little Italy in Manhattan, opened on the premise that since he knew Italian he could develop a practice. But that lasted only a short time, and then the whole family moved to the Bronx, where, because it was 1918—the year of the great flu epidemic—he was immediately busy and successful. Everybody was sick. His son remembers that he made forty or fifty calls a day in his first season as a doctor. "And for a young man, this was a bonanza. He did very well."

It's a good thing he did, for his daughter Jeanne says that they "were very poor, very poor." She remembers that when they first moved to the Bronx, they moved in the middle of the night so none of their new neighbors would see their "horrible furniture." When Jeanne went out to meet the other children on the block, the family's fears were realized; the furniture was all inside, but Jeanne's clothes were clearly visible in daylight, and the other children mocked her. She ran home and told her mother what happened,
and, like a character in one of her husband's Dickens novels, Manya spent the night cutting up and tailoring one of Isaac's coats for Jeanne, so she could go back out the next day. "That's how poor we were."

Manya assisted Isaac in his work for several years, giving up her job as a retoucher; the husband and wife worked together at creating the middle class family their youngest child would be born into. Jeanne recalls their mother taking on several jobs, as nurse and technician, as "receptionist" and medical assistant, working long hours. In addition, when their financial situation improved, she had the responsibility of running their new house, which held both his office and their home. But by the time Grace was born, Mrs. Goodside no longer worked directly with her husband, as she had done in the earlier years of his practice; she was a housewife, and took care of the business of administering a large household. Grace remembers her father's accounting methods: "It was a poor neighborhood. He got paid a dollar or two dollars for going somewhere to see a patient. At night he took his pants off, turned them upside down, and all these dollar bills fell out."

The Goodside family--and their house--was a kind of way-station for people coming to the United States from Russia. People would come over with no jobs, no money, and of course no homes of their own, and stay at the Goodsides for weeks or months at a time. First, second, third and
even more distant cousins would sail into New York harbor, and land on the Goodsides' front steps; they'd stay for a while with Isaac, Manya, Luba, Mira, Natasha and the children, and eventually move on. Every Friday or Saturday night, there was company, mostly family company; they'd all sit at a big round table in the dining room, talking about events in the old country or American politics. And when only the immediate family was home--the young Jeanne and Victor, their parents, their aunts and grandmother--they would read. Almost every evening, seated on those scratchy old overstuffed sofas and chairs, by the light of low table lamps and tall torchieres, the whole family would read. Jeanne points out that "of course there was no television at the time, and very little radio. It was only when we moved up to the Bronx that we had radio."

The family was, as their politics might suggest, rather irreligious. Only the elder Mrs. Goodside practiced Judaism; Grace remembers that when she was a young child, on holidays she would walk her grandmother down the block a few doors to the synagogue, which was in a house just like their own. She herself did not attend more than a few Sunday school classes. Jeanne recalls that their father's mother went to temple on the holiest days, and Manya would always spread a special tablecloth for her during Pesach. Grandma Goodside's husband, the grandfather they never knew, had been violently anti-religious, and in the old country, there
was serious disagreement between father and son over this issue. Notwithstanding those fights with his father, Isaac Goodside eventually gave up religious observance entirely; he and his wife did not even make Victor a bar mitzvah. As an old man in the Bronx, Dr. Goodside would spit on the street when he saw religious Jews, or when he passed a synagogue.

So what would he think if he knew that his daughter Grace has begun to attend services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? Would he, who lived in a culturally Jewish milieu all his long life, understand her desire to locate and maintain Jewishness every autumn in Christian Vermont? He could never have experienced such a need, for his family was strongly identified as Jewish, and he lived surrounded by Jews all his years in the United States. Unlike Judaism, Jewishness, Jeanne says, "was a given," and was never given up. The Goodside family was not unconsciously seduced by the insidious force of assimilation. They chose to live as the kind of secular Jewish thinkers—intellectually, philosophically and politically inclined—they had already become in Russia. They believed, as Grace's character Misha Abramowitz explains in "The Loudest Voice," that "After all, history teaches everyone....What belongs to history, belongs to all" (LDM, 59), and they maintained a secular perspective, adapting those elements of the religious tradition that suited their convictions without the
trappings of belief. When Grace Paley recently composed some ruminations on one woman's pleasures in this imperfect world, she produced a piece that is not a poem and not quite a story, but rather, in the rabbinical tradition, something Anglo-American critics might be inclined to call a meditation. In the tradition of her people, she calls it a "midrash."  

The judgment of the patriarch of the Goodside clan might continue to be a consideration in his daughter's decisions about religious observance and ceremony. "My father was wonderful," Grace says. "He was humorous, he was brilliant, he was sophisticated..." (Perry, 42). Dr. Goodside held an enviable, even an exalted, position in his family. Victor too, himself now "Dr. Goodside," says that while he and Jeanne were growing up, they felt their father "could do no wrong." They believed then that he was always right about everything. Victor respected him and thought he was "wonderful,"--and thought that everyone else thought so too. And Isaac was, his son acknowledges, a fine doctor, a competent and responsible family practitioner,  

1. Bonnie Lyons, who argues that Jewishness is "thematically central" to Grace Paley's work, says that "Yiddishkeit, especially the idealistic, socialist version...is the underlying source of values in her work" (2).  

2. A "midrash" is a narrative/commentary, often on the Torah, which deals with ideas and ethics, historically Jewish. The text of "Midrash on Happiness" may be found in Gibbons, 151-3.
with "a knack for dealing with people"; he was hardworking, successful and well respected.

But as they grew older, both Jeanne and Victor began to think differently about their parents, and their parents' marriage. They recognized that their mother had suffered a certain unhappiness in her home, and had gotten less satisfaction than her husband and children had from family life as the extended family lived it. A small round woman whose peasant features were strong in her maturity, Manya got little recognition compared to the steady flow of praise and admiration her still noticeably handsome husband received. Victor says that he and his sister have realized that their mother was "little noticed," though she was definitely at the heart of the family--always present, but rarely prominent. He points out that even though his grandmother and aunts could easily have lived elsewhere--the aunts always worked, and made a decent living--they continued to live with his parents, despite his mother's unhappiness about that situation. The family was "made up of women who were all busy adoring my father--while my poor mother was out in left field."

Jeanne remembers her grandmother as "very lovable," and as a woman whose influence in the family circle was strong. But Jeanne's grandma was, after all, Manya's mother-in-law, the mother of a man whose children all describe him as "very busy." Whatever homage Isaac Goodside
may have offered to his mother, his children recollect little attention or deference to their mother. Though Jeanne knew that her mother was the one who made many of the decisions--in the background--and that they were generally carried through, her father was regarded as "the kingpin." She explains that he was "in many ways a very rigid man, and a big egoist. Though he was short, he was attractive--and everyone liked him, because he would flaunt his personality. All his patients loved him. But in many ways he was a selfish man, because he put himself first in almost everything. He would often bring up the fact that my mother was a few months older than he," supposedly as a joke, but "he was very caustic."

Grace, the baby born so much later, understood perhaps even sooner and better than her older siblings that her mother wasn't satisfied with life in the large family. After all, by the time Grace was old enough to know what was going on around her, Manya had been in that position for more than twenty years. One aunt, Luba, had married and moved out, but Manya's sister-in-law Mira and her mother-in-law remained in the house. "You know," Grace says now, "extended families are really good for children...[but] they're not very good for anybody else."

Like Jeanne, she thinks that her father "was pretty unconscious" of her mother's problems. And she saw yet another dimension to that marriage: "He admired her, but one
felt that she really was crazy about him. He was a very attractive man, you know, people talked of him as very attractive. And my mother was less so, less physically attractive than he....I didn't think my father was, until one of my girlfriends told me, 'Gee, your father is so goodlooking.' I said, 'My father!?' I mean, I loved him, I was crazy about him, but I didn't think he was so goodlooking." By the time she was fifteen years old, Grace Goodside realized that her mother was a woman married to a man generally acknowledged to be better looking than she, "and more exciting."

Isaac Goodside, though he was no despot, lived with a harem. Even in the years that Grace was growing up, "In that house, when my father would say, 'Pass the salt,' three women would jump over each other to give him the salt." Her analysis of her own response to her father is very like that of Virginia Woolf, another literary daughter whose father's energetic and demanding charisma drew its power from women—sisters, wives, and daughters who devoted their lives to his character and his success. Virginia Woolf wrote of Sir Leslie Stephen after his death: "His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;--inconceivable." (Woolf, Diary, 135) And Grace Paley said of Dr. Isaac Goodside after his death: "In some ways he was very good, but in some ways I could never have done anything until I got away from him." (Perry, 42)
Indeed, it must have been her father's position in his family--far more than the behavior of any of the other men in Grace Paley's life--that gave rise to her question in "A Subject of Childhood": "What is man, that woman lies down to adore him?" (LDM, 143)

When they bought the two-story house where Grace was born and grew up, at 1538 Hoe Street between 172nd and 173rd Streets in the Bronx, there was a comfortable quiet living room where Isaac and Manya could sit together, listening to music and reading. Dr. Goodside bought one of the first victrolas--Grace says that they had "one of the best record players in the Bronx"--and developed an enormous classical record library, including 78's of all the famous singers. They held "musicales" in the house; friends and neighbors would come in every week and listen to recordings of classical music. He loved music "passionately," Jeanne says. "My mother liked music, but she never followed through on her perfect pitch. She could play any instrument, but she never followed through on that." In "Mother," Grace Paley describes the scene in that room, and the emotional dynamic between the couple who most often occupied it.

...she sat beside him. They owned an expensive record player. They were listening to Bach. She said to him, Talk to me a little. We don't talk so much anymore.
I'm tired, he said. Can't you see? I saw maybe thirty people today. All sick, all talk talk talk talk. Listen to the music, he said. I believe you once had perfect pitch. I'm tired, he said. (LSD, 112)

Grace's birth, on December 11, 1922, was a surprise to Jeanne and Victor; old as they were at the time (14 and 16 respectively), neither one knew their mother was pregnant. The family--including Grace herself--attributes this to the fact that Manya Ridnyik Goodside was by then a fat little woman who "just seemed a little fatter." Victor explains that she tended, like her husband, toward "an old world prudishness" which prevented her from mentioning her pregnancy to her children. He says he knew that "something was going on," that day, but his mother was "rather quiet than outgoing," and "this was something that one didn't discuss freely." Jeanne says, "I was so naive at the time. I mean, at my age we were all naive. We didn't know. I never knew my mother was pregnant, all the time she was pregnant. And the day that Gracie was born--she was born in the house--I was the most shocked girl in the world."

In the manner of Grace Paley's fiction, there are at least two different stories about the coming of this baby. Jeanne says, "Here's a funny story about how Gracie came to be born. My father had mellowed [over the years] and so I asked him, 'How come you and Mama had Gracie fourteen years after I was born?' And he said, 'Well, I was by that time fairly well fixed, I was well off, and I said to mother, How
about having a baby? And she said, Why not?' And so they had the baby." Grace says that her father told her that, "Mama came to me and she said, 'You know, I think it would be nice to have another child.' And I said to her, 'All right.' And so they did."

Given the "puritanism" all three of the Goodside children ascribe to both of their parents, the cultural atmosphere and marriage in which this pregnancy occurred, and the passage of so many years, we can only speculate about what Manya and Isaac might have said to each other in March or April of 1922. Such speculation need not be prurient; in fact, with the addition of a few more years to their ages, Grace Paley considered some of the possibilities in "The Story Hearer" and "Listening," both written in the nineteen-eighties:

Jack, I want to have a baby.
Ha ha, he said. You can't. Too late. A couple of years too late, he said, and fell asleep. (LSD, 143)

Faith, have you decided not to have a baby?
No, I've just decided to think about it, but I haven't given it up.... My dear, he said, perhaps you only wish that you were young again. So do I..... I doubt it, I said. Besides, I'm busy, you know. I have an awful lot to do.... But Jack said, Oh come on.... Come on, kid, he said, touching my knee, my thigh, breast, all the outsides of love. So we lay down beside one another to make a child, with the modesty of later-in-life, which has so much history and erotic knowledge but doesn't always use it. (LSD, 203-6)

A thirty-eight year old mother of two teenagers, the busy wife of a successful family doctor living with a
mother-in-law and sister-in-law who doted on her husband, the pregnant Mrs. Goodside could easily have been of several minds about the situation herself.

The year before Grace Goodside was born, her aunt Luba had married and moved out of the family home. When she was two or three years old, her brother Victor also left the household, to go off to school. When she was seven, her sister Jeanne married and moved out as well. From her earliest memories then, until her own marriage in 1942 at the age of nineteen "and a half," Grace was the beloved little one in a family of grown-ups.

Her earliest memory, of getting lost in the beach town of Belmar, New Jersey, could only be the recollection of a child who was loved. "I think I must have been two and a half years old." She wandered into the basement of a neighbor's house, which resembled her family's rented summer place, "and I remember my little rubber beach shoes, little bathing shoes. Those little shoes always got full of water or sand or both." She remembers "standing there [in the neighbor's basement] for a while and being perplexed and crying a little....I remember being lost, which must have been very impressive, but I don't remember being found, which must have seemed very natural." Being held and caressed by loving adults was "very natural" for the Goodside baby, who had "a wonderful life for a child....nobody was not good to me. Really, nobody. I had
three women all caring for me--not even counting my sister," who was "really always half a mother to me. Except for quarrels I had with her in my early teens when she seemed to me to always be agreeing with my mother, she's really been as much a mother to me as anybody."

Being essentially an only child in a household full of middle-aged adults had two effects. "On the one hand, they were more relaxed, they knew a lot." Little Gracie could stay out late on the street in the warm weather with the neighborhood children; they weren't worried about her. On the other hand, "I was more protected. I wore long stockings very late into the season, much later than the other girls--because they were old-fashioned. So I was let alone a lot, and I was over-cared for."

In memory, her family seems to have been "very cultured, but at the same time very down-to-earth. And utterly unsnobbish. [Though] the women on the block, I think, did see my mother as snobbish." They thought of Mrs. Goodside as "the doctor's wife." But Grace maintains that this was "mainly because she was terribly shy"--and because her mother had perfect posture. "She cared a lot about her posture, and worked at it....I can still see her fat little figure walking along with a perfectly straight back. And having good posture is one of the things that makes other people think you're a snob. My family," she says decisively, "had very good characteristics."
When Grace Goodside was a young girl she was a tomboy, wearing pants much of the time, sporting very short hair. In recollection, Grace says that she thought she was a boy—well, she knew she really wasn't, but like lots of tough little girls, kept up the fantasy until it became physiologically impossible to sustain. Her brother recalls that she was "a real personality around the block." Even when he no longer lived there, he knew her reputation—"what a delight she was; everybody was so delighted with her goings on—she was rambunctious. She was up and down the block; everybody knew Gracie. My father had a chauffeur, a black man by the name of Saunders, and he took her under his wing in a way." Saunders taught young Grace to drive and let her drive his car—up and down the block—when she was only seven years old. And even at that age, she had a social conscience: the family said that she would take children from the block into the house for baths, "with my mother's approval," Victor says. "Even so young, she knew that dirty kids should be able to have a bath."

Grace says that she was a fierce tomboy, but that she also loved babies and had dolls. "There were both those

3. At Northwestern University in 1984, she explained to a symposium audience that "when I was a little girl, I was a boy—like a lot of little girls who like to get into things and want to be where the action is, which is up the corner someplace, where the boys are....I could hardly wait to continue being a boy so that I could go to war and do all the other exciting boys' things" (Gibbons, 231).
things struggling inside of me. No, they weren't really struggling. They were both just there, in me." In "Ruthy and Edie" (LSD), two little girls embody those not-really-struggling elements for their author. Ruthy reads about Roland's Horn at Roncevaux; Edie reads about the Bobbsey Twins and Honeybunch. Ruthy wants to be brave and fight for her country when she grows up; Edie doesn't want to go to war because she hates to be separated from her mother. Despite what might seem to be irreconcilable differences (or the source of intense conflict within Grace Goodside), in their story, these two have remained intimate friends all through their lives.

Though Jeanne says otherwise, Grace believes that the family didn't consider their tomboy a pretty child. "Not especially," she says. And besides, she had "a very cute cousin." She feels that "it was not thought that I was pretty. There was a little plainness in our family," she says, implying that she was the embodiment of that plainness. But we have only to look at photographs of the young Grace Goodside as she entered her teens to find that her appeal—she was certainly pretty enough—was her eagerness, her visible energy and liveliness. She was the kind of girl everybody might turn around and look at, walking down the street.

In one photograph from the thirties, the family is lined up on the summer grass, and she, right in the front
row, is practically leaping out of the picture. She's so ready: she wants to be a woman—not a girl, not a child—she wants passionately to be adult, to be grown, like everyone closest to her. Her urgency explains the longing of those adolescent characters—Josephine and Cindy Anne—in the early stories, who want desperately to get older faster, and push out of childhood by means of their just-born sexuality. These stories by a woman writer unfortunately appear to justify the pop-Freudian insistence that young girls are seductive nymphets, flaunting their pubescent bodies that "ain't even quite done" (LDM, 32). But the fact that Grace Paley is herself the source here—for these young girls are autobiographical characters—can become part of our analysis of the text. Grace explains that her straining at the leash of childhood, while it certainly included the adolescent's traditional yearning for sexual maturity, was a full-throttle acceleration "to be grown." The baby among elders for so long, Grace attributes not only her mood in that old photo, but also the interplay between Josephine's youthful heterosexuality and her strong woman-identification in "A Woman, Young and Old" (LDM), and the repressive patriarchal circumstances of the equally aggressive but slightly older Cindy Anne in "An Irrevocable Diameter" (LDM) to the strength of her own desire to grow up fast—very fast. "That's exactly it," she says, "You know—I was the youngest, and I wanted to be grown."
Though as a little girl she liked to play with boys, and later was "boy-crazy," Grace always had girlfriends who were important to her. "I always had a best friend. Always. My girlfriend Evvie, who lived right across the street, she was very important to me. My friend Bea, and my friend Barbara--Oh yes, I always had girlfriends... Well, who do you talk to about the boys if you don't hang onto your female friends?" she says with a laugh. "I had very dear friends, very dear friends." Referring to "Ruthy and Edie" (LSD), which, along with at least a dozen more stories, features women's friendship, she says again that several of her stories are autobiographical "to some extent," and suggests that they be considered resources for study of her lifework: "You can go to those, you can go to those stories" for information about their author.

Though she, like her characters, was surrounded by women and girls while she was growing up, Grace Paley preferred her father to her mother. A daddy's girl in the classic tradition, she was one whose family situation provided both the patriarchal structure which encouraged that identification, and a womanly substructure that supported her and provided her with female models who serve her well as she dismantles the male-centered form in her fiction. "In the family it was always said that I was like him, that I was very like him. And it was sort of pushed on me in that way. People do that; they push it on kids. They
say, 'Oh, you're just like your father.' And that's what they said to me....you see, he had a sense of humor, and I was considered funny. I was a funny one." Like her strongly autobiographical character Faith, another recovering daddy's girl in "Dreamer in a Dead Language," she was "a constant entertainment to us. She could take jokes right out of the air....She had us in stitches.... (LSD, 18)

Her mother, Grace suggests, resented the identification of her daughter with her husband. No one ever said that she was like her mother or grandmother; "I wish I could have been like my grandmother; I still wish I could be like my grandmother was. She was very dignified, she was very smart. I loved her very much....She loved all of us, and as the youngest, I was cherished."

Like most daddy's girls, Grace Goodside preferred her father for the traditional complex of reasons as well as the specific circumstances and dynamics of her family. Isaac was the more apparently intellectual of the two parents, better educated and possessed of more personal power than his wife, both at home and in the world beyond the family. True, his wife and sister had always done productive work in and out of their home; Manya had been an independent worker in the early years, his co-worker in the development of his medical practice, and certainly the

4. See Arcana, Our Mothers' Daughters, chapter five, for discussion.
director of that large family household in the Bronx. Mira was a charter member of the ILGWU, working in the shops and at home for years. But Dr. Goodside, possessed of a title and a reputation, was obviously the source of their material comfort as well as their community standing. His life as a man was more interesting, more exciting than Manya's life as mother and wife. Moreover, all the women in the house deferred to him, loving him to a fault. His youngest child learned and understood quickly, as all children do, the relative importance and status of women and men in society, and she saw that pattern played out with emphasis in her home.

Grace Paley's stories, particularly when read in the order she designed for her three collections, display a growing understanding of her relationship with her mother. Manya's long illness through the late nineteen-thirties, and her death when her younger daughter was not yet twenty-five, made it impossible for them to work through all their complicated feelings. But from 1975, when Grace first published "Mom," to the present, the figure of the mother and mother/daughter relationships in her writing—especially when contrasted with her presentation of the father and father/daughter relationships—exhibit a definite pattern of change, reflecting her developing feminist consciousness. In the mid-seventies in "Mom" (85), she attacked what she recognized as "the mocking campaign" against mothers by male
doctors and fiction writers, and gradually made her mother­wives noticeably stronger and more seriously critical of (even well­loved) men.

In the third story collection, published in 1985, the father­husband figure has been rendered far less sympathetically, especially in relation to his wife and daughter, than he had ever been in Grace Paley's stories before. In "Dreamer in a Dead Language," Faith's father is associated with both her ex­husband, the irresponsible philanderer Ricardo, and her current lover, Philip, who is noticeably lacking in sensitivity. Mr. Darwin, still funny and smart, now a serious poet, has become arrogant, egotistical, tired of his wife, and utterly unable--as well as unwilling--to understand and respond to his daughter as the person she is. In "In the Garden," the father of the two kidnapped girls has made their return impossible by his arrogant response to kidnappers' demands. In "Lavinia: An Old Story," both Robert and Mr. Grimble are implicated as instrumental in their wives' failures to do good work in the world. In "Friends," Selena's husband has dumped her for a younger woman, women's desire for and interest in men are defined--albeit jokingly--as symptoms of a disease, and women's longstanding friendships are ironically described as "at least" as important as their marriages to men. In "Anxiety," a young father is unable to see that his ego is more important to him than his little daughter's pleasure;
he hurts her because his pride is wounded by her innocent silliness. In the strongly autobiographical "Mother," the author has created a portrait of her own parents' marriage, and for the first time Manya's disappointment, her losses and her worries, are definitively fictionalized; both Grace and her father (who "appear" as the I-narrator and the husband) are sources of anxiety and sorrow for the mother in this story.

Not only are these men of the third story collection presented with less sympathy than their predecessors, but their wives and daughters--and their lovers--are less willing to put up with their failings and flaws than the first collection's Ginny, Anna, Rosie Lieber, Marvine, Kitty, and Faith in her younger days. The cynical skepticism of Dolly Raftery, Alexandra, and Mrs. Luddy in the second collection has developed into the repeated disappointments and acknowledged anger in Faith and her friends and neighbors. It is interesting to speculate about how these later stories developed over their writing time, in terms of the events of their author's family life (i.e. her father's death, her own divorce), political developments in the women's movement--and even whether Grace deliberately waited to make them public.

Her own parents were, of course, not the only models available for her scrutiny as Grace grew up. Their friends, immigrant couples in their Jewish Bronx neighborhood--no
longer "socialist" but certainly "social democrats"—were almost always egalitarian in their ideas, but rarely in their daily lives. Grace grew up thinking "that...the excitement was with the men....with the boys in the street and with the men in their talk, men's talk." Considering the differences, she says that the men would play pinochle and the women would sit around the table and talk. She ultimately preferred to listen to the women talk, but the men were very alluring; she found them "mysterious." The women would talk about what seemed to the listening girl to be "the real things" of their lives; the men would not. "Sometimes the men would talk politics, and occasionally they would quarrel. But the women's talk was about what actually happened in life."

The male mystique continued to fascinate her for many years, and gave rise to the first two of her extraordinarily realistic male narrators, Frederick P. Sims in "The Contest" and Charles C. Charley in "An Irrevocable Diameter" (both LDM). But almost all of her stories, from the first ones published in the mid-fifties to those most recently published in the eighties, are devoted to a revelation of the lives of women and children. Her changed attitude toward the subject of those stories, which she used to sometimes self-consciously call "this crap," is plainly inscribed at the end of Later the Same Day in "Listening" (202-3), where we find Jack pleading with Faith to tell him
her stories of women--after he has told his own "woman stories" at the beginning of the book. But Faith--unlike her author--won't tell. Faith retaliates for more women writers and readers than Grace Paley alone when she leaves Jack--even temporarily--alone in the world of men and men's voices.

With the exception of her relatively brief sojourns in army camps with her first husband, the world of women's voices has always been Grace Paley's environment. Beyond the immediate household, Mrs. Goodside had many women friends, many people around her all the time. "Lots of people came up to the house to see my mother," Grace says. "Lots of women." She says that they were "half-relatives; everybody around was related and sort of related and nearly related. And you have to realize that [any] person might turn out to be somebody who was from their village in Russia who might even be family. It's not the same thing as now," when we make definite distinctions between family and non-family on the basis of blood relationship. "There were always women around who I called my aunt this, my aunt that."

This familial warmth might seem to be at odds with the "puritanism" their children attribute to the elder Goodsides, but the general atmosphere in their home was hardly repressive. Dr. Goodside would often say "goddamnit!" and then Manya would say, 'Ah, Zenia!' using
his family name to remonstrate with him at his outbursts. "He thought he was very risqué, saying that, and he would tell a terrible joke every now and then which was as mild as soap, but he didn't think so." Mindful of the many contradictions of family life, Grace wishes to have it understood that her father respected her mother: "He never didn't think well of her. They would yell and scream, but he always thought well of her. They would holler and holler and holler (and to this day I can't stand anyone hollering)." And they "weren't terrible about lying. Mostly it was, 'Oh, don't tell the real truth, don't tell how it really is because you'll hurt the person's feelings.'...It wasn't to the extent of harm, or anything like that." She laughs and says, "After all...you could [operate] like [some people], who tell the truth out of sheer malice....so it goes both ways."

All the adults in the family wanted the children to hear and understand what they were saying. They didn't use their other languages for secrets, to shut out the children from adult conversation, as parents in so many immigrant families have done. And Grace has remained fluent enough in Russian to speak to and understand her colleagues when she traveled to the World Peace Conference in Moscow in 1973. "They never did much of that 'not in front of the kinder' stuff. They wanted me to learn, and to know their other languages." There was always the very strong desire that
the children should be knowledgeable, as well as educated. They should be smart, and they should be competent; they should make a living and succeed in America.

When Grace was seven years old, Jeanne married Sam Tenenbaum, a psychologist, and he took the child for testing. She was "very bright" and scored "very high" on tests at CCNY. The specific events and feelings of that experience may no longer be present to Grace Paley, but the fact of it—and what it meant to those who fostered her development, is clearly delineated in the pride of Zagrowsky the pharmacist.

...he was just five, he can already read a whole book by himself....My other ones...were also very smart, but they don't hold a candle to this character. Soon as I get a chance, I'm gonna bring him to the city to Hunter for gifted children; he should get a test. (LSD, 152)

As if she'd been part of that earlier family reading circle, Grace was a voracious reader from the age of three, when Jeanne taught her to read, and encouraged her to write as well. Jeanne still hasn't forgotten her little sister sounding out the word "ssss uh nnn, and when I said, 'Faster, faster, say it faster,' she got the word sun, and from there, she learned to read." And her little sister wrote that encouragement into a story about mothering: "The sister-mother is the one who is always encouraging. You can
do this, you can get an A, you can dance, you can eat squash without vomiting, you can write a poem" ("Mom," 86).

Grace spent a lot of time at the library when she was still quite small, and remembers reading The Secret Garden, and two books called Nobody's Boy and Nobody's Girl. She wrote poetry as a child, a small book of which Jeanne Tenenbaum has kept all these years. In fact, with the exception of one or two experiments which have survived only in her memory, Grace Paley wrote only poetry until she was over thirty—though she didn't publish a poetry collection until the fall of 1985 (Leaning Forward).

"But the [childhood] poems, they were really nothing. Really nothing. Your average kid now could write rings around 'em." Whether these juvenilia are prizewinners or not, the point is that we have them because Grace Paley's childhood writings were valued, praised, and encouraged by her family. "They were a typical Jewish

5. "The first story I wrote was a very tiny story about a boy who had to stop taking piano lessons with his teacher....Then I wrote one more story...again with a kid in it, about a Spanish superintendent's kid and the other kids on the block—written around the period of big garbage cans and coal heat. A kid by accident rolled a can off and killed somebody, and they were looking for him. It was very simple. Neither of the[se stories] was too successful." (Perry, 42)

6. In these poems, written when she was eight and ten years old, she had already begun to work on the reproduction of conversational speech and dialect, and had embraced some of her major themes (family, politics, and social issues).
family; they were very verbal; they expected me to be very verbal. I talked a lot; they liked it." They might have occasionally made her be quiet, she recalls, but they liked it when she wasn't.

Schooling, however, was different from learning, and Grace Goodside's report cards would no doubt demonstrate the distinction. "Well, I think I liked \textit{[school]} when I was small. But you know, I don't seem to remember a hell of a lot. I remember being very good at school, very smart, you know, and liking \textit{that}. And I remember also \textbf{not} liking school, so that when my glasses broke I'd be happy to say, 'Oh, I can't go, my glasses are broken.'" The family, delighted with their smart little baby--and with her high test scores--simply assumed that she would always get the grades to match those scores. But they didn't apply any pressure she could feel for several years more.
Encouraged to grow and develop in every direction, young Grace Goodside did just that. She wrote, she read, she talked and listened. As she grew into adolescence, her political views became more radical than those of her parents, and her social life provoked family antipathies unknown in the lives of Jeanne and Victor. Her mother was worried and her father was angry; both were disappointed. A young poet who was often in love but rarely in school, a blooming anarchist and a confirmed romantic, Grace was a constant frustration to her surprised and anxious parents.

In the summer of 1933, the whole family was up on Long Pond in Mahopec, New York, where they had purchased a vacation home. Dr. Goodside had become president of the community organization there, and remained president until he died, many years later. The family was welcomed and appreciated at Long Pond, and its youngest member made friends and influenced people. But Grace was getting "very wild," Jeanne remembers. Manya was unable to control her, and asked Jeanne to find something to interest the child. So that summer Grace became the editor of a newspaper her
Sister started in the vacation community, "and she ran that paper for a number of years, and was damn good at it."

Success as a journalist did not, however, solve the problem. That eleventh summer, when she entered adolescence, she "immediately went into conflict with [her] family, which was—remember—very puritanical, and I mean very puritanical." Those first years of her adolescent rebellion—eleven through thirteen—strained her relationship with her mother and unfortunately coincided with the discovery of Manya Goodside's breast cancer, the beginning of her long illness. "Her illness didn't change anything for me," Grace says, speaking of her youthful refusal to accept the meaning of her mother's disease. "Being in love with a boy changed everything more for me than my mother's illness." Her mother's hospitalization and intermittent semi-invalid status did not result in the loss of a strong maternal presence from the girl's life, as it might have in a nuclear family. "You know, there were other people around all the time, my aunt, my grandmother, my sister, my father; I was very dear to my father."

By the time she was thirteen her mother was discovered to be seriously ill, and most of the family's attention focused on that illness. For years, Manya had done her husband's x-rays, taking the pictures and developing them. In 1935 she discovered a small lump on her breast; Isaac examined it, and rushed her to the hospital.
Her breast was removed that day, and she was told that if she lived for five years she would probably be cured. In the period between that operation and the recurrence of malignancy, Mrs. Goodside suffered from pain and lessening mobility in her arm, and was hospitalized on several occasions. "I didn't want to know about her illness. I hid it from myself." But the family hid it too: they didn't talk about it with Grace; no one actually told her what was happening, so she found it relatively easy to practice her childish denial, as she has described in her fiction:

One evening I hear the people in the dining room say that my mother is going to die. I remain in the coat closet, listening......[after some debate] I am not told. Thereafter I devote myself to not having received that knowledge. ("Mom," 86)

Grace remembers her obstinate autonomy. "And whatever I wanted to do, I would do. I was very headstrong. No matter what they would say--if they would say, Oh, you're killing Mama, I would do it anyway." Even in her early teens--at 12, 13, and 14--she stayed out late at night and ignored her schoolwork, so that she got poor marks. Though hospitalized occasionally over the years, Manya Goodside was home much of the time during her illness, aware of--and increasingly frustrated by--her adolescent daughter's behavior. She was convalescent and relatively active, but never completely healthy again before her death in 1944. The family's threats were false as well as cruel: her
younger daughter's wildness did not kill Manya Goodside; she died of cancer. But she worried because she knew she wasn't strong enough--nor would she live long enough--to take care of Grace. Her fictional counterpart in "Mother" says: "You never finish your lunch. You run around senselessly. What will become of you?" (LSD, 111-12)

When Grace was considered a real problem in the family, her memory is that she was sent to her brother Victor and his wife, who lived in upstate New York, where he had begun his own medical practice. She can't remember what the exact infractions were that merited her exile, but thinks that when she "just got to be too much" for her mother, she would be sent up to stay with them. These "banishments," however, were actually never more than a week or two, and seem actually to have often coincided with school holidays.

Grace Goodside was not regarded as a delinquent, nor was she punished with anger or violence. Hurt, puzzled, confused and frustrated as her parents must have been, they never abused her. "When something really bad happened, my father would grab me by the arm and say, 'What's going on here? What is this?'" No one ever struck her. Indeed, they were a physically affectionate family--"very huggy"--"to the extent that I was brought up to kiss everybody goodnight around the table before I would go to sleep, kiss the company and whoever was there." This minor league
family institution held intact for adult children, and appears in the fiction with the addition of irony; in "Faith in the Afternoon," "Faith....kissed Mrs. Hegel-Shtein, because they had been brought up that way, not to hurt anyone's feelings, particularly if they loathed them, and they were much older" (ECLM, 45).

Despite all those kisses--and a highly cultured family circle--there was no talk about sex and bodies, not even physiology. The Goodsides, who fought and argued and wrangled over international, domestic, and personal politics, who were themselves medically knowledgeable, were just as reluctant to discuss sex and reproduction as most parents of their generation and culture. "The Russian-born mother has said on several occasions that there are no such words in Russian" ("Mom," 86). That reticence is probably the reason Mrs. Goodside never actually voiced her fears and concerns--and they were strong--about Grace's developing sexuality. Though she shared her anxiety with her elder daughter, who was by then married and in her twenties ("What's going to happen to Gracie? All she does is like the boys!") , she never joined the majority of girls' mothers in their overt warnings, never told Grace to beware of boys because they only want one thing.

"In that kind of puritan socialist atmosphere my mother would never say such a thing. Men were supposed to be comrades, so she would not speak of them that way."
Nevertheless, she made herself clear, "and I understood. My mother didn't like me to play with boys, she didn't like me to go see boys, she didn't even want me to go to bar mitzvahs....I was in real conflict with her." Throughout her teen years, she knew--as daughters do--that her mother didn't want her to run around with boys because it was dangerous, and she knew that pregnancy was the danger. The message was not that boys were bad by definition, but that association with them was dangerous for a young girl.

Though she probably saw more of her father than most children, since he worked at home, she didn't actually spend much time with him, but sometimes would accompany Dr. Goodside on his rounds. "He'd say, 'Get in the car. Come on in the car with me.'" And she would go with him to pay a house call, and sit in the car and wait until he was done. "Then we would have these conversations. Who remembers what we talked about? We talked about anything. Babble, babble, babble. He was a very smart guy, a very intelligent guy. It was no problem for me to see my father. I saw him all the time. My friends' fathers went away in the morning and they came home for supper. But when I came home for lunch from school, there he would be."

And of course, "I didn't expect [to spend more time with him]. It never occurred to me. My father didn't come to my high school graduation. It was nothing to me. I never thought to complain about it. It didn't bother me."
(It bothered my sister, though.) It seemed to me he was very very busy. I mean he had patients day and night. And it seemed to me the graduation was pretty boring. I never was bothered by stuff like that."

Some fathers try to encourage their daughters to be closer to their mothers, to treat their mothers better. Many, as baffled as their wives by the adolescent behavior of formerly adorable daughters, try to negotiate treaties between the two, acting as go-betweens and trying to recreate or rearrange the family's dynamics.¹ "My father was so busy he would never even notice. He wouldn't even be there. Besides, I was mad at my father too in my teenage years. I was angry at him too. He'd yell at me for his own sake, not just about my mother."

He disapproved, for instance, of her attitude about school, and was certainly disturbed by the change in her academic behavior and accomplishment. She had breezed through the lower grades with no trouble, she recalls. "I don't seem to have had to do a minute of work until later on. And the minute that I had to do work, I got into trouble....[because] I thought if I had to do any work [that meant] I was stupid. I never had to do anything before. So between the pressure to do well and the idea that to do a lot of work would show me at my stupidest," she began to

¹. See Arcana, Our Mothers' Daughters, chapter five.
feel "bad" about herself by the middle of junior high school.

This situation was further aggravated in senior high. "In high school all that really interested me was literature and love....I started to work less and less and less in everything except English. I always did very well in English because of course I always read a lot. I never didn't read. And I loved writing....essay questions on an exam would make me very happy. But other than that, I began to go downhill. And I speedily went downhill....I really did poorly in most subjects. I studied very little and I was very lazy. I thought about boys constantly and I was mostly in love."

Her non-scholastic attitude notwithstanding, in high school Grace was "serious, very serious" about her writing. Even as a boy-crazy teenager, she kept reading and writing: she wrote love poems. If she did think about what she would be when she grew up, "I thought I was a writer." Her sister's understanding of the situation is that, "Like grade school, in high school she never had to work; she was very popular. She had a lot of boys hanging around her. She was very pretty; slim, very pretty." Grace's own memory of high school is somewhat different. Her "bad" feelings continued to develop out of that private belief that she wasn't as smart as everyone thought after all, and were exacerbated by the gulf between her intense interests and the standard
academic curriculum and practice. Perhaps when Grace remembers herself as "boy-crazy," she is merely accepting that popular description of the discouragement of intellectual growth, which often creates in adolescent girls a dammed-up emotional pool, into which their disappointment flows in the wake of hormonal chaos.

Grace Paley is not the first artist to have suffered through the approved schedule of intellectual and aesthetic progress that is formal schooling; but as a girl and woman, she is one of those who accepted full responsibility for her "failure." "Something happened to me at school. After junior high I just sort of went inside myself. I became desperately unhappy." This was "even earlier" than ninth grade. "I was very unhappy. I finished high school when I was fifteen and a half. I did very badly at school. And I never talked [in class]. I mean, I never talked. I didn't write poems in school. I didn't contribute to any school magazine or paper until later, when I went to NYU for a year. And I was married already then. I was married, but I don't think I was more than twenty-one."

Though the standard curriculum and classroom discussions couldn't capture that young mind, it did not lie fallow. Through other students and extra-curricular activities, Grace became aware of and knowledgeable about the Spanish Civil War, as well as the Italian bombing of Ethiopia, which remains a strong memory in her mind even
now. She was in the student union in high school and "we talked about it, we discussed it, we talked about what it meant. After all, my family always talked politics. But these particular things were things that were happening. And they were part of what was active among young people in our lives." Her sources of information and opinion broadened, going beyond the family circle. This was, she felt, quite different from her parents and their friends sitting around the table and talking about the czar and the Russian revolution. Her political perspective, which had been shaped by their memories and commentary over the years, began to diverge from the now relatively comfortable liberalism of that dining room table, and moved left, criticizing the United States government and advocating more action for social change than her parents had taken in decades.

She feels that she was "just normally political, no big deal....In New York at that time, if you lived in that kind of neighborhood, it was normal to go to student union meetings and things like that; it was no big deal." (Endor/Thiers, 5) Her sister Jeanne recalls the impact of this "normal" involvement; Grace "and my father and mother were on two sides of the fence. My parents were social democrats; she was very much to the left of them. And they used to have terrible fights, political arguments. And she was very active politically. There was always literature
about the left side—all this material piled high in her room—and my mother would go crazy. Because she, my mother, was on the right of the left, you see. She wasn't right, but she was on the right side of the left." These arguments figure prominently in Grace's third story collection, as in this excerpt from "Mother."

I had just issued a political manifesto attacking the family's position on the Soviet Union. She said, Go to sleep for godsakes, you damn fool, you and your Communist ideas. We saw them already, Papa and me, in 1905. We guessed it all. (LSD, 111-12)

"Gracie gave them trouble," Jeanne assumes, "because she was so different from me....They didn't know what to think of her. But she went along in her own way. Nothing stopped her. They didn't try to punish her or keep her in." They fought and argued constantly, but "it didn't do [my parents] any good. She did exactly what she wanted." It's certainly true that young Grace did many other things that bothered her parents—there was all that running around with boys, for instance, and the fact that her room was always a mess—but Jeanne recalls that they were particularly upset about the radicalism of her thinking and allegiance, and the knowledge that she was politically active, but never told them what was happening, where she went, or what she did.

"You brought her up like that and now you're surprised," says one mother to another in the story "Friends" (LSD, 121). Like Richard and Tonto (LDM, ECLM,
LSD), and Rachel Larsen (LSD), children of radical and progressive parents often challenge those parents to live up to their ideals—as well as to accept and support the children's idealism. The disappointment and disillusionment of our children are powerful consciousness raisers, as Faith explains after Richard yells the following condemnation in "Faith in a Tree"—

I hate you. I hate your stupid friends. Why didn't they just stand up to that stupid cop and say fuck you. They should of just stood up and hit him. (ECLM, 99)

--and then takes action himself, as a graffiti sloganeer.

His mother says "that is exactly when events turned me around, changing my hairdo, my job uptown, my style of living and telling....I thought more and more and every day about the world." (ECLM, 99-100)

Grace Goodside's parents, whose political theory rarely translated into overt action in this country, may have felt vaguely guilty in the face of her behavior at the same time that they were outraged. Though they never moved far to the right, they did gratefully accept the United States government—city, state, and federal—finding in this nation answers and solutions to the questions and problems they had faced in the old country. Members of the generation that revered FDR and LaGuardia, they couldn't help but make a favorable comparison between even the grimmest of New York streets and the bloody roads through
They risked their lives for, couldn't share their gratitude.

She was leaning against their bedroom wall. She was about fourteen. Fifteen? A lot you care, she said. A giant war is coming out of Germany and all you say is Russia. Bad old Russia. I'm the one that's gonna get killed. You? he answered. Ha ha! A little girl sitting in safe America is going to be killed. Ha ha! (LSD, 186)

Grace Paley's political heritage, as illustrated here in "The Expensive Moment," was not just familial, and the history she grew up into was local as well as global. The Depression had begun just when she was old enough to notice class and money distinctions. Though she never thought of her family as "rich" when she was a child, she "knew that [they] had comforts. We had a house. In a poor neighborhood, we had a house--a big house. No one talked about money in the family; it wasn't something you talked about. But I lived in a neighborhood where a majority of the people were suffering." The neighborhood was "hit very hard by the Depression. Into a neighborhood that had at one time been lower middle class, a working class neighborhood--you know, mostly garment workers, people like that--into that neighborhood came this great unemployment; a tremendous number were unemployed, and a lot of people were already on relief. They were on relief for ten years in some cases, and they suffered terribly from that time."
"I was very aware of that, and very aware of myself as a privileged person. Yes, I...felt very privileged; a lot of my friends were from families that" suffered in ways the Goodsides never did. "And I would take these girls with me for rides in the car or out to Pelham Bay or City Island or things like that." Unwilling to play the role of Lady Bountiful even in her childhood, Grace "didn't feel like I was doing them favors, but I did know that their families were in pretty bad straits." This comment about "favors" is spoken out of the concern that never disappears from the mind of a woman of conscience who has also been a woman of privilege. She wants to be understood as having seen and felt her community's need and loss, having understood that need and loss when she was quite young.

"By the time I was eight or nine years old the Depression was very deep. People were being thrown out of apartments all the time. I saw whole households out in the streets under blankets....Everyday I saw this, and I felt it strongly, very strongly. I felt lucky. Very sorry for everybody else and very lucky myself. I was conscious of it and even a little embarrassed....I had my own room, which clearly was incredible to the other kids. My family didn't suffer at all"! Her fortunate position--economic and familial--is shared by Faith in the story collections, and, as in this excerpt from "The Immigrant Story," she sometimes
tackles a little heat during spasms of resentment or envy from her friends.

One Hundred and Seventy-Second Street was a pile of shit....Everyone was on relief except you. Thirty people had t.b. Citizens and non-citizens alike starving until the war. Thank God capitalism has a war it can pull out of the old feed bag every now and then or we'd all be dead. (ECLM, 173)

Grace's best friend lived with her mother, father and brother "in...a tiny, tiny apartment. I can still see it quite clearly." And the reason it's so clear, she says sarcastically, is that "I lived in an apartment just like it with my kids on 15th Street when I was in my period of downward mobility. You know, somebody slept in the dining room....nobody had room of any kind at that time. And my friend's father was out of work; everyone was out of work. It came to a point where half the people I knew were on welfare." When she went to visit her friend, there was a special signal, a secret way she would ring the bell so they would know she wasn't the social worker or someone else who was going to give them grief. "By the time I was in my teens, the parents of most of my best friends--with the exception of my friend Evvie, whose father had a hardware store, a paint store--were in really very very bad shape."

Grace talks about the fact that the Depression took the heart out of people, people who had struggled, often desperately, and worked through their whole lives. "There was the sense that they had worked very hard, you know? It
was that whole immigrant generation. My parents were of that generation." They worked steadily and constantly, and they willingly took the burden of that work onto themselves—even those with luck, who rose above their earlier poverty and pain.

Grace describes her father's day, in the years of his success: "He would have a small breakfast. Then he would see patients. Then he would have his main meal at mid-day. Then he would see more patients. Then in the evening he would drive all over the Bronx to see other patients, people who had not come to the office in his home. He would often have office hours again, after he returned. He would have his supper late, and then later on in the evening he would look over x-rays. And that was his life. That was what he did every day. My father worked harder than any human being I've ever seen. He was burdened, and he was determined to support his life." The economic and social reality at the base of Dr. Goodside's sense of responsibility is clearly defined in "The Burdened Man": "The man has the burden of the money. It's needed day after day. More and more of it. For ordinary things and for life" (ECLM, 109).

Her mother worked "just as hard" as her father, tending that big house with its twelve rooms and suite of offices, always filled with people. In "Mom," Grace explained the dynamics of the Goodsides' partnership.
"Together with the aunts and grandmother she worked to make my father strong enough and educated enough so he could finally earn enough to take care of us all. She was successful" (86). Manya Goodside "enabled him to do all of this," Grace knows, and when she was dying, when they were both fifty-nine years old, he had the first of several serious heart attacks. Despite family opposition, when his wife died he immediately sold his twenty-five year practice and retired from medicine.

Grace recalls a man who, before he died at the age of eighty, told her that when he was a young man, and contracted pneumonia, Isaac Goodside "went and picked him up and brought him home, and my father and mother, together in their house, nursed him and took care of him until he was well. He had been far from home--another Russian immigrant. Maybe he was from their village. Maybe he just knew someone who knew someone who was their cousin." We needn't romanticize urban immigrant culture in the early twentieth century in the United States to understand that generosity, which differs from the philanthropy born of noblesse oblige. No matter how much money or status Isaac Goodside attained for his family, his younger daughter has explained, "'really he was just a ghetto Jew'....Basically he was...a working-class man and he really never got over...[his] deference to Anglo-Saxonism. He worried a lot whether we would make fools of ourselves [among the gentiles]" (Perry, 42).
Jeanne too describes their parents' kindness; virtually institutionalized within the family, it was simply what was done, what was right. "My mother was a very principled woman, very principled. During the summertime when they...used to go out to Belmar for the season, they'd rent a house with a friend, a Dr. Katz. And my mother would always bring with her two children from an orphanage. And they would spend time with us there, with Gracie, with me, and with the other people who had children about our own age....that was my mother's choice."

This woman whose mothering extended to motherless children worried more and oftener about her youngest child than she did about her own dying. Manya got weaker and sicker as Grace grew older and—in her mother's eyes—wilder and more reckless as well. Like Gittel Darwin in "Faith in the Afternoon," she must have asked, "When will you be a person?" (ECLM, 33). She couldn't control her daughter, and she couldn't understand her either.

Jeanne Tenenbaum, whose love for her sister is palpable when she speaks of her, says that though Grace gave the family a great deal of pleasure when she was a child—and of course has been a source of great satisfaction and enjoyment for many years—"she's caused us a lot of pain too. Just because she's wonderful, don't think she hasn't." When Grace went to college, right after high school, Jeanne was working as a dean in the city high schools, "sitting on
one side of the desk and talking to parents who sat on the other side being miserable about their children." Mrs. Goodside had been sick for a few years by then, so when she got a letter from Hunter College saying that they wanted her to come in for a meeting with her daughter's counselor, she couldn't go. Dr. Goodside couldn't go either, so Jeanne "was elected. I went, and there I sat on the other side of the desk. And I discovered that my little sister had not been going to school, had been cutting classes."

She would intend to go to class, Grace explains, would even want to go to class. But on the way into the building, going up the stairs, she'd hear something—maybe a scrap of conversation, a story being told—that would catch her mind and take her away, right back down the stairs and out of the building. She left school that same year, shocking her family. Victor and Jeanne had attained the education and professional careers their parents' struggle had paid for: they were a doctor and a teacher; they played the piano and they played tennis. But Grace, the golden child of their parents' later years, born of their comfort and success, had failed. Dr. Goodside refused to allow her to drop out completely. He argued for her to study business—a stenographic and typing course—so that she would have some way to earn a living. Jeanne explains that Grace finally agreed to that, and she did get work "some
place, I don't even remember the name....but of course her heart wasn't in it."

Grace knew that her parents were "very disappointed" and that they "really felt bad," which made her feel pretty terrible herself. "They had wanted me to do everything," she says—to go to college, be a teacher, be a social worker—change the world. But at the same time that there was much encouragement of her intellectual and social endeavors, there was also disapproval of her politics, horror at her "wildness," and fear for the results of both of these. And there was an overriding concern about marriage. Grace felt that the "whole atmosphere in the house was that if you didn't get married you were in trouble." Of course they had expected their bright, pretty, funny, strong and determined child with her high test scores to rise to the top in the new world of America—sweet cream that they knew she was—and achieve wonders. But it never entered their minds that she wouldn't also be a wife and mother.

After all, her aunt Mira was right there in the house, a living example of what happened if a girl did not marry: bitterness, resentment, the waste of a woman's vitality. "She was a very unhappy woman, a profoundly unhappy woman. [Mira was also] very beautiful, extremely beautiful....oh, there were many men who wanted to marry her. But," Grace eventually understood, "the only man she
wanted to marry was my father." This somewhat extraordinary complication, apparently recognized by the adults of the family, did not prevent Mira from being a bad example for her young niece, who remembered and recorded her aunt's fate in her stories. "[She was] the one who was mocked for not having married, whose beauty, as far as the family was concerned, was useless, because no husband ever used it" ("Mom," 86).

The family's attitude toward Grace began to change when she did poorly in high school, and hardened into an acceptance of disappointment when she left college. With no forethought to match our hindsight, they decided that she was, as she puts it, "a dud." They'd thought she was a brilliant star; they'd thought she'd make her mark in the world—but when she married before the age of twenty, they decided she would be "just a mother," and they arranged their hopes and expectations accordingly. But her grandmother's thwarted ambition and disappointment in marriage, her aunt's ironic acceptance of life on the sidelines, and her mother's struggle toward integrity had not been lost on young Grace Goodside; they percolated slowly through her consciousness, and they rise in her stories. One of the most poignant examples is "Lavinia, An Old Story," which the writer describes as being rooted in
the lives of her grandmother, a friend, and herself.

Now see Lavinia going about improving the foolish, singing in the choir, mending the lame. Now see her...that gal apt to be a lady preacher, a nurse, something great and have a name. Don't know what you see...but I got in mind to be astonished. [But then, when her mother realizes that the young woman has become "just a mother," and has apparently failed--like her mother before her--to fulfill her promise] I let out a curse....I cry out loud...Damn you, Lavinia--for my heart is busted in a minute--damn you, Lavinia, ain't nothing gonna come of you neither. (LSD, 67-8)

Grace thinks that despite this deep disappointment, her mother was enormously relieved to have her baby marry so young, because then, as she slowly and painfully died, she wouldn't have to worry about her. That maternal anxiety is recorded in "In This Country": "One reason I don't close my eyes at night is I think about you. You know it. What will be?" (LSD, 108). The belief that Grace would be taken care of by her husband led to Manya Goodside's acceptance of her daughter's leaving school and marrying--an attitude which was shared by Isaac, their daughter speculates. In fact, though her "wildness"--both political and social--was indeed modified by the marriage and its ensuing motherhood, the Goodsides' relief is ironic in terms of Grace's husband's World War II duty in the South Pacific, and the young couple's rocky financial condition throughout the decade following the war.

2. Mrs. Pinckney, who worked for Grace and her sister in the early fifties.
But Jess Paley's appearance on the scene offered no immediate foreshadowing of those difficulties. Like reading and politics, music was a central feature of life in the Goodside household, and when Grace Goodside married Jess Paley, he brought another passionately musical sensibility into the family. "I met him because we had a very big record collection," Grace says. Her stories, as in these brief segments of "Faith in a Tree," are filled with references to specific works, musical terminology, musical metaphors and music lovers like Jess.

...two men strolled past us, leaning toward one another. They were...music lovers inclining toward their transistor, which was playing the "Chromatic Fantasy." They paid no attention to us because of their relation to this great music...."do you hear what I hear?" "Damnit yes, the over-romanticizing and the under-Baching. I can't believe it."...[One of them] puts his transistor into the hollow of an English elm, takes a tattered score of The Messiah out of his rucksack, and writes a short Elizabethan melody in among the long chorus holds...(ECLM, 88-9, 92-3)

Many of her friends were guests at the every-other-Friday night musicales held at the Goodsides' in the thirties; a good number of the listeners on any given Friday night were teenagers. "Since I was very wild and they were very worried, they didn't want me running around," so her parents arranged for Grace to host their musical evenings. Her father helped her plan and arrange the first program, but after that she would do it herself; the selections were always classical music.
"So one day, in late 1939 or 1940, a couple of guys came to the house and they rang the bell and said, 'Is this the place where they play music?'" She told them they had the right house but the wrong night--it was Thursday and Dr. Goodside was playing pinochle downstairs. But these fellows pointed out that even though it was Thursday, they were standing there on the doorstep and besides, it was raining, and so couldn't they, maybe...? Grace conferred with her father, who said she could let them in to listen to music while the family went upstairs and had tea. "So they came in, the boys, and they sat around and they listened to music, and that's how I got to know Jess."

Jess Paley, who is a few years older than Grace, says he was "enthralled with" Dr. Goodside, though he "never had much sense of" her mother. But Manya Goodside knew who he was. She told her daughter, "He's a very nice boy. He doesn't say hello and he doesn't say goodbye, but he knows the way to the icebox." His own parents were less accepting of the relationship; the Paleys may have considered Grace--and her family--not quite up to the mark. "They were very difficult people," says Grace, but then, immediately realizing that she has uttered a criticism, adds, "but not really any more difficult than anybody else. I did get close to them very quickly." During that first year, when Grace was turning eighteen, the young couple saw each other steadily, and the Paleys were openly displeased with their
son's choice. But after that, the charm—and the concerted effort—of their future daughter-in-law won them over to acceptance, if not delight, at the union.

The Paleys were Jewish, but they were Latvian, and they spoke German in their home. Grace explains that their sense of social position in the Christian world was very different from the custom of her own family and neighborhood. The disparity between the two families was rooted in the traditional lack of sympathy between German Jews (who had been in the United States since colonial times, and were generally more educated and wealthier) and Russian Jews (usually peasants, less educated, frequently impoverished, who began to arrive in great numbers at the end of the nineteenth century). The Paleys didn't even live in a Jewish neighborhood. Like many German Jews, they had chosen to live among Christians on a street of brownstones in the borough of Manhattan, while the Goodsides, even when they could afford to move, remained in the Bronx, in a plebeian two-story brick house; though it was detached, a single house, it was among others just like it. Grace Goodside "was always surrounded by Jews; very comfortable among Jews, I was."

Nevertheless the Paleys presented an oddly familiar mirror of the Goodsides, with a mother, father, uncle and grandmother in Jess' house as complement to the mother, father, aunt and grandmother in her own. Moreover, the
uncle was a doctor—which may have contributed to Grace's fondness for him—and Jess had an unmarried aunt as well. One striking difference was that in Jess' family, the grandmother was not only important but powerful. Grandma Goodside was not; she was cherished—"we all loved my grandmother, we all adored her, but she was living in my mother and father's house. My father was the one who had the power."

Jess' grandmother was pious, and set the tone in the Paley household. She was, Grace recalls, religious enough to take the subway all the way downtown just to get Kosher chickens. "My own grandmother was, of course, mildly religious, but she was not officious with the family." Jess' mother tried to obey her mother, and struggled to make her family conform to what her own mother wanted. Because of that, she would say to her son, "Do this, Grossmutter wants it." He rebelled, becoming even more irreligious, or anti-religious, than the atheist Dr. Goodside.

Grace now contrasts his situation with her own, explaining that she grew up with no need for such a bitter rebellion because "no one ever tried to make me do anything religious; I loved taking my grandmother to synagogue." Jess was resentful because of being constantly cajoled or urged to accept the forms of orthodoxy; he resisted what he considered hypocrisy. "He was angry because it was forced. He always thought [religious practice] was false because it
was presented as what one does for Grandmother, not as the thing itself." Perhaps in relief as well as appreciation, Jess was at ease with Grace's family, and came to the Goodsides' house often. Jeanne says, "he loved my grandmother, just loved my grandmother," who seemed to return his affection. Dr. Goodside, unlike his mother, had reservations about Jess, as he had had about Sam Tenenbaum, Jeanne's husband. But surely a man whose family of women was a constant source of praise and support might be expected to express something less than wholehearted acceptance of the men who took two daughters out of his house.

Victor Goodside, who sustained no such loss at the addition of his brothers-in-law, liked Jess Paley and says, "He had a peculiar kind of humor which didn't always come out just right, a wry sort of humor, kind of oddball." He recalls that Jess "just objected to the world as it was," which is also a fair description of the world view of the Goodside's own wild girl. "In the army he was court-martialed for writing on the pavement somewhere, 'Beware, this is a salute trap!' They caught him at it. He was a constant objector to the situation as it was, and he always laughed at it." Maybe this "oddball" sense of humor was what made some of the family think Grace's boyfriend very strange, and fear that he wouldn't make a good husband; some thought him a difficult man.
In the years that Grace Goodside and Jess Paley were "going around together," she worked at office jobs, and also tried going to college again. This time she took a class with W.H. Auden, who was spending England's war years at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan. She had been reading his poems, loved them, and was strongly influenced by them. "Of course I was one of about two hundred people in the class, which met in one of these big lecture halls, but I did a very brave thing. He asked, 'Are there any poets? Are there any people here who would like me to see their work?' And I put my hand up. I still can't believe that I put my hand up, since I hadn't spoken a word for three years in high school. So he took [my poems] and then I met him for lunch and we talked."

Auden talked to her about the language she used in her poems, about her ear, and about the voices she heard and spoke in her poetry. He asked if she really "talked like that," or heard other people talk the way she was writing. "I was using words like 'trousers,' which of course I'd never actually say in conversation." Essentially, he urged her to write in her own language, to write what she actually heard and spoke--instead of the language of an upper middle-class Englishman, which was the voice of the poetry she'd been listening to in her head. "I was really writing just like Auden for a few years there. I had all these poems, and most of them were just like his, which is kind of funny."
But I was young." Because he told her the truth and was kind in the telling, he was a good critic and mentor for the young American. "Just to be in the presence of someone who was writing for real was important." Her boyfriend Jess didn't care for poetry, but never discouraged her; he did think of her as a poet. "Now and then he'd like a poem."

During that year Grace sent some poems to the college newspaper, and they were accepted and published, which was "very exciting" for her.

She and Jess married when Grace was nineteen "and a half" years old. Her choice and its emotional outcome provided Grace with the raw material of her craft for "An Interest in Life" when Ginny, whose fictional girlhood smacks of Grace's own youth, explains:

Once I met my husband with his winking good looks, he was my only interest. Wild as I had been with...others, I turned all my wildness over to him and then there was no question in my mind. (LDM, 93)

Her parents made no overt objections to Jess; "they liked him. They thought he was fine. Well, maybe my father didn't like him so much." The Paley family, however, did object to the marriage. Having set aside their earlier aversion to the Goodside connection, they now opposed the timing of the wedding. Jess' parents thought their son was too young to marry, and they knew he would soon have to go into the army. He was their only child, and they were strongly invested in his future. They felt he should go
through the war and come back free to make decisions, free of responsibilities. "For all I know they were right," Grace muses now. But she remembers her own father saying, "When I wanted to get married, I didn't ask my mother if I could"—he thought it was "ridiculous" that Jess' parents should have anything to say about the marriage at all, and said to them, "I'm surprised he even mentioned it to you."

Grace explains that in the Depression nobody got married and then, when the war came, everybody got married; all her friends were suddenly getting married. She attributes their decision to "peer pressure; everybody was graduating. Those who went to college or were finishing high school." Marriage was "the next thing, the next thing to do." His family wanted a synagogue wedding—but her family objected to what they considered the oppressive and unnecessary trappings of organized religion, saying, "For this we came to America?" So not in shul—but with a rabbi—Grace Goodside married Jess Paley on June 20, 1942.
CHAPTER III

War and Marriage

In the same month that he married Grace Goodside in 1942, Jess Paley took a degree in physics from City College, and then joined the Signal Corps. His membership in the corps, though it wasn't "regular army," required schooling at various sites in the United States, and he soon was moved from one training camp to another. His bride traveled with him, writing poetry and working at a variety of clerical and menial jobs. Their marriage, born in World War II and growing into the Korean War of the fifties, was subject to the political and social atmosphere of the post-war and cold war periods; moreover, the definition and structure of "family" was changing for the young couple. Some of their elders grew ill and died, and they became parents themselves. Grace Paley began to develop the sense of herself as a woman in the world which soon informed--indeed suffused--her earliest stories, which were written in the nineteen-fifties.

Grace traveled with Jess from Belmar, New Jersey, where they lived for three months, to a military camp in Aurora, Illinois, near Chicago, which was an arrangement
"sort of related to" the Reserves; the men were studying radar. Then Jess was shipped to Florida for basic training in Miami Beach. There was no camp in the forties resort town, and the men lived in the hotels. They drilled by walking up and down the stairs of the luxury hotels along Collins Avenue; the army had commandeered them all. They would also drill in the streets, in full uniform. Grace remembers that "it was very hot, and you could almost smell the platoon coming."

But though she traveled to Miami Beach with Jess, she couldn't stay with him on a base or in an apartment as she had in the other cities. So she rented an efficiency apartment, and while Jess hated the army, and could hardly enjoy his situation, she recalls, "I had a real good time. There I was, meeting all these people, all these boys--it was really a good time for me." She loved living among "the boys" because, as a young woman in the early years of World War II, she felt that all the excitement, all the action was with them.1 "I adored to listen to men talk during the war. I would hang around PX's and just listen to them talk. What good fortune it [seemed]--there I was, a young girl, surrounded by these young men. I thought it was really great."

1. See her commentary in Gibbons, 231.
That excitement was a mixture of the thrill of the extraordinary political and historical importance of the soldiers' lives, and the physical fact of being a young woman surrounded by young men who were both radically constrained and charged with energy. The experience became a primary source for the story "A Woman Young and Old," one of Grace Paley's first three stories, written in the mid-fifties. It was first published in one of what were then called "men's magazines," which is an intriguing commentary on the problem of this story. Grace chose to make Josephine, who is not quite fourteen, sexually aggressive in her own cause—which is to seduce and marry Corporal Brownstar, her young aunt Lizzy's boyfriend.

Both the mother and grandmother in the story make exceptionally positive statements about women's mutual affection and reliability, and have taught the girls in their care to mistrust the sexual opportunism of men. But these feelings and teachings are undercut by the grandmother's loyalty to a man who "whacked" her daughter "every day of her life" (LDM, 25), and the mother's blind romanticism and willingness to go to bed with the first man who embodies her fantasy—even if he is her younger sister's date for the evening. Nonetheless, the text of the story presents many contradictions and displacements of these negative elements. Like Rosie Lieber, Ginny, and Anna—who all appear in The Little Disturbances of Man with them—
Grandma, Marvine, and Josephine may be fools for men, but they aren't fools.

That is, they fall for the heterosexual romance and erotic excitement that suffuse these "stories of women and men at love," but they already carry, like Grace Paley herself when she wrote these tales, the seeds of a feminist analysis which, sometimes ironically and sometimes angrily, began to define these contradictions differently in the next decade. Grace realizes now that her perspective had shifted, from the years of the experiences themselves, to the years of writing about them. "By the time I was in my thirties, it was different, and I wasn't so interested in hearing men talk—you know, like hearing remarks about Jews, and hearing the way they would talk about women." Not only do the younger women in this story appear to be learning from their elders' mistakes, but "A Woman Young and Old" actually suggests a positive lesbian sensibility at its conclusion, when Josephine, having lost Brawny to a failed Wasserman test and his company's relocation, is "grateful for" the companionship of her baby sister Joanna, who has "moved in with" her since their mother's remarriage. Josephine, like her aunt Lizzy before her, is neither bitter nor resentful, and she understands that her relationship with Brawny represented no more than his "hope for civilian success" (LDM, 40). She is comforted by and satisfied with her sister Joanna: "She is a real cuddly girl."
Josephine, like Cindy Anne in "An Irrevocable Diameter," which was written soon afterwards, is autobiographical in that she embodies Grace's precocious sexual and intellectual exuberance, as well as her experience in army camps. The problem here is that the author has combined the child's excitement with the young woman's experience, and so gives credence to the pornographic image of the young girl as Lolita, powerful in her effect on men, capable of and responsible for defining her own actions. **Nugget** probably took the story for this reason; a superficial reading, disallowing the narrative's contradictions and the characters' ambivalences, offers support for that dangerous and inaccurate definition of young girls. In fact, the magazine changed the title of the story from "A Woman Young and Old" to "Rough Little Customer," which misunderstands Josephine utterly in order to serve the sexual bias of its editors and readers.

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2. Years later, in "The Little Girl," a story with an even more complicated set of ethical problems, Grace created yet another young girl, sexually curious and looking for adventure, who is destroyed by the cultural realities this story basically ignores.

3. That phrase is used in the text in quite another mood than the one suggested by the new title. Marvine uses it to describe her daughter Josephine to their family doctor—who delivered the child—as a tough, rambunctious, feisty little girl, a lot like her mama. The title was not all that was changed. From the very first sentence, more words, phrases, and paragraphs in that magazine version are not-Paley than Paley. Grace says that when she saw it, she screamed and went right to bed.
In her years as a young Army wife, Grace Paley was lucky; her ingenuousness and exuberance protected her just as those qualities protect the fictional Josephine. She was generally employed on the base where her husband was stationed, or at least nearby, when they moved from town to town. Miami Beach was the one place where she couldn't get a job, but when they moved from there to West Palm Beach, she became a domestic—taking care of children and cleaning house. "The lady taught me because I didn't really know how to do it. I made incredibly little money, but it was a very short time; I didn't mind."

In fact, her mind was elsewhere; not only the "boys" occupied her attention and imagination. Grace wrote poetry while they were in Florida; that was a rich time for the writer learning her craft. She was young, and as they traveled, she was still free of the responsibility that her motherhood and postwar commitments would bring. She "actually had a few poems published in a real magazine," called *Experiment*. She thinks, retrospectively, that "they're not bad."

They moved next to North Carolina, where Grace had a good job; she was the secretary to the fire chief, and "made a lot of money—relatively speaking." Her youthful style—only slightly altered in maturity—calls to mind almost any Judy Holiday movie. On this base she had the job of ringing the fire bell to mark the noon hour for the whole camp each
day. After a while, Jess says, he asked her how she knew when it was exactly noon, how she actually timed the bell. She explained that she always set her own watch by the central clock on the base which—they suddenly realized—was set each day by the bell she rang.

But this period of her life was also marked by sharp emotional upheavals and contrasts; as Grace's adventures increased, Jess moved closer to combat duty. Moreover, her mother had become gravely ill; Manya was dying. Manya's arm had remained enlarged and tender, extremely swollen, on the side where her breast had been removed. The family considered her "a very stoic person," Jeanne explains. But after several years of sporadic pain, she had a recurrence of the cancer, and in the treatment her chest was severely burned. She couldn't swallow; she couldn't eat. She was fed directly through her stomach.

Jeanne was the one who "fed" Manya this way. The family could easily have hired a nurse to do so, she explains, "but at that time it was different"; families took care of their own. The terribleness of Manya's painful death is the author's reference point when Faith, in conflict with Ann in the story "Friends," thinks, "I decided not to describe my mother's death. I could have done so and made Ann even more miserable" (LSD, 81). Not only does the character Faith decide not to use her mother's pain and grief to make Ann feel guilty, but the author Grace has
chosen not to translate her mother's final suffering into autobiographical fiction.

Finally, perhaps when it was absolutely clear that there would be no recovery, Jeanne wrote to Grace. "My sister wrote me a letter and said, 'It's time you came home.'" She went home immediately, and stayed with her mother for three months. Of her relationship with her mother in those months, she says, "Well, it was good," and she says it in such a way that other daughters, hearing her voice, understand that Grace made certain that it was good. Though she didn't resent having to stay at home, she began to worry about Jess. When her mother went into a coma, Grace thought about her young husband, and the fact that he could at any moment be sent overseas and killed. "I asked my father, 'Pa, how long is this going to go on?' And he said to me, 'What do you want? Do you want me to kill my wife?' I think now, in these days, maybe I would have. But then, in those days, no--we didn't think like that."

Dr. Goodside had had a severe heart attack at the same time that the recurrence of his wife's cancer was discovered; they were hospitalized together. When they came home--he to convalesce and she to slowly die--Isaac Goodside announced that he intended to sell his medical practice. His daughter Jeanne tried to convince him not to do it, but was not successful. Mrs. Goodside lingered, weakening steadily, but her husband sold the practice quickly and they
moved, with his mother and sister, to a new place, an
apartment in the West Bronx which Grace had gotten through a
friend.

Manya Goodside had always confided in her elder
daughter that she "want[ed] the time to come when I can move
into an apartment with your father and close the door,
without anybody in the house." She never lived to see that
day, but she did live to see that new apartment. She was
carried around in a chair--she could no longer walk--to see
all the rooms. Jeanne recalls that her father was very kind
to his wife; "I remember they had very beautiful moments
together before she died. I listened for a while, but I
left the room; I couldn't stay. They were as though they
had just met. They were talking in very endearing terms,
which they never did during their life. And then she died,"
Jeanne says, echoing the refrain in Grace's story, "Mother"
(LSD, 111-12). "It was a very terrible time."

Their brother Victor had been given a brief leave
from his base in San Francisco--perhaps 36 hours--to visit
his mother, but was not allowed to leave again when she
died, and so was not present at her funeral. Their father
stayed on in that apartment with his mother and sister.
Mira Goodside also died in the forties, and her mother died
in 1949, one month before the birth of Grace's daughter
Nora. Isaac Goodside lived the rest of his long life in
that apartment, until his own death in 1973.
Jess was finally shipped out to the South Pacific, where he was on active duty for eighteen months. All but one of the men Grace knew served in the Pacific; none of those close to her saw action in Europe; none had any suspicion of the extent of Hitler's war and his genocidal program. Like most Americans outside of the federal government, her family and friends didn't know what was happening in eastern Europe until the concentration camps were opened at the end of the war. "But we knew terrible things were happening," Grace recalls. "The city was filling up with refugees; my father sponsored refugees. There were many, many people that we knew personally who had escaped from Europe, from Hitler, from the German armies, from the action there. So we knew, we knew it in other ways."

"Even when I was a kid, when the war was building up in Europe, I remember my mother saying, 'It's coming. It's coming again,' and it was like a terror, a terror that was acknowledged. We knew," because her parents had escaped, because they had lived through pogroms, because they had been put in prison. They felt it; their Jewishness was palpable. Jeanne was a dancer, and during the war she danced for the young political groups, including the anti-Nazi German socialists who met in New York City. And even though these people were anti-Nazi, "They had this long blond hair; they were all Christians." There was a feeling
there that Jeanne would tell about, a feeling about who these people were, and what that meant to the Jews—to be close to them, to work with them. Even those who were allies could arouse the terror.

While Jess was overseas, Grace continued to move around, living with different people for various lengths of time. She spent a month in Texas with her high school friend Gloria Miller, who had a job there as an occupational therapist. Then she came back to New York and lived a few months with another friend from Evander Childs High School—Bea Loren, who got letters from her husband three times a week. "From India, from Australia. Those guys were really traveling. Jess didn't write much. He wasn't a writer, but he had this little camera and he took pictures. He sent pictures from everywhere." Grace Paley, like almost all young wives in wartime, experienced contradictory emotions about her husband's absence. Even though she got a few "sweet letters" and many photographs in the mail, "I still worried about him; I really worried about him. [At the same time] I was optimistic though; I always felt that he'd be all right. I missed him a lot—well, I did a lot in that time, so I can't say 'missed,' but I was very glad to see him when he came home. I was very happy to see him."

She worked "somewhere downtown," and went back to school for a while, this time at NYU. Going back to school, she says, was quite consciously "another try. I thought I'd
try it again. I studied mostly English literature. Again, I couldn't do it, I really couldn't do it. But I did write. And remember, I had taken that one course with Auden when I was seventeen, and that was very important. It influenced me a lot." In that period she also lived for some time in the Bronx with her father, aunt and grandmother.

Her mother was dead, and her father had retired from medicine; he was painting. Visitors to Grace Paley's New York apartment can view his work there, including a still life of a finely detailed set of kitchen shelves on which rest some utterly edible carrots; Grace explains that this painting drew so much covetous praise that her father offered to replicate it for admirers. In Jeanne's dining room hangs a portrait of Grace, a good likeness and a commentary as well. Dr. Goodside had a series of heart attacks in the war years; he was often incapacitated, and his younger daughter "stayed with him there in his room....I remember him barely moving." Though her stories about fathers suffering coronary disabilities feature much older men than Isaac Goodside was during WWII, this period surely fueled her description, in "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute," of a man whose heart, "that bloody motor," is no

4. This latter phrase is from another story describing a father with coronary disease, "A Conversation With My Father," (ECLM, 161). Both of these stories were written in Isaac's later years, the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies.
longer the reliable machine it used to be. "His arteries had a hopeless future, and conversation about all that obsolescent tubing often displaced very interesting subjects" (ECLM, 121).

Grace herself contributed to her family's wartime history of painful illness by contracting pneumonia and being sick for several months before Jess Paley came back from the war. But by the time he came home, she was fairly well recovered, "pretty much okay." He, however, "was really in bad shape--he was psychologically ill." Though he was certainly happy when he first came home--happy to be home--like other soldiers, he soon exhibited evidence of the stress he'd undergone. Grace argues that the notion that only the veterans of the Vietnam war experienced shock, had terrible problems of readjustment, and suffered serious longterm depression is "really a lie." She insists that the whole generation of men who fought in WWII has very serious problems--and is in fact "marked by" their experiences in that war. "It's even worse, really, because that was the 'good war.' That was the war where you should have been glad that you were killing people--there was no ambiguity and political dissidence."

Almost none of those men--including Grace's brother and friends and both her husbands--spoke of their experience in the ways many Vietnam veterans have, because there was no doubt in the national mind that what they had done was right
and good. "They were heroes, so with most of them everything was hidden; it's so ironic." Her knowledge of soldiers' responses to such an analysis—and her own feeling about the military exploitation of young men—provides the roots of her commentary in "Listening," a story written after years of involvement in anti-war and anti-draft work.

Poor young fellow, God knows what his experience has been; his heart, if it knew, would certainly honor the Geneva Agreements, but it would probably hurt his feelings to hear one more word about how the U.S.A. is wrong again and how he is an innocent instrument of evil. He would take it personally, although we who are mothers and have been sweethearts—all of us know that 'soldier' is what a million boys have been forced to be in every single one of a hundred generations. (LSD, 200)

When Jess returned, he "didn't know what to do with himself. He couldn't go back to physics; it had been too long a period that he'd been away." As a scientist, he felt that he'd lost years of professional development; he had been out of school for almost three years. He tried many jobs, but he was, like so many veterans, weary and depressed.

Grace was doing secretarial work, apparently supporting them both. She enjoyed those jobs because they were, essentially, political. She was hired by organizations that she could believe in and support. She worked as a fundraiser for Spanish refugees, and for the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Since these were all office jobs, which she calls secondary and tertiary work,
she made very little money. But she "felt lucky to be there," because then she could "be with them in their work." She could be part of the organizing effort and make a living--albeit a meager one--doing it. Jess Paley, talking about Grace's tenant organizing early in their marriage, says "she's religious about" her activism; remembering those early years, he calls her "an activist first and a writer second."

Jess' professional rootlessness, which appears to have originated in his war years, was a cause of anxiety to his wife's family despite his growing proficiency in camera work. Victor explains that Jess was perceived as being unreliable. "He didn't take a steady job when he could do the same thing by picking and choosing. He was a capable photographer, but he chose not to have a steady job; he chose to be a freelance." In some ways this might have been his temperament all along, as Grace seems to suggest. He "always did what he really wanted to do. And he wouldn't do anything that he didn't want to do. If he didn't want to do something, he wouldn't do it, and that's all."

There was at least one important time when this intransigence gave way. Grace had always wanted to be a mother--she had considered having children even before the war--but Jess did not want children. She considers her attitude "part of my general optimism," and views the bearing and raising of children not only as a natural
outcome of love between women and men but a commitment to human life. She literally could not believe that Jess didn't want to be a father, that he wouldn't choose to raise children. The idea that her husband—or anyone—might consciously and deliberately reject that task and experience, was simply unimaginable to Grace Paley. "I couldn't believe it, even from the first time he said it. I thought, ah, no, that can't be right. He'll change his mind. He really does" want children.

A masculine distaste for pregnancy and the presence of small children is suggested in several of her earliest stories, written between 1952 and 1959, and is featured in at least two. These characters may well be grounded in the frustration of Jess Paley, who, like many men, grudgingly accepted his children in their early years and then struggled to relate intimately to them when they grew up.

Ginny's husband in "An Interest in Life," holds the grudge, and abandons her and his four children:

Oh, you make me sick, you're so goddamn big and fat, you look like a goddamn brownstone, the way you're squared off in front....Your big ass takes up the whole goddamn bed....There's no room for me....All you ever think about is making babies. This place stinks like the men's room in the BMT. It's a fucking pissoir. (LDM, 95)

Corporal Brownstar, in "A Woman Young and Old," is really just a boy himself, and is startled when Josephine offers to have children for him. Lacking the experience of Ginny's
husband, his interest is exclusively in her thirteen year old body:

No! Oh no. Don't let anyone ever talk you into that. Not till you're eighteen. You ought to stay tidy as a doll and not strain your skin at least until you're eighteen. (LDM, 32)

In that same story, Josephine and Joanna's father—who, like Ginny's husband, has no name and is described as a darkly Gallic or Gypsy type—rejects his children in a romantically understated style, and later leaves them with equally charming, but obviously fake, reluctance:

"...a wife," he said, "is a beloved mistress until the children come and then..." He would just leave it hanging in French, but whenever I'd hear les enfants, I'd throw toys at him, guessing his intended slight....one day he did not come home for supper....A post card two weeks later [read] "I have been lonely for France for five years. Now for the rest of my life I must be lonely for you." (LDM, 26)

And Ricardo, Faith's first husband, the most prominent of the reluctant—and literally distant—fathers in Grace's stories, when drunk and holding forth belligerently on this very subject, "often shouted out loud...that she'd had those kids to make him a bloody nine-to-fiver" (ECLM, 35). Like him, Jess Paley left home sporadically, on assignments that sometimes carried him thousands of miles away. When Ricardo first appears, nameless, in The Little Disturbances of Man, he's in Chicago in one story and has just returned to New York from "the
British plains in Africa" in another (LDM 127). His contact with his two small sons is infrequent, to say the least.

Despite a few exceptions, that first story collection--written when the Paley children were young--presents other regrettable examples of fatherhood, including Peter, who scarcely knows his daughter Judy and turns her over to a friend within minutes of their accidental reunion; Mr. Graham, whose knowledge and understanding of his daughter Cindy are nonexistent and whose interest in her is classically patriarchal in its prurience and authoritarianism; and Mr. Teitelbaum, whose relationship with his son Eddie constitutes a tragedy that provokes enough pity and terror to outclass Theseus and Hippolytus.

Grace feels that her own husband changed his mind when some of their friends had children--and he "really liked them." Then, when his daughter was born, he "didn't object," and in fact seemed "rather interested." He didn't seem upset, she recalls, and attributes this at least partially to the charm of the children themselves, who were--their mother says--"two of the most beautiful children you ever saw in your life, copper-headed, brown-eyed kids."

Nonetheless, Jess Paley was critical of his children--even when they were much too young to benefit by his analysis and commentary. Grace's assessment of him is that he was always very critical, and indeed had what she called "a very critical nature," which is "a part of him to
this day." "He didn't like his own family very much; he wouldn't go to see them or take the children to see them." But she explains that Jess did take Danny out, and played ball with him. And he introduced music to Danny—which must have meant a great deal to both him and his son. When Danny said he wanted to play the flute, "Jess went out and got him a flute, and then he got music so they could play together."

Her stories repeatedly display Grace's recognition of the minimal attachment fathers in this society generally develop with their young children. In "The Used-Boy Raisers," Livid, Faith's first husband, requests a reading demonstration from his elder son—whom he hasn't seen for a long time—and then admonishes his ex-wife, "Faith...that boy can't read a tinker's damn. Seven years old." "Eight years old," she tells the concerned father (LDM, 130). Similarly, in the later story "Faith in a Tree," Phillipp Mazzano hears Faith's nine-year-old Richard criticize his mother, and comments, "I think I have a boy who's nine" (ECLM, 91). In fact he has three boys, as one of the mothers present reminds him—one nine, one eleven, and one fourteen. Phillipp's attentiveness to Richard, and the charm with which he evokes tenderness from both women and children in the park, lose their appeal when viewed by contemporary readers in relation to his careless fatherhood.

In the more recent story, "Listening," we find a retrospective view of the situation, wherein Bob Nichols
Grace's second husband] seems to have joined Jess Paley as a source: "Then Jack asked, Richard, tell me, do you forgive your father for having run out on you kids years ago?"

Recognizing Richard's defensive, deflective response, "Jack said, Ah...He blinked his eyes a couple of times, which a person who can't cry too well often does." Jack tells Richard about his own father, an immigrant rag peddler, and then asks another extraordinary question: "What do you think....Rich, do you think my daughter, I mean Kimmy, will she ever call me up and say, It's O.K., Dad?" Richard's "Well," delivered with a nod of the head and a shrug of the shoulders, is not a heartening reply (LSD, 208).

Correspondingly, in the same story collection we find "Anxiety," in which the present generation of young fathers demonstrates how much farther men--even those deliberately struggling toward consciousness--have yet to go in their painful efforts to develop the capacity for maternal nurturance (LSD, 99-106).

Grace's own attitudes toward the care and feeding of families, despite her early tomboyhood and adolescent wildness, were typical of her gender and generation, and further fueled by an extraordinary capacity for compassion and an impulse toward nurturance. Moreover, in the ordinary way, she was encouraged by her mother's positively defined experience. Manya had actually told Grace that having her youngest child was "a very easy birth," and Grace "really
took that to heart when I myself was having children." She assumed that "all that would be hereditary," and "it was--if [what her mother told her] was true." Grace Paley loved being pregnant with both her children, and attributes her pleasure and comfort to "genes--I think that's just what we do [in my family]. I wasn't sick or anything. My mother had me early, I had Nora at eight months (in September of 1949), and Danny was born two months early (in May of 1951). That made it very easy," she laughs.

Given the encouragement of her mother's success story, she always assumed that she would have healthy labor and healthy children; "there would never be anything wrong with them." She insists that she had no anxiety about either pregnancy or either child's development. When Danny was born prematurely, weighing three and a half pounds, she says he "looked great." The hospital staff kept him "in a hot box for a couple of months," and she'd go to look at him there. She wasn't allowed to handle him; "at that time, that's how they did it." But Grace remembers the nurses as being "very loving; they'd pick him up and show him to me, saying, 'Look, look.' He didn't have any meat--no flesh--so with his red hair, he was red all over; he was pretty cute. At two months, he weighed only five pounds, but at a year, he was right--he leaped ahead."

Her enthusiastic optimism--which may operate even more forcefully in a retroactive gear--is clearly the source
of the tone of that telling, which eliminates her longing to hold her newborn child, her fears about his vulnerability, and her desire, during that "couple of months," to bring her baby home. This is a woman for whom motherhood is an extension and specific manifestation of nurturant sensibilities which have come to dictate fierce pacifism and stubborn, intense personal attachments. Like the woman—surely Faith—accused by Jack in "The Immigrant Story," Grace Paley has "a rotten rosy temperament"; she "always see[s] things in a rosy light" (ECLM, 173). To that accusation, Faith replies that she sees "the world as clearly as you do," saying, "Rosiness is not a worse windowpane than gloomy gray when viewing the world" (ECLM, 174).

The rosiness of chronic optimism does not prevent Grace from taking deliberate action. Her rosy view is, as Faith insists, a clear one, and she is no less decisive than clear-sighted. She had no pregnancies before the children, but a year and a half after Danny was born she was pregnant again, and had an abortion. She had conceived Danny only twelve or thirteen months after Nora was born, and since he was born at twenty-eight weeks, the two are only twenty months apart. "I was not in good shape. I had two little kids and things were hard for us then. I mean, hard. I experienced a lot of nausea. I was not sick or anything but I was not your bundle of energy. So it was clear that it
was not the time to have another child. And yet I would have wanted it." Much of what she says about this abortion--as is commonly the case in women's lives, even when decisions are solidly made and never regretted--is contradictory. Jess didn't want more children; she loved spending time with the two babies she already had; their income was uncertain at best; she was a writer who already had no time to write; "And yet I would have wanted it." Moreover, finding an abortionist--one who was not a butcher--was part of the pain of the decision.

"It was ugly--you had to find somebody. Oh, I remember." Grace spent those days in the park--Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village--walking, sitting and playing with "my two little babies. This was before they were both old enough for daycare." Like the women in so many of her stories, she was friendly with the other mothers who came to the park with their children. Like Faith and her boys with Kitty and her daughters in "Faith in a Tree," Mrs. Hyme Caraway, Mrs. Junius Finn, Mrs. Steamy Lewis, Lynn Ballard and Anna Kraat are both sources and resources for each other's lives (ECLM, 77-100). "There wasn't anything that we didn't talk about together. I had my two and they were both in one carriage and I said, 'You know, I just can't have this baby.' And the woman I was talking to said, 'Yes.' She told me about this guy. And I went there with Jess; we went there together and we did it. And afterwards
we went to the place that used to be where Blimpy's is now. That's what I remember."

At some point in the early sixties though, she remembered more, and she wrote her memory into the story "Living."

I was bleeding. The doctor said, "You can't bleed forever. Either you run out of blood or you stop. No one bleeds forever." It seemed I was going to bleed forever....I was frightened....I could hardly take my mind off this blood. Its hurry to leave me was draining the red out from under my eyelids and the sunburn off my cheeks. It was all rising from my cold toes to find the quickest way out....I felt a great gob making its dizzy exit. "Can't talk," I said. "I think I'm fainting." Around the holly season, I began to dry up. My sister took the kids for a while so I could stay home quietly making hemoglobin, red corpuscles, etc., with no interruptions. I was in such first-class shape by New Year's, I nearly got knocked up again. (ECLM, 60-1)

On the original manuscript of this story, which was typed on a manual typewriter on small white sheets the size of notepaper, many changes are made in both pencil and ink. The narrator's situation is one time the aftermath of an abortion, another time a miscarriage. The final version, published, attributes no specific cause to what is obviously uterine drainage or hemorrhage; Grace's decision was to have her readers determine the cause of Faith's bleeding.

These years in the lives of the young Paley family were concurrent with the imprisonment of the Rosenbergs and their execution in June of 1953. Though older than Grace and Jess, Ethel Greenglass and Julius Rosenberg came from much the same background. They were born and grew up in New
York City; he had graduated from CCNY in 1939, and was in the Signal Corps until 1945. The Paleys and their closest friends, however, were not in fear for their homes, their jobs or their reputations during the McCarthy period. "We didn't even have that kind of jobs. Nobody in our crowd was like that. We were quite out of that world." The Paleys weren't in that circle--the City College crowd--but weren't far from it either. Nor were they particularly surprised at the actions of the U.S. government. "It was no shock to my nervous system. I had always paid a lot of attention to the political situation. I was not surprised or disabused" of some fantasy about democracy, for instance, a few years later when Eisenhower lied about Francis Gary Powers and the crash of his U-2 in the late fifties. "I never thought Eisenhower was so great. I would just assume that he would lie; I was not surprised."

The assumption of reactionary behavior or corruption in government and government officials is symptomatic of a common mindset in Grace Paley's characters. They may be optimists, but they are also realists, even cynics: from Rosie Lieber in the first story, who decides to live for love but is never blinded by it, to the three extraordinary major characters in the last story (the young narrator looking for a job, the multi-named "vocational counselor" who lives in a car, and the bogus entrepreneur Jonathan Stubblefield), The Little Disturbances of Man, written and
published during the length of the Eisenhower administration, created in the Cold War years, is well supplied with characters who think and speak as their author does. Even the most hopeful, romantic, enterprising or lucky of the people in those pages--like Shirley Abramowitz, Peter, or Dotty Wasserman--recognize and acknowledge the individual behavior and social mechanisms they suffer or struggle with; and those who anticipate and predict their losses and failures--like Anna, Frederick P. Sims or Charles C. Charley--absorb those losses and failures with calm recognition.

Grace Paley speaks of her own lapses in much the same mood. "I'll tell you a funny thing. You know, we did almost nothing around the Korean War. I have almost no memory of anything about the Korean War, and I'll tell you what I think [about that]. We were so unconscious, so unaware of that war. The whole country was unconscious. It was really very smart of [the government]; it came right after that huge effort, right on the heels of the other war. My generation just didn't want to pay attention. We were all exhausted. No one wanted to think about it. All we wanted was for things to settle down. It was very easy for them to move right into [Korea]. Even while it was happening it was a forgotten little war."

Grace explains that the second world war had been a long presence in the life of her family and community. "We
would have bad dreams at night, we would talk bad things about it during the day: the Depression, the coming of the war, the war, the consequences of the war, the Cold War. All I wanted was that we would settle down into a regular life when Jess got home from the army. I don't know if that's what he wanted, but that's what I wanted. I just couldn't wait to settle down. It's true that some of our friends were moving out to the suburbs, but both of us certainly made the decision not to do that." There had been over twenty years of oppressive atmosphere—militarily, economically, politically. And the Korean War was virtually hidden in the aftermath of those years, sneaked in the back door through the people's emotional exhaustion from that long, long time of grief. "So for this other war, the Korean War, there was just no place in my heart, there was no time in my life, and I simply dove into my kids."

In this way, Grace Paley was typical of American women in the fifties, encouraged to make babies and cookies and tend to them both in the kitchen. "Luckily for me my husband didn't want [four or five] kids, and I had only two." But she was having and raising small children while women were being thrust back, out of the workforce, and redefined in terms of the role of wife/mother; she could feel that backward movement in the society. "I never wanted to work in a steel mill; it never entered my mind"; in fact, she'd never been especially ambitious for a career of any
kind, despite her family's encouragement. "I never wanted a profession. It was of no interest. I was very glad to have crummy jobs so I didn't have to think about them. I liked being with the kids, and I liked hanging out with the other women the most. It had nothing to do with what happened after the war."

Notwithstanding such a definitive statement, Grace Paley was affected by the psychological transformation of women in the years immediately following the war. Her impulse to write was "frozen up for a while" in that period. "Left to my own devices, certainly I would have had more kids. I liked writing, and yet I didn't think of that as a career. I didn't say to myself (as she had hoped in her adolescence): 'I'm a writer.'" Grace believes that Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique presents an accurate analysis of the middle class woman of the fifties, and that "the far ends of the spectrum--like upper middle class" North American women--were "more deeply affected by the press of femininity" than others. She feels that the transformation from (the somewhat inaccurate cartoon of) Rosie the Riveter to (the relatively more appropriate image of) Betty Crocker in an amazingly short time reflected the lives of women who had graduated from college, women who could have had lives that included careers and professions; they "really lost a good deal. They were deprived of a lot. They married doctors and lawyers and moved to the suburbs
and had children and were supposed to be happy in their kitchens. And they certainly had four children."

Grace had, before the second wave of the women’s movement in the United States, "already read a very important book called Adam’s Rib by Ruth Herschberger [first published in 1948]. She said everything. She already said everything that came up again later--all of the issues, they were all in there." Though this is an exaggeration, Herschberger did cover a lot of ground, including the linguistic use of the generic male, rape and sexual dominance, the clitoris and its uses, Freud’s theories of female sexuality, witchcraft, menstruation, marriage, heterosexual romance and erotic experience, the pedestalization of femininity, the socialization of gender roles, and "equality." Though some major issues are missing, like lesbian life, daycare, paid work, and class, race and ethnic differences, Adam’s Rib provided a fine introduction to the discontent that was to come into the lives of white middle class heterosexual North American women in the sixties.5

Femininity and its attributes were undermined by the kind of careful analysis Herschberger provided. Grace Paley recognized herself as one who really never had conformed to

5. Herschberger’s effect on Grace’s consciousness may have been instrumental in the text of her singular story "The Floating Truth." See chapter 6 for discussion.
the prescribed image. "Well, first of all, I never wore high heels. You gotta remember, I came from a socialist household. I never wore high heels. We didn't live in that style. And I never wore make-up. I'm wearing more now than I ever did then." Though it's true that Grace has been seen wearing a little lipstick and the occasional dab of rouge while making a speech or giving a reading, she wore no make-up at all when she said that.

That tiny contradiction recalls the far more serious ambivalence revealed in other instances, like her abortion decision. Asked about her personal motives and circumstances, she will often insist that she is not responding to cultural pressures on women as a group. But that denial is contradicted by her candid descriptions of herself and her family. Moreover, this denial is at odds with her longtime struggle against an almost classically leftist concept of "individualism"; it seems to be based in traditionally feminine self-negation and passivity. She calls herself "lazy" as a writer, or insists that her production of a relatively small number of stories—despite the demands and chastisement of critics—is based in "a character defect." But her denial carries little weight against the evidence of her life. Grace Paley is not professionally ambitious, and her explanation of that lack of ambition comes closer than her denials, in their
obviously contradictory nature, to the truth—not only of her life, but of the lives of women.

Sounding strangely like Frank Sinatra, she explains, "I just went my own way, mostly by not doing. Not by confronting or fighting. [Remember,] I didn't even quit school; I just stopped going. I just didn't go to it. They would say all of these things to me and I would just say, 'Um.' I would shrug my shoulders and that would be that. My mother was in despair and my father was in total despair, because they had been ambitious for me, even if I was not ambitious in my own behalf. [My family was dumbfounded] by my lackadaisical, laid-back, premature-sixties attitude. But I did want to get married, and I did want to have children. There's this split between wanting to live my own life, wanting to be totally liberated, to be a person who lived any way she wanted and do whatever she wanted to do—and wanting to have a husband and children." Unique as any other thinking self, in these contradictions Grace Paley is nonetheless at one with her generation of women—which she is usually the first to insist: "We're all creatures of our time—to the decade, maybe even to the year."

But in the Eisenhower decade, reluctant as she was to name herself a writer, she did write. She redirected her focus and, though she never stopped writing poems, began to concentrate on a different genre, the short story. So it isn't quite true that she "simply dove into [her] kids"; she
wrote and published a book of stories too. And her political consciousness, bred in the house on Hoe Street in the Bronx in the twenties and thirties, fostered by her association with like-minded people and organizations in the forties, was also transformed.

The culture of the fifties that affected Grace Paley was peculiarly woman-oriented, and notably motherhood-based, but often stultifying in its actual effects on women. The PTA and the park, her children's needs and their environment, became the sources of her art and her politics. The mothers with whom Grace formed relationships in those days became the foundation for her embrace of the movement maxim: think global/work local. They were her local co-conspirators; breathing together, they formed a bond she gratefully celebrates in her third story collection, especially in the story "Friends," in which she ironically defines the connections among women as "at least as useful as the vow we'd all sworn with husbands to whom we're no longer married" (LSD, 89).
CHAPTER IV

Raising Children and Writing Stories

From the late forties to the present, except for one five year absence and a short period of peregrination in the sixties, Grace Paley has lived on one block of Eleventh street in lower Manhattan, in the Village. Her career as a fiction writer began there, as did her motherhood. her children grew up and went to school there, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues.

At the time Nora was born in 1949, Grace and Jess Paley lived in a brownstone on West Eleventh, the first of three apartments the family would occupy on that same block. They had one-and-a-half rooms: one room plus an alcove for the baby. That building--owned then by Jeanne Tenenbaum--is across the street from Grace's present apartment; it's a three-flat with a small ledge and wrought iron railings riveted across the front of the first floor apartment. "Nora learned to walk on that balcony," Grace recalls.

When Nora was not yet two, Danny was born, and while he was still an infant they moved across the street to The Rhinelander Gardens, also owned by Jeanne, where they had a full-sized apartment. In that building, Grace
explains, "we were the supers"; Nora remembers it as a sort of boarding house, with Grace dispensing towels and linens to the people who lived there. Danny can still picture that apartment "very clearly; it was an old building, decorated with wrought iron; it even had yards in the back. Not opulent or anything, just very 'old New York'." Nora says the apartments "were beautiful, really beautiful, set way back with gardens in front." In that apartment Nora remembers that the two children "slept in what I realize now was a porch. It had no glass windows, just screens. So it was always very cold out there, which we thought was normal. And there was a cement floor with a drain and a plug in it; when it rained we had to pull the plug to let the water out."

The Paleys lived there until the building was torn down to build P.S. 41 (which the children later attended until they went to high school). From there they moved further west, to Fifteenth Street and Ninth Avenue, where they lived for five years. That isn't far, but "it was a very scary neighborhood" for raising children; Grace was worried because of the Port Authority with its loading dock and freight trucks. But she was relieved to find that there were many children already there—like the tenement Ginny and Mrs. Raftery live in in "An Interest in Life": "There must [have] be[en] at least seventy-one children in th[at] house, pale pink to medium brown" (LDM, 91), and they all
went to school with Nora and Danny. "It was a much longer
walk, but they would all go together. They would set out
together and they would come back together."

Nora's view--of course--is different. She was sorry
to leave the Rhinelander Gardens but "had some of my
happiest times on Fifteenth Street. It was a very big
street, and it was across from the Port Authority building
where all the trucks came in to load and unload. The street
was always filled with trucks. And we (the kids) used to
break into the trailer trucks, and there'd be great stuff in
there, like chalk and tar and rope. We also did a lot of
roller skating. On the weekends and at night everything was
all closed up, so we could skate and ride bicycles in the
street, because there was no traffic. Sometimes we could
break into the building too."

Though Grace certainly knew her kids were skating
and riding in the emptied street, like most mothers she
probably didn't know about the rest of those exciting
activities. But she has always understood that she, like
her mother before her, would be ignorant of the private
lives and distant actions of her children: "Their mothers
never know where they are," says a wistful or disapproving
woman on the subway in "Samuel" (ECLM, 104). That story is
a textual rendition of a mother's worst nightmare: when kids
go out into the world of trucks and subway trains, and
grownups who aren't their parents and don't especially love them, even the most careful mother cannot protect them.

The block of Fifteenth Street they lived on was a poor one, and most of the residents were Puerto Rican; Danny says that they lived in "an old run-down tenement," and had very little money. He remembers hearing his parents talk about how they didn't have enough money to pay their rent. Jess was offered--and took--assignments doing commercials, and he made a lot of money on occasion, but that income wasn't steady, and Grace made almost no money at all when the children were both very young. Danny knew that his father "had always refused to work for anybody. He would only freelance, take a job here, a movie there--rather than have one employer. And so when there weren't jobs there wasn't money. I remember in the early years, when we lived on Fifteenth Street--I'm talking now about the years before 1960, up until the time my mother's first book came out--we were really poor. But you know, if I compare the kids I teach--I'm a teacher of a sixth grade class and I have about thirty kids--about one-third of them live in the homeless shelters, or they live in these terrible hotels; that's what I think of now as poverty." In those terms, "we weren't really poor, because we had food and we had an apartment. In those days in New York you could be poor and still have an apartment." There were "no nights when we couldn't eat. Maybe we couldn't have anything great, but...."
And then "all of a sudden," Danny recalls, things started to change, around 1960. Jess started getting more work, and Grace's first book had come out. The Paleys moved as soon as they could, to the apartment Grace still lives in on Eleventh Street. Much discussion preceded the decision, because of worries about whether they'd be able to make the rent; it was $125 a month. "But it was such a nice apartment, it was so much bigger, they took it anyway."

The family came back to Eleventh Street at the end of 1960 or early 1961, and took an apartment in the building named Unadilla, right next door to the new grammar school. Nora says that she was really sorry to leave Fifteenth Street, but, "my parents weren't so happy about the things we liked there, and I don't think my father liked it there at all. It seemed big to me, but it must have been pretty small; the new apartment on Eleventh Street was much bigger." She and Danny each had their own room there.

No one else lived with the four Paleys; there was no extended family on the scene in this generation. Danny says, "I don't think anybody could stand it anymore." Their grandfather never came to their house; they always--and often--went to see him. He lived "up at the last stop on the subway," Nora remembers. When she was growing up, she thought that all old people spoke Russian; identifying the language and accent of her mother's elders with oldness
itself, she thought that when she got old, she would have an accent too.

Danny also remembers going up to the Bronx to visit his grandfather, especially with his aunt Jeanne, who'd drive them up there in her car. She has no children, and says that over the years Nora and Danny "have been as close to me as though they were my own." No longer living together, or even in the same neighborhood, the Goodside family maintained relatively intimate relations. (The Ridnyiks had never been as close to Grace and her children as the Goodsides; Manya did not cultivate her side of the family.) Grace's father was the most prominent elder in the Paley children's lives. He would tell them stories, Danny remembers, "and we always had a good time with him. He was very affectionate. He had been kind of a wild radical in his youth in pre-revolutionary Russia. And so of course he would tell millions of stories about those days, about being sent to Siberia and then coming to this country. My sister and I were both very close to him."

Grace Paley was married to a man who absolutely refused to live as her father had, a man who seems to have been the opposite of that immigrant photographer/doctor who "worked harder than anyone" to support not only his wife and children and mother and sister, but many others as well. Wives often speculate about whether they've chosen husbands who are duplicates or opposites of their fathers--
consciously or not. Grace Goodside, like many women, had managed to effect a compromise: she found a man who had her father's authority and personal power, his wit, aesthetic sense and intellect, but who would not relate to his family—or anyone else—in terms of those standard social or familial contracts and agreements which had bound her father to forty years as "the burdened man."

Danny remembers going to summer camp at the age of six. IRS refund checks paid for the weeks the Paley children spent in the country. Grace, like Manya Goodside, wanted them to lie down in the tall grass and see wide blue skies when they looked up. But she knew that going to camp wasn't a bucolic fantasy for them; "I think they hated it," she says, and writes that thought into one of Faith's funny complaints in "Faith in a Tree."

I could be living in the country, which I love, but I know how hard that is on children—I stay here in this creepy slum. I dwell in soot and slime just so you can meet kids like Arnold Lee and live on this wonderful block with all the Irish and Puerto Ricans....(ECLM, 84)

Danny says that when he and Nora were at camp his father "would never write but my mother would write regularly. She would tell me the news of what was going on in New York, and send me little newspaper clippings. This was before I could even read. My counselor would read me the letters and I
would try not to cry hearing them."

One of Danny's earliest memories is of the struggle between mothers and children for separation. Of course mothers not only want their children to be with other youngsters, and learn to make up their own lives, but also want their children simply to go away—just to be, sometimes, somewhere their mothers aren't. "I remember her taking me to nursery school on the first day. I was very upset; I didn't want to be separated from her, so I kept crying. When she'd try to leave me in the room, I'd run back out again, and she'd hug me again, and then I'd go back in. This happened a few times," Danny recalls, "before finally I stayed." The mother's point of view in a complementary scene is delineated exquisitely—excruciatingly—in "A Subject of Childhood":

"Now listen to me. I want you to get out of here. Go on down and play. I need ten minutes all alone. Anthony, I might kill you if you stay up here."..."O.K., Faith. Kill me."..."Please," I said gently, "go out with your brother. I have to think, Tonto." "I don't wanna. I don't have to go anyplace I don't wanna," he said. "I want to stay right here with you." "Oh, please, Tonto, I have to clean the house."..."I don't care," he said. "I want to stay here with you. I want to stay right next to you." "O.K., Tonto. O.K. I'll tell you what, go to your room for a couple of minutes, honey, go ahead." "No," he said, climbing onto my lap. "I want to be a baby and stay right next to you every minute." "Oh, Tonto," I said, "please, Tonto." I tried to pry him loose, but he put his arm around my neck and curled up right there in my lap, thumb in mouth, to be my baby. "Oh, Tonto," I said, despairing of one solitary minute...."No," he said, I don't care if
Richard goes away, or Clifford. They can go do whatever they wanna do. I don't even care. I'm never gonna go away. I'm gonna stay right next to you forever, Faith....I love you, Mama," he said. "Love," I said. "Oh love, Anthony, I know." (LDM, 144-5)

Danny remembers his mother "always being there at home, and just being very warm and affectionate; I don't remember her blowing her stack too much, or getting too angry about anything we did." Grace Paley has obviously experienced the desperation she describes so poignantly--"always being there"--and had the great good fortune to understand the contradictions of early motherhood while she lived in it.

Grace was not a mother who made many rules or tried to deliberately implement her expectations in her children's lives. For instance, even though she wanted them to embrace Jewish identity, she maintained a laissez faire policy on that issue. She says that a Jew is "a person whose family is Jewish. I raised my kids to know they're Jewish, to like the idea, not be displeased with it, not try to hide it. To not be like in my generation, [where] there are many people who are ashamed of it." She probably would have raised them even a little more Jewish, but her husband opposed overt Jewishness in their home. She says that they didn't attend services, and that there were no longer any family members--as there had been in her own childhood--who might have taken the children into religious situations and ceremonies.

"[But] I raised them to know they were Jewish children."
As Danny recalls his childhood, Jewishness was rarely discussed in the family. "Both my parents come from anti-religious backgrounds. In fact, we had a Christmas tree when we were kids." His mother's tolerance and affection for that symbol of Christian December is a prominent feature in one of her earliest stories, "The Loudest Voice."

On the street corner a tree had been decorated for us by a kind city administration. In order to miss its chilly shadow our neighbors walked three blocks east to buy a loaf of bread. The butcher pulled down black window shades to keep the colored lights from shining on his chickens. Oh, not me. On the way to school, with both hands I tossed it a kiss of tolerance. (LDM, 60)

Danny says that as a boy he knew very little about Judaism. "My mother took us to synagogue maybe two times total. My father hated synagogues and rabbis and churches and all organized religion, and my mother was brought up" that way too. Danny, like his grandfather, was not made a bar mitzvah, "which is almost unheard of," in his generation. "Although my mother did give me the option to do it. It wasn't that she didn't want me to. She asked me when I was about eleven or twelve, would I like to, and I said no."

Nora was also aware of her father's antipathy to Judaism and other religions. But she says that Grace often read the children Bible stories when they were small. "I had a sense of Jewishness, you know--my family was Jewish."

But, given their names--Nora, Danny, Grace and Jess the
children's auburn hair, and the fact that not one of the four has the stereotypical features attributed to Jews in the West, their Jewishness has never preceded them into a situation or relationship, or even a conversation. Grace has been assumed to be "New York Irish" by neighborhood people who knew her, and Nora speaks of frequently encountering and overhearing outspoken anti-semitism because speakers assume she is Christian, and thus speak freely in front of her. Like her brother, who is interested in Jewish history, she identifies more strongly as a Jew now than in her youth.

The socialization of and cultural distinction between the genders received even less consideration than ethnic identity in the family. Grace had no preference before Nora was born, but once she had a girl, she wanted a boy during her second pregnancy. She thought little about sex role stereotyping when they were growing up. "I thought about how much I wanted them to be decent human beings. I thought about that a lot." Her concern is voiced in one of the later stories by Jack, who, in "The Story Hearer," doesn't want Faith to want another baby.

The kid might be very smart, get a scholarship to M.I.T. and get caught up in problem solving and godalmighty it could invent something worse than anything us old dodos ever imagined. (LSD, 143-4)
But she was more worried about Danny than Nora. Despite the fact that she didn't think about maleness per se, "didn't think the word 'male,'" she did think about the idea of the military, about the way the military is perceived and imagined in this society, and how it works, in terms of law and political exigency, in the lives of boys and men. She recognized that there were "all these people [who] want these kids to go and fight and die--and I didn't want that for my kid"--or for anybody's kid really, which sentiment was the basis for her later draft resistance work. She hated that people would say to Danny--or to Nora for that matter--"You stand up for yourself! You have to fight back." Even in her youth she had rejected violence as a response to offense. "I always felt that Danny should not be called upon to beat some other kid up. He didn't have to do that." In the mid-sixties, as escalation of the Vietnam War steepened, Grace defined the absurdity of that demand by putting it in the mouth of a police officer, who addresses Faith's Tonto--who is still nearer a baby than a boy in "Faith in a Tree"--in just the kind of shame-making terms that push young boys into violent response: "Listen Tonto, there's a war on. You'll be a soldier too someday. I know you're no sissy like some kids around here. You'll fight for your country" (ECLM, 98).

In that same period, the mid-sixties, she wrote the male code of everyday violence into "Samuel," a story in
which the natural exuberance and adventurous spirits of children have been guided into masculinity training. Four boys who've gone to see "the missile exhibit on Fourteenth street," a show designed to create and foster interest in the military, are shooting off make-believe machine guns as they balance on the small platforms between speeding subway cars (ECLM, 104-5).

Samuel laughed the hardest and pounded Alfred's back until Alfred coughed and the tears came. Alfred held tight to the chain hook. Samuel pounded him even harder when he saw the tears. He said, 'Why you bawling? You a baby, huh?' and laughed....[The boys have been watched by both men and women inside the cars, and the author has made a distinction between those men who identify with the boys and those who disapprove of their behavior. One of the latter pulls the emergency cord in an effort to make the boys come in off the dangerous platform. The train stops "at once." ] Samuel had let go of his hold on the chain so he could pound Tom as well as Alfred....he pitched...forward and fell head first to be crushed and killed between the cars. (ECLM, 104-6)

Samuel's death is the result of more than chance; it develops out of a complex of male motives and actions, all of them encoded in the social construct of masculinity. The men riding the train are described in terms of responses to the requirements of their own masculinity training. Some of them, the narrator explains, "were once brave boys like these." Others had been "boys who preferred to watch" the daring ones, like the man who won't confront the boys but pulls the emergency cord in the story (103). Both kinds of men had long ago learned what Samuel, Calvin, Tom and Alfred
are learning—that they will be measured by, and must measure themselves against, a standard of adventurous daring, a model of individual heroics.

Grace recalls how Danny "loved to wrestle. He had lots of buddies," and in the schoolyard they would be encouraged to fight, but when they were at home or in the park—private time—the little boys would wrestle for hours, for the sake of intimate contact and the exhilaration of using their bodies. Understanding the children's need to be close despite the codes of behavior that deny physical intimacy to boys even when they are toddlers, Grace says that "they were hugging really, just hugging a lot. Knocking each other down, picking each other up. But it had nothing to do with violence at that time." She argues that they didn't really want to hurt each other, and asserts that they didn't hurt each other. "Of course there were always a couple of kids who did want to hurt, and Danny hated them. There was one kid who had a real big stomach, who used to fight with his stomach, go up and bounce into people with it."

That boy, irrevocably doomed as "the fat kid," was probably malicious out of his own pain. The family portrayed in "Gloomy Tune," a composition of the early sixties, contains children whose low economic status and painfully meager parental attention define another kind of doom, virtually irreversible in the terms of the text. In
this story, mindless and pointless violence—verbal and physical, effortlessly learned—renders genuine response an impossibility between Yoyo and Chuchi. The boys are suddenly and accidentally thrust into a situation which calls out the set of masculine responses they've memorized.

Chuchi Gomez slipped in an olive-oil puddle left by a lady whose bottle broke....Chuchi said, turning to Yoyo in back of him, Why you push me, bastard?

Who pushed you, you dope? said Yoyo.

You dumb bastard, you push me. I feel over here on my shoulder, you push me.

Aah go on, I didn push you, said Yoyo.

I seen you push me. I feeled you push me. Who you think you go around pushin. Bastard.

Who you callin bastard, you big mouth. You call me a bastard?

Yeh, said Chuchi, the way I figure, you a motherfuckn bastard.

You call me a motherfuckn bastard?

Yeh, you. I call you that. You see this here oil. That's what I call you. Then Yoyo was so mad because he and Chuchi had plans to go to the dock for eels Sunday. Now he couldn't have any more plans with Chuchi. (ECLM, 55-6)

They continue this exchange until words give way to blows and Yoyo smacks Chuchi on the shoulder with a board with two nails in it. The author shows the boys' friendship, apparently developed out of genuine interest, destroyed by the demands of their masculinity training.

Despite the theoretical separation of traditional parental roles along gender lines in this culture, most mothers, like Grace Paley and her characters, are the ones who take care of most business in the home—and in the lives of their children. Like her children, Grace's friends and
colleagues describe her as loving, attentive, and utterly involved in the lives of her children when they were small. Her longtime friend Sybil Claiborne explains that she was "very loyal, very, very loyal." She supported her children's choices and points of view; sociologists would say she validated their perceptions. If there was a fight between one of Grace's kids and another kid, Sybil remembers, Grace wouldn't necessarily say the other kid was wrong, but whatever Nora or Danny said, she would support. Even in a disagreement with a teacher, she would take the side of the child.

Grace Paley's politics of motherhood were different from the immigrant generation of her parents--and many members of her own generation as well--who thought that teachers and schools not only represented the American way, but that this way was by definition good and right. Many parents of that era wanted their children to fit a preconceived pattern of citizenship and daily behavior, just as the Goodsides had expected--and came to despair of--a certain kind of demeanor and accomplishment from their youngest child.

Interestingly, when Jess was at home, the aesthetic and intellectual interests of the two parents did break down into standard mom and dad patterns: Danny remembers that they "always helped us with homework and projects. My mother would help with the writing part, and my father with
the math and science." Nora, however, thought of her mother's and father's work in terms of the professional dynamic they seemed to represent: "He did this visual thing, and was always thinking about light. She was a writer, and was always thinking about language." Their father's presence in the children's lives was marked by frequent long absences as well as notable actions, rather than an ongoing mood, tone or feeling.

For instance, Jess designed and installed headphone sets for Nora and Danny to wear while they watched television—the sound of which their father hated. So his presence was as memorable as his absence. "When I was a young child," Danny says, "my parents were very close. The four of us would take trips to the country. Let's say my father would be shooting a film, and he'd have a list; he'd need shots of an elm tree with a field behind it. Or a certain kind of flower by a brook. It would be very specific. My mother and he would be in the front seat, and she would help him find all these things. And we'd drive around until he'd say, 'OK, this is it exactly,' and then he'd take pictures of that. I have mostly good memories from my early childhood; I don't remember them fighting too much. But I do remember my father being away a lot."

When Jess was working, more often than not he was out of the country. He worked several times for Twentieth Century, usually on documentaries. His children remember
him traveling to Mexico and Israel, to Laos and Thailand before the wars in Southeast Asia. Nora says "he had a lot of real interesting jobs. He went away to amazing places—we have these beautiful pictures, slides, of places that are completely gone now." But then there were long periods of time when he didn't work, times which were, she says, "grim." Her mother wrote that grimness into wry humor, projecting the economics of her own marriage into Faith and Ricardo's divorce. Faith makes "reasoned statements" about the situation in "Faith in the Afternoon."

...odd jobs were a splendid way of making out if you had together agreed on a substandard way of life. For, she explained to the ladies in whom she had confided her entire life, how can a man know his children if he is always out working? (ECLM, 35-6)

Not divorced but frequently without her man, Grace was surrounded by other women living with their children in the neighborhood. "All these women that I knew," she says, "I was very impressed with them; I was very interested in all these women living these lives. And I really wasn't so different from them, because Jess would go away for long periods at a time, and I would be alone with the kids."

We need to know that "alone" is not really the operative word here. Family life at the Paleys' place was what has been—for much of the twentieth century—considered quintessentially "bohemian." That is, as her sister Jeanne explains, "she had a very disorganized household. Very
disorganized. Nothing was in its place. Everything [Jeanne chuckles]--even the children--was out of order. There were always a million people in her house." This domestic scene might be called "woman artist with children." Never a still life, always employing chaos as a thematic element, such a picture is the antithesis of images like that of Virginia Woolf, writing at her tall desk, gazing out over the garden and water meadows.¹

The back yard at Rhinelander Gardens had been filled with children, swarming over the jungle gyms Jeanne bought. There, and then later on Fifteenth Street, the neighborhood kids were always in Grace's house, and so were their mothers. "Her household was always filled," Jeanne recalls, "and her door was never closed." People came in and out, "using the refrigerator as though it were their own." When Nora and Danny were both old enough for full days of school, other students would come home with them in the afternoons, drop their books in Grace's house and run out to play. And not until their own mothers came home from work, or maybe even dropped by, would they get their books and go home.

Danny says that even when they had very little money, Grace was always giving it away, helping out everybody she could. "People would be coming over to borrow

¹ Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell however, a painter and designer who had three children, has often been described in these terms. See Woolf's complete diaries and letters, and Spalding's biography of Bell.
money constantly—not that she would ever get it back—but it never seemed to be important to her, whether she got it back. And when I was a kid, if somebody needed a place to stay, even if it was for weeks or months, they could stay with us."

That style, dependent upon the constant vital exchange amidst a virtual tribe of mothers and children, is associated with a particular class, or subculture. Nora recalls that the first time she thought that Grace was different from other people's mothers was one year at summer camp, when all the families came for a visit. Nora looked at her parents and suddenly saw that they were completely different from the others. They were in a different class, by virtue not only of their low income, but of their politics and culture—in the purest anthropological sense; their style of clothing, their demeanor and conversation were all dictated by such differences.

Grace and Jess may have even walked and talked differently from the majority of the campers' parents; people who make art, and whose income comes from jobs "on the side" which support that art, are a hybrid class. They may have been born or raised to the middle class, but they have neither the money nor the inclination to live among the bourgeoisie. This couple visiting their children at summer camp were a freelance cameraman and a writer of short stories who had chosen to raise those children in a
"bohemian," "beat," or "hippy" neighborhood, a community long-recognized as the home of artists, leftists and poor people. Grace uses that image of her "dangerous" neighborhood ironically in "An Irrevocable Diameter" when Mr. Graham interrogates Charles about his date with Cindy:

"You sonofabitch, where the hell were you?"  
"Nothing to worry about, Mr. Graham. We just took a boat ride."...
"Where to?" he said. "Greenwich Village?" (LDM, 110)

When Nora was a child she had no idea about the family's class or income; she first thought about it when "a friend of mine's family had a car and we didn't. And they had a summer house. Then I knew that they were rich." This same friend couldn't go to Greenwich House daycare because her family had too much money. "They weren't poor enough; they were over the line." It is interesting to compare this situation with Grace's own childhood, in which she was the little girl with the summer house. As the mother in the case, thirty-some years later, she was "so broke at that time, we were at the lowest level of income at Greenwich House," which rose from three to ten dollars a week through the fifties. But she was still, she explains, "a middle class person." Like Danny speaking of his students, she says, "I knew we were broke and I felt very bad that we didn't have any money, but if you had said 'poor' to me, I would have said, 'What?' I would have said that we just happened to be broke this week. I would think to myself,
'After all, we're not poor people.' And then I would think, 'Jesus Christ, if we don't get out of this hole soon I don't know what's gonna happen.' But we weren't poor people.'

At the time Grace and Jess Paley's children were growing up, Greenwich Village was filled with young people who made lots of children and hardly any money--the men wore beards and the women wore Mexican shawls; in the fifties both women and men wore black a lot--but Nora says that there wasn't much distinction between "artists" and working class people. "Everybody was working. My mother never hung around with artists. She wasn't part of a community of artists," and in fact her daughter recalls knowing no other artists in those early years. Her friends' mothers were the people Grace spent her time with then, so the children saw no distinctions among them. Being "an artist" just seemed to be one of the ways people lived. Not until she went to college did Nora recognize that in the society at large, making art is considered different and unusual.

But Nora always knew her mother was a writer, "before she had published a book or anything. I think she was always writing. I remember her typing; my brother wrote a poem about a lady typing, because that was the way we always saw her. Writing was what my mother did, like my friend Nancy's mother worked in the Bible society; it couldn't have been more normal." Nora and her brother grew up feeling that writing was a part of thinking--a private,
personal act. Nora read her mother's stories "from the beginning. It just seems like it goes way back. My own interest was really more with the poems, because I was writing poems very early myself. And she would encourage that, so we read and wrote a lot of poems together."

Danny knew his mother was a writer by the time he was six; "I knew she was always writing. I read her first book when I was eight or nine years old." He says that her habitual periods of consideration and reconsideration, that painstaking editing process, was evident in his childhood; it "took her a long time to finish anything." He recalls Grace "typing away; I always saw her typing." He mentions the poem Nora refers to, a childhood memory like the "lady writing" in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. "It's about a woman who kept typing--and the minute she gets done typing, she types the thing again."

Like his sister, he recalls his mother's support and approval of her children's writing. "My sister's always written more than I have. I remember her writing poetry at a very young age. Grace always encouraged us to write; and she always told us [that what we wrote] was good--I don't know whether she meant it but she always told us it was good." Danny often submitted his work to a monthly magazine of children's writings, and was frequently published. Once a story of his was not taken; "I don't remember what the editor said but he was very diplomatic. And my mother said
to me, 'That's how it is. You've just had your first rejection.' Faith has a similar attitude toward her children's writing, and is equally committed to enthusiastically supporting them in "Faith in a Tree."

"The ladies of the P.T.A. wear baggies in their blouses they talk on telephones all day and never clean their houses."

He really wrote that, my Richard. I thought it was awfully good, rhyme and meter and all, and I brought it to his teacher. I took the afternoon off to bring it to her. "Are you joking, Mrs. Asbury?" she asked. (ECLM, 90-1)

As a child, Nora recognized that Grace's writing was her work, as well as a source of intellectual and aesthetic pleasure. "I always knew she was doing work." One's work, then, was part of one's life; it was not separate from the rest of daily existence. "I didn't think it was easy, but it was woven into the fabric of our life--mother and kids, and what we all were doing." The issue of productivity--number of texts produced--arises here, for Grace Paley has always refused to isolate herself for the sake of her writing. She has never been ambitious in the traditional sense: she has no career goal toward which she moves as a writer--only the repeated goal of the immediate project, its truthfulness and quality of expression. Keeping the writing integral to the rest of her life, she has rejected the romantic image of the (archetypically male) artist as lonely seeker and interpreter of truth and beauty. Her other
commitments—not only to her children, but to other people, and to her community and her growing political involvements—have always taken as much of her time and energy as her art.

It's also true that, in these early years, as a mother with no "disposable" income, she hadn't much choice; but she never railed against that circumstance. She refuses to consider motherhood a sacrifice or a form of self-denial, insisting that even when Nora and Danny were growing up she chose to live as she did. This is not to say that she never experienced emotional conflicts, or that she did not recognize the socially imposed contradictions between her longing to write and her love for her children.

But she has continued over the years to maintain an unusually high level of integration in her life as a writer, teacher, mother, activist, wife and friend; as her income rose and her fame spread, Grace Paley still did not assign greater importance to her writing than to her other activities. When her third story collection was published in 1985 and she read from it for weeks at bookstores across the country, the most repeatedly asked question from her audience was, "Why so long between books?" or "Why do you make us wait so long for these stories?" Her answer is always the same: "I have other things to do. Writing isn't all I do."
Nora, like some others close to Grace, occasionally regrets that her mother has not taken more time for writing. "There wasn't very much separation [between writing and the rest of her life; that was good for us but] probably for her sake there should have been. She should have had a door to close and be behind it--but none of that happened; it wasn't like that. I don't know when she got the time, how she did it. She must have done it sometime--maybe it was while we were in daycare. I know some of that time she was working [for pay] but maybe she was also doing her own stuff. It's not like my father took us to the park so she could work--none of that was going on yet."

Neither Nora nor Danny understood, when they were children, that mothers weren't supposed to be writers, or that there were negative sanctions and endless restrictions on women who tried to write. Grace Paley's writing was part of her life in the same way that her life appears in, and is part of, her writing. Despite Nora's retroactive wish for her mother to have had more worktime and privacy, Grace Paley's life reveals none of that apparent but decidedly artificial separation between life and art or life and work.

Her work has always been based in her family experience, as a Goodside and as a Paley. All of her

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stories deal with or connect to women and children, to family life in the urban world of apartments, parks, streets and schools—even if they also focus on a broad range of subjects, including the Yiddish theater, sexual struggle and tenderness, racism, employment, the uses of depression, poetry, revolution, death, old age, language, war, kidnapping, marriage and divorce, drug addiction, the state of Israel, writing and language, Russia, immigration at the turn of the nineteenth century, China, poverty, reading, medical technology, socialism, miscegenation, pinball games, surgery, lesbian anger, music, libraries, senility, police officers, drinking, and horticulture. None of these subjects are mutually exclusive.

Like many writers, Grace was enabled to write her stories when she realized that the things of her life could be put to use in art, and that her language could make "literature." She began to write stories in 1952. "I'd been writing poetry all that time and sending it out. I would have loved to be published. I read little magazines all that time." She had none of the fear or hesitation that new writers sometimes express about seeing their work in the hands of an uncaring or unworthy public. "I have no oppositional feeling, no precious feeling, about sending stuff out."

Jess Paley says that he believed the short story form was "the coming thing: people haven't the time for
novels, and they like to sit and read a story." With that belief, he joins the vanguard of American literary criticism. The short story genre, long denied serious consideration by scholars, academic critics, and some fiction writers themselves, was even scorned by most book publishers, who posited a theory of textual evolution and insisted that the novel was a higher form of life. But the story form has gained in status and sales throughout the past four decades; it is no longer considered an exercise, a brief drill to be performed by fiction writers before they undertake the real work of writing a novel. Grace Paley's choice has been serendipitous.

Jess urged Grace to write stories for publication—"I always knew she was a writer"—just as she had encouraged him in his film work. "Jess said to me, 'You have a sense of humor, you can really tell a story. Why don't you write stories?' And I knew that was true. I had known it for a long time." Some friends of theirs were writing stories, and she'd heard or read some and thought, "I could do that. I could do that." Jess pointed out to her that she had always been a story hearer; she'd always been interested in the way people talk and what they talk about. Her interest in dialogue—which has developed into her ability to render the ostensibly spoken word as printed text—was an important element in bringing her to the short story. She realized that, as she told her story writing class at Sarah Lawrence
College in the spring of 1988, "Dialogue is action; it's gotta do some work" in the text. Her analysis—clearly political in its insistence on the social value of conversation—"was really a kind of breakthrough," she realizes.

"I just decided to write stories. I just decided that I could." After this declaration, she speaks haltingly—not a Grace Paley habit. "You know, when I began to write stories, I was really getting...I began...I was...I was really getting very...that was when I began to get very concerned about women. Consciously thinking about women. I'm not saying I was consciously political. I wasn't thinking feminism. I was just thinking about their lives, the lives of women. I was really thinking about it a lot."

Her hesitation here comes from trying to locate the real feeling of that time, in memory—and trying to keep that feeling clear of her present political sensibilities. She is trying to avoid the imperialism of memory, which retroactively incorporates current thinking with past thought and action.

3. The situation—as always—was really more complex than this. In a recent book of interviews, Grace talks about another element in her decision to write prose fiction—she explains that she wanted to get away from the "literary" influences of poetry as she had always known it. "I mean the reason I began to write stories was that the poems up to then had been too literary, it was really a problem" (Writing Lives: Conversations Between Women Writers, ed. Mary Chamberlain. London: Virago Press, 1988, 185).
"Now you know, it wasn't as if I had never written paragraphs in prose. But I'd never finished....I mean, I had small kids, right? And I had a man who was trying to get into a business, you know. And not a lot of money. And I wasn't really thinking about [writing] all the time. I was hanging around in the park a lot [with other mothers and small children]." How did she eventually find the time?

"Literally, with the first couple stories, I was sick. I can't remember what I had; I had a miscarriage--or the abortion--and I was quite ill afterwards. No, I think it was something else; I had some sickness. It's funny you don't remember these things."

Grace knows she began to write stories late in 1952. Her abortion was near the end of that year, about eighteen months after Danny's birth, and in a sharply ironic turn, probably was the circumstance that afforded her the time to write fiction. We often use metaphors of motherhood and birth when we speak of writing, or any kind of creative work. Women realize that we must make choices about time for children, time for work--balancing and juggling, arranging lives to include what can be done, to produce what can be given. Writers--often males, or childless women--may even speak of manuscripts as their children. If that abortion was indeed the source of her first storywriting time--time without noise, interruption, and the consuming needs of children, time for creations of the spirit and mind
instead of the body—it becomes a singular representation of the forbearance and irony entailed in the "choices" of women artists.

Grace remembers only being told to "'Take it easy, don't work for a while, send the kids to daycare and keep them there as long as you can.' So I would drop them off at school and someone else would pick them up and take them to the daycare center. Then I had all this time and I began writing these stories. Suddenly I was getting time, time for myself." That time, of course, was given to her—she did not seize it; it was a gift, maybe even an order, which is why she could take it. Somebody with authority—a doctor, like her father—told her that she had to do it.

She would not have—and has rarely since—taken so much private time and space for her writing. And she understands that the doctor's admonitions would have been meaningless if there had been no daycare she could trust and rely on. "Whenever I go out to talk I tell everybody how important the daycare was; I couldn't really have done anything without good daycare." The daycare center available in Grace Paley's neighborhood qualifies as a bona fide miracle. Greenwich House was a forgotten leftover from the insufficient federally supported programs and institutions created for working mothers during World War II. Grace believes that "they hadn't killed it yet" because
it was in an old, poor neighborhood; probably no one with any power noticed or remembered its existence.

In that period too she read a great deal. She read "all the people that were read in my day"—Joyce, Flaubert, Chekhov. She read "all the moderns," and was conscious of their style, was "very aware of their way of writing." She remembers reading Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. "I guess I was more affected by Mrs. Dalloway than anything else—without being aware of it at the time. It seems to me, looking back, thinking about when I was going to school, I was always very interested in how she did it." She also liked *To the Lighthouse* and "I was crazy about Gertrude Stein, about *Three Lives*. Remember, I had tried to write a couple of stories earlier; I had learned from reading *Dubliners*. I thought about technique a lot—and you know, I always read a lot of poetry, I mean, really a lot. I'm surprised by how much. Every now and then I'll open an anthology from the forties and I'll find that I know a lot of poems by heart. People always ask what influenced me, and I see lines in these books that really must have influenced me because I still have them in my head."

Interestingly, given her later choice to write stories, she didn't read much short fiction, favoring novels when she read prose. And she didn't read "those guys"—the standard list of American fiction writers. "Hemingway, for instance, didn't really interest me. I wasn't mad at him.
like a lot of people got to be later. I just wasn't interested. I was interested in that idea of using my own voice to make someone else's voice. Or actually using someone else's voice to get to my own."

Then, one evening, someone read a story at her house, a story that "was on Jewish themes," and she "all of a sudden felt that somehow I was given permission to write, by that story." She realized then that stories could come out of her own life, could be about what she knew, what she cared about and wanted to tell. "And then of course the first story I wrote was 'Goodbye and Good Luck.' I wrote that story for my aunt--for all my aunts--and for Jess' aunt. It was all about being Jewish and about the lives of women." It was also "all about" the Yiddish theater, and the culture that grew up around it on Manhattan's Second Avenue and environs. The romantic leads are Volodya Vlashkin, "the Valentino of Second Avenue" and author of The Jewish Actor Abroad, and Rosie Lieber, who worked first in novelty wear, then in a theater ticket booth and on stage as an extra, made artificial flowers at the kitchen table in the mornings because she "had to give Mama a little something" (LDM, 13), and wound up again in novelty wear, when she was "a lady what they call fat and fifty" (LDM, 19).

Her earliest stories also included "The Contest," with its unforgettable 'Jews in the News' puzzle series, and
"The Loudest Voice," in which a whole neighborhood of first and second generation immigrant Jews debates the required celebration of Christmas in their children's school pageant. In the next six years, during which Grace wrote eight more stories, she also produced "In Time Which Made a Monkey of Us All," which takes place in the Bronx neighborhood of her youth and is strongly Jewish in characters, references and mood, and "The Used-Boy Raisers," in which Faith makes a short passionate speech about the proper position and role of Jews in human history and about the 1948 designation of the state of Israel.

Clearly that moment of revelation, in this case the hearing of a story "on Jewish themes," is essential to the writer who is not among those listed—or perhaps we should say loaded—in the traditional literary canon of the West. Young Mrs. Paley was not Irish like James Joyce, nor was she British, like W.H. Auden. Female like Woolf and Jewish like Stein, she was nonetheless "other" than they in their childlessness and class privilege and, perhaps most important, in the language of that privileged class. The story she heard that day in her own home came from someone like her; it might have spoken in the language of immigrant voices, of the Bronx or its equivalent. Only when she knew that stories could be told in voices like hers, could she take W.H. Auden's good advice. Easy for him to say, "write in your own voice." His own voice was the voice of ENGLISH
LITERATURE: a descendant of Shakespeare and Dickens could say anything, born with a silver voice in his mouth. The story of Grace Paley's beginning to write stories illustrates her now-frequently repeated teaching: a writer begins by finding her own voice, and is thus enabled to reach toward the other, to speak in tongues--bringing her to knowledge of both self and other.

She says, "I'm really embarrassed. I can't remember [for sure] which I wrote first, 'Goodbye and Good Luck,' or 'The Contest.' But those were my first two stories." After many rejections--"both those stories were sent back by every other magazine"--the two were published in Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature, based at the University of Illinois in Urbana/Champaign. Accent, founded in 1940, was publishing established writers (like Wallace Stevens, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Richard Wright and John Dos Passos) as well as the work of new writers. Like Grace Paley, Flannery O'Connor, J.F. Powers and William Gass were first published in Accent. These editorial choices were the result of a "conscious effort to locate and...undeniable success in finding and publishing the talented, unpublished writer" (Hendricks, 4). Accent's longtime editor, Kerker Quinn, expressed a preference for "a more suggestive, concise technique" (Hendricks, 25), and was noted for his "truly eclectic" choice of fiction, the majority of which was "highly experimental in either form or subject matter"
(Hendricks, 139). Such a purpose and sensibility must have been necessary for the initial acceptance— in those New Critical times— of Grace Paley's first-person narratives about women, stories that are non-canonical in both style and subject.

After writing those first two or three stories during her convalescence, she did not send them out right away. Sybil Claiborne, whose son was one year ahead of Nora in the park and Greenwich House, and whose kitchen provided the opening scene in the first Faith story ("The Used-Boy Raisers"), says that "Grace wouldn't let them out of her clutches," but Jess showed the stories to some people, and Sybil was among them. All of those first readers were more than appreciative, she reports; they loved the stories.

The publication of Grace's first story collection is itself a good story, a tale of good fortune with a happy ending. And, like most of the stories Grace Paley writes, it's grounded in a network of women's and children's lives. Nora and Danny had some friends whose father worked at Doubleday. This fact became a stroke of luck when he once arrived at the wrong time— too early or too late or on the wrong day— to pick up his kids for his weekly visit, and his ex-wife said, "Well, why don't you read Grace's stories while you wait for them to get ready?" Whether this, or one of the other versions people tell, is what actually happened, the point is that Grace's children's friends and
their mother gave the stories to a reader who not only liked them very much indeed, but was in a position to act on his appreciation.

After reading "The Contest," "Goodbye and Good Luck," and "A Woman Young and Old," Ken McCormick spoke to Grace. "Write seven more and we'll publish them as a book," he said. He offered her a contract, which she negotiated through Tom Bowman, a friend from a college short story class, who acted as her agent for that first book. Though McCormick had asked for seven, Grace wrote eight more stories (the extra one is in the set that introduces Faith Darwin, called "Two Short Sad Stories from a Long and Happy Life") "much faster" than she wrote the first three. As she wrote during those years--Little Disturbances was published in 1959--she sent her work out to magazines. And so, rather backwards but with the usual amount of disappointment, she experienced the new writer's fate of frequent, if not constant, rejection.

When her stories were finally accepted by magazines, they were not always treated with respect. "A Woman Young and Old," published in Nugget, appeared under another title and with many lines omitted or altered extensively. (In fact, close reading of the two texts reveals fewer original sentences and paragraphs than altered ones.) Like other abused authors, Grace raged and wept. She had "a nervous collapse." She called the editor to object; he apologized,
saying that he hadn't thought she would mind--which is astonishing--and offered to print the story again with her original words. His candid response reveals the ignorance and carelessness implicit in his editing. Several "men's magazines" of that era, including Esquire when it still printed many sex cartoons and "pin-ups" of nearly-naked women, and Playboy, which continues the practice, used good fiction and astute journalism as high quality filler between "girlie" pieces. Such magazines provided space for fiction writers, and even paid well--or at least better than "little magazines." This is still the case with contemporary pornographers; Playboy continues to be the best example.

Doubleday, however, did not edit her stories, and Grace had control of their sequence, which she has maintained with each of her subsequent collections (including Leaning Forward, a book of poems). Little Disturbances presents its eleven stories in an order relatively close to that in which they were written, but this is not so much the case with her other books. But it has also happened, with the publication of the second and third books, that the design of her collections creates and maintains an ongoing community of characters within a complex of evolving themes. They constitute, in essence, a story cycle. By 1974, when she published Enormous Changes, Grace was even more obvious--whether consciously or not--in her repeated use of maturing characters and the creation of
thematic patterns by means of story sequence. Neither so fully integrated nor so deliberately constructed as Winesburg, Ohio, Grace Paley's stories, written over a thirty-five year period, are perhaps more like the cycle of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha tales; they describe and populate—with few exceptions—a neighborhood of characters who share and exchange knowledge of their mutual history. The order in which these stories are arranged creates a chronology for the lives of the major characters, and emphasizes certain themes.

That coherent, ongoing, fictional world might have been lost, were it not for the network of mothers and children—like those in her stories—that Grace, Nora and Danny belonged to. She says now that "if [Doubleday] hadn't taken [those first stories] for the collection...and [then] said to me, 'Write more,' for all I know, I would have just written the first three stories. That's a possibility. That's why I've always understood how people need encouragement to write."

4. See Ingram for extensive discussion and definition of story cycle form.

5. Moreover, some stories clearly are deliberate continuations of earlier ones, or refer directly to episodes and conversations which have taken place in earlier stories. For instance, Faith and Jack's conversation about having a baby late in life is continued from "The Story Hearer" (first published in 1982 in Mother Jones) to "Listening," which Grace recalls as one of the last stories written for her third collection (1985)—at least three years, and maybe as many as five years, later.
The young woman who realized at the age of twenty that her family considered her "a dud" had now, in 1959, to reassess that realization—and so did her family. Victor Goodside, who had seen his little sister's early poetry and had been "startled by the quality of it—she was quite young"—says that when "the first book came out there was this real feeling in the family that Grace had come through." Victor, realistic in his judgment, was also aware that Grace's stories were not spontaneous outpourings of the creative spirit. "I do have the sense that it was a struggle [for her to write]. And I guess you might say I was a little unhappy about it. I thought that her life was unnecessarily a struggle." He thought that "if Jess would only get a steady job"—he chuckles as he says this—"and take care of things," Grace would be able to write more stories. But he "accepted it as the way some people live in the Village, the bohemian life" of artists.

Jeanne Tenenbaum has also been aware of Grace's struggle to write, especially in terms of the competition among all the activities in her sister's life. She wishes that Grace had chosen a life that allowed her "to sit down, alone, everyday, to write"—and she hopes that now, having attained to eminence in her field, Grace will do that. When Jeanne read the first published stories, she too recalled that early promise and the family's hopes for Grace. "I
couldn't believe what I read. I was so taken aback, astonished, so amazed at the beauty of her work."

She says that their father had some criticisms, however. "He would say to her, 'Why do you write this way? What makes you write this way?" Isaac Goodside himself had written a book, an autobiography, for which he wanted his children to find a publisher. The father-as-poet appears in Faith's life when Gersh Darwin recites his work to his daughter, translating from Yiddish as he speaks.

Childhood passes
Youth passes
Also the prime of life passes.
Old age passes.
Why do you believe, my daughters,
That old age is different?

"What do you say, Faithy? You know a whole bunch of artists and writers."
"You're marvelous. That's like a Japanese Psalm of David."
"You think it's good?"
"I love it, Pa. It's marvelous." (ECLM, 46)

This excerpt from "Faith in the Afternoon," in which Faith's father is modest and his daughter admiring and encouraging, is markedly different from their exchanges in the later story, "Dreamer in a Dead Language," when he is arrogant and ambitious and she is dismayed at his interest in publicity and marketing (LSD, 11-38).

Isaac Goodside "thought he was a great writer," Jeanne says. "My father thought he was a great everything. And he wanted to give Gracie suggestions as to how to
write." Those "suggestions" became the heart of Grace Paley's most analyzed story, "A Conversation with My Father," in which the father-as-critic argues with his daughter about her writing. 6

"I would like to see you write a simple story just once more," he says, "the kind de Maupassant wrote, or Chekhov....Just recognizable people and then write down what happened to them next." [The daughter, who says she wants "to please him," writes, and offers her story to the father, who says:] "You misunderstood me on purpose....You left everything out." (ECLM, 161-2)

The fictional father's objections are stylistic, but they are moral, ethical and philosophical, too. He wants her characters to be described physically, and to be given personal histories, but they must also subscribe, within the plot, to the social mores he approves.

"...Pa, what have I left out now?....
"Her looks, for instance."
"Oh. Quite handsome, I think. Yes."
"Her hair?"
"Dark, with heavy braids, as though she were a girl or a foreigner."
"What were her parents like, her stock?...What about the boy's father? Why didn't you mention him? Who was he? Or was the boy born out of wedlock?"
"Yes," I said. "He was born out of wedlock."
"For Godsakes, doesn't anyone in your stories get married? Doesn't anyone have the time to run down to City Hall before they jump into bed?"
"Married or not, it's of small consequence."

6. Among the critics who examine and discuss this story are Klinkowitz, Meier, Schliefer, Hulley, Humy, Neff, Sorkin, Mandel, Kamel, DeKoven, and Coppula.
"It is of great consequence, he said." (ECLM, 162-63)

Additionally, the fictional father wants his writer-daughter to accept his definition of tragedy—not only in her fiction, but in her life as well.

"The end. The end. You were right to put that down. The end."
"I didn't want to argue, but I had to say, "Well it is not necessarily the end, Pa.""
"Yes," he said, "what a tragedy. The end of a person....You don't want to recognize it. Tragedy! Plain tragedy! Historical tragedy! No hope. The end."
"Oh, Pa," I said. "She could change."
"In your own life, too, you have to look it in the face." (ECLM, 166-67)

Their fictional quarrel, which reflects current arguments about critical sensibilities in postmodern American fiction, is fundamental to the ongoing philosophical disagreement between Grace Paley and her father, even when the composition of the story-within-the-story (in which a mother and son are juxtaposed with the father-daughter pair in the frame) is no longer the issue. Isaac Goodside and his daughter Grace fought together for nearly forty years. Jeanne says that when Grace would visit their father, his eyes would light up. Isaac "was crazy about her whenever she came. They'd fight, but he was crazy about her all the time. And she'd spend the time arguing

7. See Schliefer, for instance.
with him, both of them arguing at the top of their lungs. But he couldn't wait until she came again."

The family's response to her published work, with or without argument, was like Grace's own: recognition that yes, she was a writer. Once her first collection was complete, she felt that she really had to continue writing. "But then I also had to get a job." The children were nearly nine and eleven years old, and the Doubleday money couldn't take them very far, "so I went to Columbia University. And the pay was so minimal that they were embarrassed." She was typing for the University and says they were "so embarrassed" that they actually would tell her, "Well, take your time, work an hour and rest an hour." In that "rest" hour she could do her own writing. "Well, maybe they didn't say that. But that's what I did," at least for the "couple years" she worked there.

Sometimes she would bring stories written up longhand to transcribe at the typewriter; sometimes she would compose as she typed. She was not one of those writers who wakes up at three a.m. to write while the world--and her children--sleep. She laughs at the suggestion, saying, "That's not me--that's Bob Nichols--not me. When Bob lived in New York and had jobs [in the city] he would get up at 5:30 and write before he had to go to his job." In full sunlight, then, and on a very slim paycheck from Columbia University, Grace Paley continued to write.
The publication and positive response to *The Little Disturbances of Man* solidified Grace Paley's early reputation as a writer. One year before that collection appeared, the editors of *Accent* had already noted—when they published "The Contest"—that "Goodbye and Good Luck" had "attracted wide attention" when they printed it in 1956. That story is the first in *Little Disturbances*, a compelling opener to the collection. The book received national reviews, so that the critics too spoke in many voices. Praising the book, Virginia Kirkus was undisturbed by Grace's unusual style, finding that the stories revealed "a penetrating wry wit and a poignancy which avoids the sentimental"; she decreed "this first book...a demonstration of a considerable talent." *The New Yorker* bestowed a mixed blessing: "Mrs. Paley's writing is fresh and vigorous, and her view of life is her own, but she juggles her phrases at such a dizzy speed, executes so many sleights of hand...that it is not easy to see whether she is telling a story or merely performing tricks with words."
But Grace Paley had no wish to become the newest radius in New York's literary circles. She wanted, she insists, to "stay with" her friends: "I was so interested in my friends. I didn't want to leave them." And for many more years, Grace believed that to identify as a writer, she would have had to leave her chosen social and political world, "my sphere--which, interestingly or perhaps ironically, was creating my literature. I was very afraid...and my fear was the fear of loss, loss of my own place and my own people." Had she understood then what her characters learned nearly twenty years later, Grace might not have been so afraid. In "The Expensive Moment," the narrator explains how American artists responded to the revolutionary Chinese view of the artist as one who works to develop the culture of her people:

All sorts of American cultural workers were invited [to greet the Chinese visitors]. Some laughed to hear themselves described in this way. They were accustomed to being called "dreamer poet realist postmodernist." They might have liked being called "cultural dreamer," but no one had thought of that yet. (LSD, 189)

Grace Paley has explained to dozens of interviewers and audiences over the past three decades that she was always active in "local things" and really didn't want to become "a literary person." She was wary of the mystique of professional writers, both the academically and the aesthetically inclined. She wanted to stay "on the block"--that is, not only did she wish to remain outside the culture
of the literati, but she perceived the literary world almost wholly in terms of its most negative, and exclusive, reputation: she assumed, for instance, that association with other writers would necessitate leaving her friends and abandoning her political commitments. Bob Nichols even now refers to her as "a neighborhood type, not a coalition or abstract-level type."¹

The neighborhood is not only the most common locale in her stories, defining the milieu of her recurring character groups, but it also represents a feeling in Grace Paley, the sense of community and connection, the sense of being at home. In 1986, long after she had become comfortable with the appellation, "writer," she was the first winner of the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit, and was named State Author of New York. In her brief acceptance speech, she expressed gratitude for the honor, and admiration and respect for the committee of writers who

¹. It is also true that she did not receive invitations to join the literary community. Grace Paley—despite her interesting and interested reviews—was not put up for membership in the literary establishment. Indeed, she had at least one classic experience of the other sort: when LDM came out in 1959, she attended a literary cocktail party at which she was introduced to Norman Mailer. That great wielder of the phallic pen turned away from his new colleague with one sentence only: "I don't read women writers." (During the Vietnam War, Grace found herself Mailer's ally against the United States government; in the nineteen eighties, they opposed each other in "the PEN wars," when that international organization of writers was taken to task for its systematic marginalization of women by its women members, including Grace Paley.)
chose her by saying that "the only nicer thing maybe for me would be if I got an award from my block."

Her desire to stay small and work locally was a tactical decision, and the choice of a good socialist as well as the result of the fears she describes. But being female was basic to her decisions as well. In her choices, Grace Paley was also refusing to take up space, rejecting the possibilities of her own energy and talent. Her gender--like her motherhood--is not inconsequential here. She didn't become a public speaker until the early sixties; "I wasn't in that kind of situation, and I tried very hard not to be." Her trying to keep small, to stay in the family and on the block, was not only motivated by a fear of losing her homeground, but is also a classic female maneuver; women learn how to keep our place. Ironically, in her efforts to keep from getting too big, becoming too important, wielding too much power, she learned to prosper in the small plot she chose to cultivate.

Grace Paley's small plot was just like those of other young mothers in the nineteen-fifties. When Nora entered elementary school, Grace went to her first PTA meeting. At that meeting, her sister Jeanne recalls, something was said or done that evoked a strong response from the new member, Mrs. Paley. "She had never gotten up to speak, she had never spoken, but she got up and said what she wanted to say--and she told me that she liked [doing]
it. From then on it was easier for her. That was the beginning of her ability to get up and talk and say her piece. She grew active in the PTA and one thing led to another."

When Grace became politically active in the neighborhood, Nora perceived her actions as a function of motherhood, because "she began with going to the school and sticking up for her kids. And it just seemed like this is what mothers do." Moving outward, from the family onto the block, into the park and the wider neighborhood, was a natural extension of the maternal sphere. "From my point of view, since I was very little when she began, it was just an outgrowth of her motherhood. All the [important] action was always taken by the mothers." In "Politics," Grace describes some of that important action, displaying the accuracy of Nora's analysis with hilarity, as well as the irony intrinsic in all municipal business.

2. By 1970, Grace had grown comfortable enough with "saying her piece" to wield a megaphone at demonstrations, as she did, for instance, at the Varick Street Draft Induction Center in New York City that spring.
"Commies" and other assorted "creeps." No one on the Board of Estimate, including the mayor, was unimpressed. After the reiteration of the fifth singer, all the officials said so, murmuring ah and oh in a kind of startled arpeggio round lasting maybe three minutes. The comptroller...said, "Yes yes yes, in this case yes, a high 16.8 fence can be put up at once, can be expedited, why not..." Then and there, he picked up the phone and called Parks, Traffic and Child Welfare....By noon the next day, the fence was up. (ECLM, 139-41) 3

Danny explains the connection between Grace's politics and her motherhood. "As a mother she wanted to help make the world safe, help make a world that would still exist when her children grew up." Grace's style of mothering is an expression of her general politics, which grow out of a radical compassion--that same concern that she exhibited as a child during the Depression. Though she might feel angry, frightened, or indignant when she organizes or takes to the streets, these emotions are not the source of her activism. Sybil Claiborne speaks of her "as a nurturer rather than a mother, because that [meaning] spills over into so much of the world--her concern about the environment--everything goes beyond her being the mother of two children. You have to be careful with a word like 'motherhood,' because it can be so restrictive and so selfish. Being a mother was what rooted her in her

3. The first published version of this story, (WIN, 4.14, August 1968, 32-3), reads differently. Between 1968 and 1974, Grace altered the text. This is not unusual; she has occasionally published two or three different versions of stories and poems, or published what is virtually the same text with two or more different titles.
community, and pushed her into a certain kind of activity at a certain time in her life. Grace says, 'Your politics is where your life is.'"

Thus, in that frequent contradiction integral to the lives of women in this culture, both Grace's writing and her political work were constrained by the narrow range afforded women, while at the same time they were powerfully fueled by doing "woman's work" in "woman's place." Her present feminist consciousness was engendered within those restrictions, and it has produced her current analysis of the integrated nature of such seemingly disparate issues as women's reproductive rights, global militarism, the proliferation of nuclear power, daycare, racism, poverty, and gender equity in the workplace.

Danny remembers when Grace became involved in anti-war and anti-military activities in the late fifties, "though back then they called it the 'Ban-the-Bomb' movement." By the time he was six or seven years old, he had begun to worry about the future, his future. "Was I going to get to grow up? What was going to happen?" So he asked his mother, "and she more or less promised me that by the time I was grown up there wouldn't be any more war." And he remembers that she didn't waffle either; no "Let's hope...." She was definite; "I was so relieved."

Despite the inaccuracy of this prediction, Grace Paley was an effective teacher as a mother. The children
learned from her and, when still quite young, they were actively engaged in community struggles. Both Nora and Danny pulled away and reacted against Grace to some extent in their adolescence, in the sixties. Danny recalls that though he was involved with both the Peace Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, and "used to go to a lot of demonstrations," as a teenager he went through a period when he "didn't want to have anything to do with the political movements she was involved in." Adolescent disaffection notwithstanding, Nora explains that, for Grace's children, political action--like writing--"was what you did; it was what was happening, what was going on, especially in the sixties."

Tonto and Richard in the Faith stories are children of a politically conscious and active mother; their pronouncements and arguments are drawn from the dinner table debate they grew up with, just as their author's earliest political inclinations were fostered in the dining room on Hoe Street in the Bronx. Grace says that her daughter Nora's politics were clear very early, and that even when the teachers threatened to fail her for refusing to participate in bomb drills, she said, "I don't care, I'm not going to." Nora explains that "I really just watched her, and I got involved myself with people my age, and it was all just sort of natural."
That first political action Nora ever undertook herself was in elementary school, in the fifties—when her mother was eccentric, unusual—not yet a member of that vast sixties movement. "We had these shelter drills. And I remember being totally horrified by it, and I refused to do it. It was the first action I ever initiated." She knew that the precautions she and her classmates were being taught were ridiculous, and she resented the hypocrisy of their being mandatory, so she protested and opposed civil defense drills in her school. Her motivation, she says, was just "the terror. I mean, I was terrified. We were terrified by what we learned about the bomb. That was something I decided to do myself, but it came out of my knowing something that the other kids maybe didn't know—I knew about it because it was talked about in my house."

Most of the political actions the Paley children observed or took part in seemed "natural" because they were, literally, right in their neighborhood. The earliest community conflict Danny remembers was the one about the city buses; they'd drive down Fifth Avenue, come through the Washington Square arch, lumber into the park and turn around. They kept coming further and further into the park itself, and the transportation people wanted to route them all the way through. "Of course," Danny says, "this was where the kids were playing, so my mother mobilized the community to stop them—and they won that one. It was
probably the next year that [the city] wanted to ban the folksinging."

When Danny was still very young, the city administration attempted to ban the playing of music in Washington Square Park. At that time people sang—mostly folk music—in the park every weekend, and often during the week in spring and summer. "And this was even before portable amplifiers were invented, so it wasn't a question of loudness. They just wanted to ban it." That absurd ban is mocked in one of Faith's numerous digressions as she tells the story of a day in the park from her perch in "Faith in a Tree."

...all the blue-eyed, boy-faced policemen in the park are worried. They can see that lots of our vitamin-enlarged high-school kids are planning to lug their guitar cases around all day long. They're scared that one of them may strum and sing a mountain melody or that several, a gang, will gather to raise their voices in medieval counterpoint.
Question: Does the world know... that, except for a few hours on Sunday afternoon, the playing of fretted instruments is banned by municipal decree? Absolutely forbidden is the song of the flute and the oboe. (ECLM, 80-1)

One day, which Danny remembers "very clearly because it was so violent," all the folksingers came with their guitars, to protest the city's ban. "I was there with my mother. And to my great shock, because it seemed so peaceful—their playing their guitars—the police came, and they started clubbing everybody in sight. No provocation. You know, it was so
peaceful, just people playing music. They started clubbing everyone, and I got scared--naturally."

Grace's response was a revelation to her small son. "And then I saw something in my mother that I'd never seen before. This big cop grabbed me--I don't know, by the hair or the back of the neck, but he grabbed me. And my mother, who was about half of his height, pulled me away, pushed the cop and said, 'Don't you ever touch my kid!' And she said it in such a way that he backed off immediately. Here was this guy who was just clubbing people! And he was so big, with his gun and his club. I looked at her in a different way that day, because I had seen something in her, a kind of toughness, that I had never seen before. And I remember being really impressed by that. I was six years old, and that day has always stayed with me. And then she gathered together with other people and they defeated that ordinance. They defeated all those stupid things the city tried to do"--the buses, the music. People still sing in that park, and the buses don't go through the arch. "They remodeled the park around 1970, and in fact Bob [Nichols] was the architect of the new design."

Nora explains that she was "very proud of [Grace], always. But in the dangerous parts I was always very frightened." Like Danny, she tells of seeing her mother respond to danger and brutality with courage. At a demonstration in Times Square, there was a great crowd of
people and one cop was coming down toward Grace and the children, moving through the crowd, swinging his billy club—"probably in an arc, but back and forth, back and forth." He was getting closer and closer to them, when Grace moved toward him and put her hand up—"very fierce." She stopped him cold, saying, "Get away from my kids."

In "Ruthy and Edie," in the fiftieth birthday party section written in the early eighties, one of the friends recalls an anti-draft demonstration. Echoing Nora and Danny Paley, she talks about Ruth Larsen, who, in the third story collection, joins Faith Asbury as a strongly autobiographical character.

...we were sitting right up against the horses' knees at the draft board....And then the goddamn horses started to rear and the cops were knocking people on their backs and heads—remember? And, Ruthy, I was watching you. You just suddenly plowed in and out of those monsters. You should have been trampled to death. And you grabbed the captain by his gold buttons and you hollered, You bastard! Get your goddamn cavalry out of here. You shook him and shook him.

He ordered them, Ruth said....I saw him. He was the responsible person. I saw the whole damn operation. I'd begun to run—the horses—but I turned because I was the one supposed to be in front and I saw him give the order. I've never honestly been so angry. (LSD, 123-4)

Ruth's experience is based in much of Grace's own, some of which is described in the essay "Cop Tales." A series of recollections about personal confrontations with police assigned to political demonstrations, drawn from years of active resistance, the essay recounts an incident
at the Whitehall Street Draft Induction Center at dawn, obviously one of the sources for the episode in "Ruthy and Edie." The demonstrators surrounded the building; Grace and her pals ("Our group of regulars") were at the back.

Between us and the supply entrance stood a solid line of huge horses and their solemn police riders....Off to one side, a captain watched us and the cavalry. Suddenly the horses reared, charged us as we sat, smashing us with their great bodies, scattering our supporting onlookers. People were knocked down, ran this way and that, but the horses were everywhere, rearing--until at a signal from the captain, which I saw, they stopped, settled down, and trotted away. (24)

Grace Paley's opinions and experiences are part of the landscape in her stories. Her stories are not didactic, nor do they present a particular party line; nevertheless, they are the natural outgrowth of what Grace calls her pacifist anarchism. Most of them introduce people who live the same kind of life, motivated by the same kind of needs and ideals, as their author and her friends and family. Often the stories will display the conflicts and contradictions that dog one party line or another, as it makes its propagandistic way along the street.

The most autobiographical of Grace Paley's characters quarrel--even "holler" like the Goodsides--about their beliefs and ideals. This has been true since she began to write short fiction, from the first Faith stories in the fifties, "The Used-Boy Raisers" and "A Subject of Childhood," in which Pallid and Livid outrage each other
with their opposing views of the Catholic church and Faith is driven to violence in her fight with Clifford about the proper raising of children (LDM), to the recent "Listening," in which Faith and Jack argue about the value of optimism in the face of reality, Faith and Richard disagree about the meaning of the intelligentsia, Jack and Richard argue about revolution and the proper treatment of Faith, and Faith and Cassie struggle with the suddenly open acknowledgement of Faith's heterosexism (LSD).

It is important to understand that the absolute reality--fact for fact--of Grace Paley's life need not appear in her stories to render them peculiarly her own. For instance, in the sixties, as her son observed, she "always seemed to have these FBI agents following her, and I thought that the phone was tapped because it was always clicking--I'm sure it was tapped." This kind of experience designed and molded the consciousness that created "In the Garden," a story in which no autobiographical elements or characters appear. Written after a trip to Puerto Rico, informed by the ambience of that country, the text nonetheless draws on her knowledge of U.S.-style political secrecy, surveillance, corruption and arrogance of power.

4. Danny's assessment cannot be far off the mark. In 1987, when the War Resisters League honored Grace on her sixty-fifth birthday, some of the loudest laughs of the evening were in response to verbatim recitations from Grace's FBI file, now open to her by law.
The integrated quality of Grace's work—political experience informing the writing—is not a simple case of writing stories that are "about," or demonstrate, specific positions, attitudes or ideas. She does not write stories which purposely illustrate certain circumstances and attempt to effect certain responses in her readers. For instance, the core of "In the Garden" is not necessarily to be found in its presentation of the multiple issues of crime/money/capitalism/patriarchal power, but is revealed in the life of an aging woman who "had become interested in her own courage" (LSD, 44).

There is only one story which, Grace says, she consciously wrote to influence her readers in a particular direction: "Anxiety" (LSD, 99-106). In that story, she definitely wanted to deliver a message, to say to the "new young fathers"—"Now, listen, you guys...." Despite its overt message, however, even this story is not marred by didactic stiffness:

The young fathers are waiting outside the school. What curly heads! Such graceful brown mustaches. They're sitting on their haunches eating pizza and exchanging information. They're waiting for the 3 p.m. bell....The children fall out of school, tumbling through the open door. One of the fathers sees his child....Up u-u-p, he says, and hoists her to his shoulders. U-u-p, says the second father, and hoists his little boy. The little boy sits on top of his father's head for a couple of
seconds before sliding to his shoulders. Very funny, says the father. (LSD, 99)

Grace Paley opposes the subordination of art to propaganda, and though her political sympathies may lie with certain concepts and authors, she absolutely resists the idea that writers should strive to render their texts impervious to multiple interpretations. In a symposium on contemporary fiction in 1975, some years before reader response theory was widely accepted, Grace argued with William Gass about the role of the reader.

Paley: I think what you're forgetting, what you're underestimating, are the readers....art...[is] two things, it's the reader and the writer, and that's the whole of the experience.
Gass: You want the creative reader.
Paley: You've got 'em. I mean, he's there. 5
Gass: I don't want them.
Paley: Well, it's tough luck for you.
[Donald Barthelme interposes a remark.]
Gass: What I mean by this is that I don't want the reader filling in anything behind the language.
Paley: Right, that's what's wrong with you. You don't leave him enough space to move around....but that reader move[s] in, by God, where there [is] space, and he always will.
Gass: Oh yes, it can't be helped.
Paley: Well, I'm glad. ("Symposium," Shenandoah, 7-9)

On the other hand, she accepts and insists upon the social responsibility of the artist, encouraging the consciousness

5. Grace continued to employ the generic male in her language until very recently; her efforts to correct that long "standard" usage may now be heard in her conversation, and read in her fiction as well. See "The Story Hearer" and "Friends" for good examples.
that one's work has an impact on both the individual and the
society at large. 6

I consider that as a writer I have several obligations
and one of them is to write as damn well as I can. I
take that very seriously and responsibly and write as
truthfully as I can, as well, and I do really feel
responsible for the future of literature....The moral
word is "ought to be" which people don't like to use too
much these days. What ought to be? People ought to
live in mutual aid and concern, listening to one
another's stories. That's what they ought to do....I
want to find out a way. Is there a way for people to
tell stories to one another again and to bring one
another into that kind of speaking and listening and
attending community? (Shenandoah, 31)

Her disagreement with William Gass is notable
because it helps us to understand Grace Paley's position
among her peers--postmodern writers of short fiction in the
United States. Her stories--which are straightforward,
apparently autobiographical, often called realistic despite
their unusual chronology and occasional fantastic elements--
affect us in the same way as photography, film, and even
photographic realism in painting: they manipulate the
"reality" they seem merely to mirror; they rearrange
"reality," making it more visible than it could be as its
"real" self, rendering it more understandable, perhaps even
more accessible, than in its actual, non-art, condition.

6. See Gibbons' text, which documents another
symposium--in which Grace again took part--held nine years
later, at which the issue under discussion is defined as
social responsibility.
But the essentially political quality of her fiction has distinguished her among other innovative and experimental postmodern writers whose work, both in structure and content, directs and reflects the practice of the art of contemporary prose. Grace Paley corrects herself when she talks about literature: "I shouldn't say a work of art; I mean a work of truth." In contrast, William Gass promoted one of the tenets of postmodern art when he told the symposium audience that "we ought to abandon truth as an ideal as artists. I think it's pernicious" (Shenandoah, 5).

Indeed, when a reader in that audience referred to Gass' The Tunnel, and asked about the issue of "what Germany is like" in the book—relative, presumably, to what the actual country Germany "is like," Gass insisted that he hadn't "the vaguest idea what Germany is like" (Shenandoah, 17). But Grace, who says, "when I write, I'm trying to understand something which I don't understand to begin with," insisted on pointing out that, in The Tunnel, Gass "picked Germany for a reason. Why didn't you say Luxembourg or Italy or something[?]" (18, 17) She is unwilling to...

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7. In dealing with morality and ethics, Grace finds herself with odd bedfellows. Iris Murdoch, who told the assembled delegates at PEN International's 1988 meeting in London that writers must "defend the ability of ordinary prose to tell the truth," went on to deplore the idea of Women's Studies and Black Studies, and even to oppose the use of word processors by writers. Reported and quoted by Leah Fritz, "A Gathering of Writers," The Women's Review of Books, 5.12 (September, 1988), 20-21.
accept the abandonment of social responsibility inherent in Gass' precepts; she rejects the writer-as-ingénue postulated by Gass.

I think you know more than you say you know about Germans, Fascism and so forth. Also I think that what happens is the reader will come in to your book, and he isn't a total dummy. That reader has been alive and has been reading the papers and books, or if they're as old as me, they've lived through that whole period and they know a good deal about it. The whole business is joined and more knowledge occurs in your work, or more truth... than you know, or than you planned, or than you even wished. (Shenandoah, 18-19)

Readers of Grace Paley's stories encounter characters and narrators who, like their author, are advocates. A writer for whom Russian, Yiddish and the multiple ethnic and racial dialects of the Bronx and lower Manhattan constitute a mother tongue, she uses speech in the mouths of characters and narrators in such a way as to make it seem "real." Speech, which is the most prevalent mode in contemporary Western fiction--appearing far more frequently as both dialogue and first person narration in the past several decades than in previous eras--is the primary mode in Grace Paley's stories. 8 Helmut Bonheim suggests that the

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8. Helmut Bonheim discusses four narrative modes present "in most anecdotes": description, report, comment and "directly quoted speech" (1). He explains that "[t]hese four modes are the staple diet of the short story and the novel" (1), and offers an historical analysis of their use. "In our own age, speech stands high in the esteem of most readers. Description is thought boring except in small doses; comment, [considered] moralistic generalizing, is almost taboo, even where embedded in speech, and even report is preferred in the dress of, or at least heavily interlarded with, speech....Speech seems most neutral, least
prevalence of one mode or another "has to do with the purposes to which" writers put their stories, "or at least with" their "assumptions about [the] stories' functions" in the world (14). Grace Paley's purposes and assumptions, as revealed in her debate with William Gass, are served by the predominance of speech in her texts.

Speech may be the most apparently autobiographical narrative mode because it creates an atmosphere of immediacy and intimacy. Moreover, its immediacy and intimacy render speech persuasive; it is rhetorically—and thus politically—effective. Much of what Grace asserts in her stories, as in political action, is the strength and force of individual character embodied in human presence; it is that presence which carries her program and is heard in her fictional voices. Crafted by one with an ear for the music of language, a writer trained as a story hearer, the written "spoken" word appears to be as open to spontaneous response as it does in actual conversation; the felt possibility of instant rejoinder, even contradiction, is sustained.

The Paley trademark is a sharply honed prose that echoes the spoken word for her readers. She does not merely listen carefully and then "record" the spoken word; in the age of techno-sound we've all heard the halting, slurred, authorial [as in "authority" and "authoritarian"]. This has not always been so....Many a nineteenth century short story has hardly a word spoken in it" (8-9).
and repetitious quality of "realtalk" in unedited recorded conversation. She extracts the essence—rhythm and diction, feeling and consciousness—of speech, and then creates the illusion that people are speaking. Grace Paley as "voice" differs from those classical American writers of short fiction who often employed the first person narrator. Edgar Allen Poe never attempted to make us believe, for instance, that we were actually in the presence of Fortunato and Montresor; Montresor's first person voice does not suggest the spoken word. It is a "writerly" voice, obviously and deliberately an element of written narrative.

Most of the collected stories—thirty-one out of forty-five—are told in the first person; the voice is that of "I," a character in the story who speaks to us, to other characters, and often to herself or himself in meditation or ironic consideration. Of these thirty-one, at least twenty-two (including Faith in more than a dozen cases) are narrators who may be associated with the author through specific autobiographical elements or through her increasingly well-known politics and world view. Her first person narration, projecting a consciousness that is apparently present, relates to its readers familiarly, and so, like a friend or acquaintance, seems to unconsciously disclose more of its apparent "self" than the third person voice could do. (We might, of course, simply move back yet one more step, and say that a third person narration is
itself always delivered by a "first" person. Some presence is suggested; someone has written those words.)

One of Grace Paley's most effective devices in this area is her employment of the **overheard narrator**. Subject to the influence of a kind of sliding consciousness (which suggests the author's presence in the text), characters comment on the remarks and answer the questions of the narrator, who is not--even if also a character--speaking to them, and may not even be present when they speak. In "Goodbye and Good Luck," when Rosie Lieber, a first person narrator, is introduced to Volodya Vlashkin, she tells her niece Lillie--and the reader--"I took one look, and I said to myself: Where did a Jewish boy grow up so big? 'Just outside Kiev,' he told me." (LDM, 10)

Additionally, Grace went on to create third person narrators who are omniscient to the point of transcendence; their story-telling is unaccountably overheard by other characters, who respond to dialogue they could not actually have heard. For instance, in "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute," the third person narrator tells us that Alexandra, while in conversation with Dennis in his taxi on the way to visit her father, "wondered: What is the life expectancy of the mind?" The text then moves to a small block of white space--a technique which generally signifies movement in time or space, as it does here--and then to the hospital room of Alexandra's father, who immediately responds to her
wondering: "Eighty years, said her father, glad to be useful" (ECLM, 121).

Her creation of the overheard narrator is no doubt a result of her disdain for transitions. She explains, "I'm not afraid to make great leaps....I hate the word 'transition'--I just like to make a good jump" (Bonetti). The same kinds of transitions--or non-transitions--occur in other stories, linking characters and scenes through time and space by means of the initially external third person narrative voice, which, by sliding into the dialogue, seems almost to abdicate its omniscience.9

That almost-abdication is typical of the politics of the writer/reader relationship in these stories; Grace Paley's texts are open, accessible. Her aberrant punctuation--especially the nearly total elimination of quotation marks from the dialogue of more recent work--and her intimate conversational style help to keep her stories from stiffening into a flat minimalism. Readers respond to the words on the page as people respond to the author herself, in person. She is an effective translator, creating apparent truth and the suggestion of autobiography by her written rendering of the spoken word; the successful

9. Some other examples of the overheard narrator, which Grace has employed more frequently in recent years, are found in "A Conversation With My Father" (ECLM, 167); "The Long-Distance Runner" (ECLM, 189); "Dreamer in a Dead Language" (LSD, 12); "The Story Hearer" (LSD, 134); and "The Expensive Moment" (LSD, 180, 185).
translation is clearly demonstrated whenever a reviewer attributes the words or thoughts of characters and narrators to their author.10

Grace's readers believe that they know her, that they really know who she is. Even readers who know none of the facts of her life, who have read only one story, often insist that Grace Paley embodies the voice of the narrating speaker. Indeed, Nora Paley reports that when she is introduced as her mother's daughter, new acquaintances—thinking of Faith—invariably comment, "Oh, I didn't know Grace Paley had a daughter; I thought she had two sons." Nora says that "this happens all the time. I can't believe how often it happens and how intense it is. I'm always shocked."

Grace's technique induces acceptance and often belief; it is a rhetorical device which serves, politically speaking, to "organize" her readers. The author puts forward a "self" in the text, a character for us to identify with, to like and accept, and then to believe. Writers whose characters' philosophical alignment is enormously different—like Philip Roth's mother-blaming, woman-hating

10. There are several examples among scholars and commentators. Nancy H. Packer, for instance, equates "the loudest voice" of young Shirley Abramowitz with the author's voice in her latest collection (34). Similarly, Burton Bendow, writing about "The Long-Distance Runner," refers to Faith as the "heroine, the intrepid Paley without disguise" (598).
men, filled with fear and shame of their Jewishness and resentful of their maladjusted masculinity— are equally successful at capturing the sympathy of readers with this technique.

Even in Grace's own work, we find the compelling power of narrators whose easy familiarity and accessibility urge us toward an acceptance of what we might otherwise find unacceptable. In "The Little Girl," a story in which a young girl is raped and killed, the narrator's conclusion, which concludes the text itself— giving him the last word— is that Juniper, the little girl, has killed herself. "That is what happened," Charlie says in the story's final line. Finding herself "tore up, she must of thought she was gutted inside her skin" after being beaten and raped, her flesh bitten and torn, so "she made up some power somehow and raise herself up that windowsill and hook herself onto it and then what I see, she just topple herself out" (ECLM, 158). In "A Conversation With My Father," written a few years earlier, (at least) two distinct points of view are presented, and the final word is given to one which appears to oppose the (strongly autobiographical) narrator's. Here, however, the author has chosen to offer one perspective only, and to give the power of conclusive placement to that vision.

Unlike that of Grace Paley's other sexually adventurous young girls, Juniper's fate is realistic. In
contrast to the adventures of Cindy and Josephine, those other two obstreperously sexual adolescents, Juniper's experience as a runaway teenager, including her death--except for the fact that she is a white girl assaulted by a black man--is more probable than either of their exploits. The racial implications alone may be a shock to the reader: though Grace has given narrative power to a black man, she has also made him complicitous in a heinous crime, and has had him blame the victim for her own death. And she has placed his story in the midst of a collection that deals, with the exception of the very short story "Samuel," almost exclusively with white people. What is the effect of this double or triple shock? Can the more positive portrayals of black women (Mrs. Luddy, Cynthia) in the final story mitigate the impact of this story's placement in the collection?

The story juxtaposes an old stereotype--the scenario in which a black man rapes a white woman--against the persuasively effected identification of a reader (of any race and either gender) with a black male narrator. A reader's sympathy for the thoughtful, compassionate, wise narrator Charlie (in conjunction with probable disgust for the white villain Angel), leaves Juniper as emotionally isolated in the reader's world as she is in her own. Little white Juniper gets just what she deserves for running away from home and wanting to go to bed with a black man.
Grace's longtime friend Karl Bissinger, who read this story in manuscript (and advised Grace not to publish it), explains that Charlie is telling a story that was actually told to Grace. The "real" narrator—whom Karl also knew—was Bill Dixon, a friend of the author until his death a few years ago. He and Grace met when both were working in the Southern Conference for Human Welfare during World War II. Grace says that it was through Bill that she learned much of what she uses in her black characters, much of what she puts into her black voices; she speaks through him.

"That's him talking in a couple of my stories," she says.

Like Grace, Bill spent a lot of time socializing in Washington Square Park; he was from the South, a modest, serious, easygoing man, often humorous. Here is a case where factual information produces one of the primary problems in biographical criticism: Once we know about the people whose lives influenced the writer, affecting the choices she has made, we begin to think differently about, for instance, the authorial decision to give the heaviest weight, the most narrative influence, to the man who says that Juniper killed herself, the speaker who puts the final burden of the little girl's destruction onto her own thin shoulders.

This story presents us with contradictory and apparently mutually exclusive choices: blaming the young white girl who ran away and flirted and suddenly found
herself trapped; blaming the initially engaging young black man who beat her up, raped her, and possibly killed her; blaming the white junky who probably did ravage and kill her; or castigating and rejecting the trustworthy older black man who blames her for causing her own death. The last interpretation is perhaps least likely, even though Charlie, who serves as our source and guide throughout, reveals at least a touch of unreliability. His sources of information are unclear; some of what he tells, according to the facts of his own narration, he could not possibly know. This story, with its multiple conflicts, is an extraordinary example of the use of direct speech—especially in the mouth of a first person narrator—as the mode of choice for fictional story-tellers who are arbiters of morality and ethics, judges of motive and definers of situation who lead readers to engage in considerations which are fundamentally political.

Though distinguished from many contemporary story-tellers by her work's readily discernible sociopolitical context and content, Grace Paley is among those fiction writers whom literary scholars and theorists have recently come to call metafictionalists. 11 Her work is self-reflective; her stories are often about the telling of

11. See, for instance, Bonheim, and especially Klinkowitz—who deals specifically with Grace Paley in these terms—in Subversions and his Delta article.
stories--her subject is frequently the recounting of lives. But, unlike stories which are primarily about stories--that is, about narrative, about fiction, about writing--Grace's texts maintain a definite social--and thus political--component. She has included her assessment of this combination in "Debts," written in the late sixties.

It was possible that I did owe something to my own family and the families of my friends. That is, to tell their stories as simply as possible, in order, you might say, to save a few lives. (ECLM, 10)

Metafictionally speaking, Grace Paley writes about story tellers and story hearers; her characters sometimes use language that calls attention to itself as language. The story called "The Story Hearer," for instance, is a text in which language--as an issue, as a topic--is discussed by major characters, used as a metaphor, and mentioned casually in passing. Treadwell Thomas, "a famous fussy gourmet," describes his former career in "the Language Division of the Defense Department," when his assignment was:

to develop a word or series of words that could describe, denote any of the Latin American countries in a condition of change--something that would by its mere utterance neutralize or mock their revolutionary situation....[He] came up with "revostate." (LSD, 138-9)
When Faith, as narrator, later recalls her small-mindedness in part of their conversation, she asks her readers:

Don't you wish you could rise powerfully above your time and name? I'm sure we all try, but here we are, always slipping and falling down into them, speaking their narrow language, though the subject, which is how to save the world—and quickly—is immense. (LSD, 140)

And Faith includes a brief consideration of language when she muses about having a baby late in life:

...there was first the little baby Isaac....before he was old enough to be taken out by his father to get his throat cut, he must have just lain around smiling and making up diphthongs and listening.... (LSD, 144)

Similarly, her characters sometimes talk about each other as characters. For example, Mrs. Raftery, who is Ginny's interested neighbor in "An Interest in Life" (LDM), and the narrator of her own story in "Distance" (ECLM), is also Faith's neighbor in "The Long-Distance Runner" (ECLM); in that story, the narrator (Faith herself) tells us that Mrs. R. not only has a history of being liked, loved and endured by her, but was in fact invented "by me" (180). So Faith, the narrator and ostensible writer of the story, made up Mrs. Raftery, and tells us so.

An instance that extends through nearly the whole story cycle is Grace's use of the character named Dotty Wasserman (also called Dorothy and Dot), who appeared in one of her first three stories, "The Contest." In that story, written in the fifties, first published in Accent, and
included in the first collection in 1959, Dotty is one of
the two major characters. She is

Jewish, which is often a warm kind of girl, concerned
about food intake and employability....A medium size
girl, size twelve, a clay pot with handles--she could be
grasped....On Sundays she'd come out of Brooklyn with a
chicken to roast. (LDM, 67-68)

Dotty wants to marry; her boyfriend does not. She makes
strenuous efforts to change his mind, and acts in decidedly
bad faith throughout most of their relationship. Freddy's
final offer is only "a great opportunity to start on a more
human basis" (77), which does not include wedlock. She
leaves him.

Dotty appears again in "Faith in a Tree," written in
the middle or late sixties and included in the second story
collection. There she has become Ricardo's refuge, cited in
a letter that does not include inquiries about his children
or enclose a check for child support but instead complains,
as Faith reads aloud to their mutual friend Alex Steele:

"I am not well. I hope I never see another rain forest.
I am sick. Are you working? Have you seen Ed Snead?
He owes me $180. Don't badger him about it if he looks
broke. Otherwise send me some to Guerra Verde c/o Dotty
Wasserman. Am living her with her. She's on a
Children's Mission. Wonderful girl. Reminds me of you
ten years ago. She acts on her principles. I need the
money."

...
"Dotty Wasserman!" Alex says. "So that's where she is... a funny plain girl." (ECLM, 82-83)

Dotty next figures prominently in "Love," written in the late seventies and early eighties and published in the third collection. Her character has changed again, and she is not the same as either Freddy's Dotty, Ricardo's, or Alex's. What is notable here is that Grace has used her to connect "Love" and Later the Same Day with "The Contest" and Little Disturbances, and to play with connections among autobiography, "real life" and fiction.

In "Love," the I-narrator's husband, relating a list of his romances, includes Dotty in his most recent--"that is, the past fifteen years or so"--list of lovers. "Hold on, I said. What do you mean, Dotty Wasserman? She's a character in a book. She's not even a person. O.K., he said." (LSD, 4). The wife immediately makes up a little story-within-the-story, and in it she creates a fictional lover who turns out to be her husband--just as he had appropriated the fictional Dotty Wasserman. "I used to be in love with a guy who was a shrub buyer.... [in] the downtown garden center of the city." Her husband asks, "How come I don't know the guy?" and she can only comment disgustedly, "Ugh, the stupidity of the beloved. It's you, I said." (4). Then she asks:
....what's this baloney about you and Dotty Wasserman? Nothing much. She was this crazy kid who hung around the bars. But she didn't drink. Really it was for the men, you know. Neither did I--drink too much, I mean. I was just hoping to get laid once in a while or maybe meet someone and fall madly in love.....She was also this funny mother in the park, years later, when we were all doing that municipal politics and I was married to Josephine. Dotty and I were both delegates to that famous Kansas City Meeting of Town Meetings. N.M.T.M. Remember? Some woman.

No, I said, that's not true. She was made up, just plain invented in the late fifties.

Oh, he said, then it was after that. I must have met her afterward.

He is stubborn.....[They spend the evening together, make love, sleep, and wake.] In the morning he said, You're some lover, you know. He said, You really are. You remind me a lot of Dotty Wasserman. (LSD, 4-7)

Grace Paley was a "funny mother in the park" and Bob Nichols, the landscape architect who designed the park, is the model for the "shrub buyer" from Vesey Street. Both Grace and Bob are story-tellers, writers who appear here fictionalized, telling stories to each other, within a story Grace is telling us; these identities turn on the hinge of the Dotty Wasserman character, first invented twenty-five or thirty years earlier, and identified as a character within these texts. Complex in its faceted metafictionality, this story is about writing/telling stories as much as it is about its other themes and ideas.12

12. The metafictional quality of Grace Paley's work has increased over time. In the first collection, there are (at least) two stories in which "stories" or fiction, are important business: In "The Loudest Voice," the question is, who should narrate? Who has the right/responsibility to tell the New Testament story of Jesus' birth? And in "The Floating Truth," writing is revealed as the creation of falsehood. In the second collection, "Changes" deals with Dennis' writing of poetry and song lyrics, which are
In this way, the stories insist upon demonstrating that they are texts, explaining the narrator's choice of words, questioning the truth of any given narration, presenting two or more versions of the same story, or several stories which conflict, to describe the same situation and people. "The Immigrant Story" in Enormous Changes is an example: the "story" of Jack's parents is told twice, with two different plots, in two different voices—one a source of anger between Faith and Jack, one a revelation of tenderness for them both. Grace Paley's narratives cultivate self-explanation and self-examination in the reader, soldering the connection between her work as a writer and her work as an activist. In both arenas, she insists upon revelation, eschewing mystification and denying
power to traditional, canonical, institutionalized forms, demanding active participation from readers and citizens.

Strikingly--but not contradictorily--Grace also makes frequent literary allusions, which display her extensive knowledge of the canon in English and American literature (and great affection for that canon) as in this passage from "Dreamer in a Dead Language":

I was once a pure-thinking English major--but, alas.... What poet did you think was so great when you were pure?
Milton, he said. He was surprised. He hadn't known till asked that he was lonesome for all that Latin moralizing. You know, Faith, Milton was of the party of the devil, he said. I don't think I am. Maybe it's because I have to make a living.
I like two poems, said Faith, and except for my father's stuff, that's all I like. This was not necessarily true, but she was still thinking with her strict offended face. I like, Hail to thee blithe spirit bird thou never wert, and I like, Oh what can all thee knight at arms alone and palely loitering. And that's all. (LSD, 14-15)

But though that knowledge and affection connect her to the educated classes and the elite (of both writers and readers) in literary history, her style and subject display her cultivation of the grassroots. Grace is like the Romantic poets Faith quotes, in her desire to speak a common language, to be understood and to understand over a greater range than canonical fiction in English generally attempts. Grace Paley's reader might well be a woman

13. She also resembles the metaphysical poets, in her use of science and technology, both as subject, as in "In Time, Which Made A Monkey of Us All" (LDM) and "At That Time, or The History of a Joke" (LSD), or as metaphor, as in
surrounded by more diapers than daffodils, but like the Romantics, her writing is born of the same impulse as her politics; she seeks illumination. Art serves, she explained at Northwestern University in 1984, the same purpose as justice: to divulge "what isn't known." It is "the lighting up of what is under a rock, of what has been hidden." She argued that writers—especially those whose voices have not been heard before in Western literature—begin by saying, "I've got to light this up, and add it to the weight and life of human experience" (Gibbons, 234).

Her stories repeatedly assert that the attempt to distinguish between right and wrong is essentially the attempt to see clearly. Her characters, like Grace herself, strive to define and maintain an ethical base in their lives; they deliberately engage—if not embrace—the moral complexity of daily life, choosing to live consciously and analytically. Grace Paley seeks illumination for the sake of revelation, and revelation for the sake of the action it inspires. Often nearly rabbinical in her rhythms and themes, she is a practitioner of the art of the question—the question asked, answered, re-asked, and re-answered, as

"Wants" (ECLM): "He had had a habit throughout the twenty-seven years of making a narrow remark which, like a plumber's snake, could work its way through the ear down the throat, halfway to my heart. He would then disappear, leaving me choking with equipment" (5).
in this contemporary response to the Socratic dialogue from "The Expensive Moment": 14

Nick: For godsakes, don't you understand anything about politics?
Richard: Yeah, and why does Israel trade probably every day with South Africa?
Ruth (Although her remarks actually came a couple of years later): Cuba carries on commercial negotiations with Argentina. No?
The boys at supper: Tonto (Softly, with narrowed eyes): Why did China recognize Pinochet just about ten minutes after the coup in Chile?
Richard (Tolerantly explaining): Asshole, because Allende didn't know how to run a revolution, that's why. (LSD, 184-5)

The answers to such questions—formed in the reader's mind as well as Richard's—are the truth Grace Paley seeks in writing her stories. Her characters query each other and their readers so that we all have a chance to answer.

When the first story collection was complete in 1959, Jess Paley delivered the stories to Ken McCormick's office at Doubleday. When the editor called the Paleys' apartment later, having read them all with much excitement and wanting to know if there were more, Jess, who answered the phone, says that he lied—instantly and

14. This is a story in which John Keats, "brilliant and tubercular," is imagined among pale green shoots of rice, "[w]orking hard in the fields of Shanxi," but still criticized by "[t]he head communard" who laughs at him, saying, "Oh what can ail thee, pale individualist?" (LSD, 182-83) (At around the same time, Bob Nichols was writing William Blake into his fiction, as a full character, along with Jack Kerouac, among others.)
enthusiastically: "Yes, dozens--she has dozens more." In fact, however, Grace's next story collection was not to appear for fifteen years, and individually published stories were scattered among several different literary, political, and academic journals over those years. That fifteen year period spanned the rising of the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, and the Women's Movement--all of which fostered Grace Paley's evolution as a political activist and fed the well of consciousness from which her stories continue to be drawn.
Though Grace Paley never stopped writing, and the publication of her first book had demonstrated that she was in fact "a writer," her energy turned increasingly to political activity after 1960. Her desire to remain outside the literary world was abetted by her interest in the growing peace movement. She was one of the neighborhood people who founded the Greenwich Village Peace Center in 1960-61, and peace work became her political center in this decade. Additionally, in 1965 she began to teach fiction writing to college students, which altered her view of the literary community by urging her further into it--an ironic turn for a non-academic artist and activist.

In fact, her growing reputation as a writer--which burgeoned in the mid-seventies and beyond--was fostered by the extraordinary circumstance of her first book's being reissued, by two different publishers, in 1968 (The Viking Press, hardcover) and 1973 (The American Library's Plume Books imprint, paperback). Three of the more obvious effects of this practically unheard-of situation were these: new generations of readers came to know her work, keeping
her as current as if she had published new collections; she made money by her art; and (a less felicitous result) she was misunderstood, perhaps even held back in her development, for the reading public expected her, as late as 1973, to be the woman—the authorial persona—who had written "A Woman Young and Old," when and while she was generating a new conclusion for "Faith in a Tree" and creating "The Long-Distance Runner," two stories which reveal extensive development of political consciousness in their author.1

In that same vein, Grace was disappointed and irritated to find that her book's subtitle had been inverted, and its preposition changed. Her own full title—carried on the original edition—was The Little Disturbances of Man, Stories of Women and Men at Love. But the new edition read: The Little Disturbances of Man, Stories of Men and Women in Love. Not only was her inversion of the genders ignored, but her prepositional suggestion of the adversarial quality of emotional relationships between women and men, a central theme in almost every story of that

1. So we see excerpted blurbs on the 1973 edition's cover from Harvey Swados, who praises Grace's creation of "sexy little girls," and from Philip Roth, who congratulates the author on having an "understanding of loneliness, lust, selfishness and...fatigue that is splendidly comic and unladylike."
volume, was erased. Re-publication was neither an unmixed blessing nor an enticement into the writer's life.

Her next stories, collected for *Enormous Changes At the Last Minute* in 1974, were all written in between--or during--meetings, actions, classes and readings. By the end of the fifties, the American Friends Service Committee had begun to fund small neighborhood peace groups; naturally their first contacts were with those who had political experience, especially people like Grace and her friends, who had already begun to oppose the proliferation of atomic and nuclear weapons, and attempt to educate against militarism. The Quakers' method was to seed small neighborhood organizations by sharing information, paying the rent on an office for the first six months, and encouraging each group's autonomy.

The Village Peace Center was such a group, begun largely by PTA members from PS 41. Many people who became Peace Center members in the early sixties were already working on the General Strike for Peace, or attending small local meetings on neighborhood issues. These included Mary Perot Nichols and her husband Bob, who would later become Grace's lover and second husband; Mary and Bob were separated by mid-decade, Jess and Grace shortly afterwards. Bob and Grace met in the struggle to close the roadway
through the park; he had been very active before she came into the fight as a representative for the third grade of PS 41. (In 1960, Bob Nichols rode in the last private car to drive through Washington Square.) The Nichols and Paley families knew each other and had friends in common, though the three Nichols children—Kerstin, Duncan and Eliza—were several years younger than Nora and Danny Paley.

Grace says that what she learned in this period from non-native New Yorkers like Mary and Bob, people who'd lived in other cities and in small towns, was that "you can fight city hall"—and win. Bob Nichols concurs, in ironic military metaphor. "We were very successful. Almost every war we waged, we won. All of our local campaigns were successful, with rare exceptions." This nearly all-win, almost no-loss record, gained in the park, in the school, and on other neighborhood issues, could not hold in the larger arena of national and international struggles, but it did strengthen Grace and her companions, encouraging them for the larger "campaigns" ahead. That was part of her education; she learned that if small groups of local people take action, they can win. To those who fear such local victories will only make people unrealistic, Grace says that's not so—"It happened, didn't it? It was real. We knew that you could do it, if you could just hold on, you
could prevail. When you sit down in the park, if you stay there, you can win." Grace's personal stubbornness was intensified by what she learned in city and neighborhood politics, which fostered the tenacity necessary for organized resistance.

Other members of the Peace Center soon included Sybil Claiborne, by then a good friend, and Karl Bissinger, who came down from north of Fourteenth Street to join the group. Karl, who also became a personal friend, worked closely with Grace at the Center, and later in the War Resisters League, for over two decades; he says that it was at the Peace Center in the early sixties that they all began to understand that the Vietnam War "was really being run from Washington. How innocent we all were!"

Grace remembers that when she began to work in the Village Peace Center in '60 or '61, they fought civil defense drills in schools, and protested atomic and nuclear bomb testing. "It was totally absorbing. I always had a certain amount of anti-warness in me. That was true even when I was in high school. Even in elementary school." At the Peace Center they also did "a certain amount" of civil rights work; they tried to work with people in Harlem growing out of a home base that fostered anti-racism as well. And Grace's interest was also in the city itself, the
political metropolitan area, so that her consciousness grew beyond the block, beyond the neighborhood. "I was really interested in what we came to call 'ecology,' the whole thing about the parks and the piers and the rivers and the land that was New York, that was Manhattan, that was the islands and the boroughs around it."

Sybil, who has done political work with Grace for nearly thirty-five years, says that there is a notable difference between the central role her friend played at the beginning of the Peace Center and Grace's current situation. In the early years, Grace was really in the middle of the organizing. She had a lot more to say about what was to be done. Many of the actions and policy decisions that came out of the Peace Center were strongly influenced by Grace. But "over the years" she has stepped to the side. Now, in similar groups, while she may offer suggestions of a focus for action, she seldom initiates. Sybil assumes that her new posture is a result of having become "famous"—she doesn't want to dominate the meeting—as well as the fact that Grace is "a genuine listener, a very careful listener." She listens well, to learn before she decides whether to speak. "Over the years she has taken more and more of a back seat."
In 1961, when Grace was one of the new group's key organizers, the Peace Center arranged a sizable demonstration at City Hall, protesting the municipal air raid shelter program. Their success led almost directly to their frequent actions against United States policy in Vietnam. Bob Nichols says that the group's "specialty" was neighborhood vigils; he remembers being out on the street in the snow in front of a City Planning Board meeting, and feeling strong support from the community when "people we knew all came by and said hello." When the war was recognized, and its origins more fully understood—as Karl explained—Grace became one of the people (she may have been the originator of the idea) who read aloud the names of the war dead at vigils, urging that American troops be brought home and the draft ended. Throughout the Vietnam War years, she was one of a group of friends that picketed the courthouse every Saturday or Sunday, carrying signs that read "Not our sons." They never missed a weekend, no matter what the weather was, in eight years.

These demonstrations were part of the growing national movement against the Vietnam War and the draft, and demanded a tremendous amount of Grace's energy and time. Her children, strongly affected by her activities, are truly "children of the sixties" in that they were themselves
participants in protests against the war and racism, and in the street culture that flourished throughout the period.

Like many high school students, they struggled with elements in their own lives—the inadequacy of the schools, the adolescent drug scene, their parents' growing disaffection—that replicated massive social upheaval throughout the United States and Western Europe.

But the Paley children's adolescence produced at least one mirror reversal of those found in the "typical" American family. Where most sixties parents despaired of their children's suddenly revolutionary inclination, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, Danny Paley says that he became very conservative for about a year, "simply because everyone else in my family was so liberal." He hung up huge pictures of Lyndon Johnson in his room, and displayed them in his windows. He says he did it because he knew that "it annoyed everybody. The more it annoyed them the more I put the pictures up." Furthermore, he "insisted" on visiting the capitol and the White House, as an exercise in citizenship and patriotism.

Despite that brief period as a junior right-winger, Danny never strayed so far from home as to actually join the opposition. Grace recalls with pleasure that he always—even in grammar school—loved neighborhood actions,
especially when politics came right to the family's door. Nelson Rockefeller visited PS 41, as did Ed Koch before he became mayor. "And Danny loved that," Grace says. "He loved the fact that it was right there, next door, on the block, on the street." During the middle and late sixties, he and his friends were active in anti-war demonstrations, several of which he remembers as "really violent." Now, though his judgment stands allied with theirs, Danny Paley does not often practice the political activism of his mother and sister.

Maybe even more than her mother, Nora seemed awfully radical to her kid brother. As a child, she'd had basically the same politics as Grace, and recalls that "Danny was a little different." She feels that his stance had more to do with his reaction to her than to his mother, because of his being the younger child. Alluding to Danny's "patriotic period," she remembers that even in the fifties, he would tease her by saying, "Oh, you just like Castro because he has a beard." He was near the mark there, Nora laughs: "That was probably true; when I saw someone with a beard I did like them, because they looked familiar to me. Every man in the Village had a beard, and no one anywhere else did."
Like her mother before her (and her brother immediately after), Nora Paley rejected high school. "I wasn't not interested in learning. I was passionately interested in learning." But unlike Grace, who attributes her "failure" to succeed in high school only to herself, Nora developed a political critique of the school system. Like many high school students of that time, some of whom organized teach-ins, published independent newspapers and magazines, picketed their schools, demanded changes in curriculum, or dropped out in great numbers, she understood the hypocrisy of the system, and was very angry at being "forced to be in a place where we did nothing all day." She railed against the racism and class discrimination inherent in the tracking and grading systems. "All my friends were Puerto Rican. They were all being put in these vocational classes." Nora remembers the struggles of her good friends who were not allowed into the college-prep track even when they had asked to be placed there and demonstrated that they could do the work.

She feels that Grace, who'd always believed in public schools and the public school system, "just didn't know" about the daily reality of the average city high school. Sharing her mother's perspective in theory, Nora points out that "it isn't that I wanted to go to a private
school; that isn't what I wanted. I just wanted to not be in a school that was as wrong as those [schools] were."

Indignant about the schools and impotent in her youth, she held her mother responsible. "I was mad at her. I didn't think she was respecting me. I thought she should have had enough respect for me to let me quit high school and do these amazing things I had in mind. So it was a hard time between us, a very hard time."

Nora attended three different high schools, with three different ethnic and racial communities, before she finally graduated. The family prevented her from dropping out, which she passionately desired to do. Her disgust and boredom finally led to a total rejection of school. Like Grace at Hunter College, she made no formal statement. But she began to wonder what would happen if she didn't take midterm exams, or pick up her report card, or even show up for classes. She had never considered any of those possibilities before. But when they occurred to her, she realized that the probable consequences of such behavior no longer mattered to her. She and her friends began to cut school, take amphetamines and ride the subway, speeding all day beneath the boroughs of New York City. Resembling the adolescent Grace Goodside of an earlier era, in that period Nora says she was in "an extreme mode and an extreme mood."
She finally attended a school in Brooklyn where her Aunt Jeanne was a guidance counselor, and says that she only graduated because Jeanne "picked me up everyday in a car and took me there, which I hated--I really hated." Grace thought because Nora loved her aunt--Jeanne and Nora have always been very close--that she enjoyed going to school with her, and she knew that those rides helped her daughter to finish school. Since Nora didn't want to finish school, she naturally had a different view. She says--replicating her mother's assessment of her grandmother Manya's anxiety--that Grace simply didn't know what to do. She was very worried about her and didn't really understand Nora's situation. Her daughter knows--and knew then--that she did everything she possibly could; but, like her mother before her, she was confused by a daughter who was thinking in a new kind of mind. Actually, her aunt Jeanne was the one who pushed Nora through the school system. "Grace says now that she should have let me drop out of school." Grace agrees that she "made a mistake. I should have let her leave school when she wanted to." The wisdom gained in crisis with Nora was useful when Danny came to the same place less than two years later: Grace changed her policy and allowed her second child to leave school.
Despite the apparently unique ferment of the times, both of Grace's children had high school experiences strikingly like their mother's. They started out as very good students, and then (echoing some of Grace's exact words), Danny says, "All of a sudden instead of school being important to me, girls became important, and my friends. I really went straight downhill for a number of years." But Danny too—more like his sister here than his mother—recognizes the cultural aspects of his scholastic decline, viewing his shift from books to peers as typical—"like most teenagers," and seeing the cultural and political upheaval of the time as a source and cause. As Grace would say, he was strongly influenced by the currents of his time and place in history: "I started taking a lot of drugs during that period of time. Nothing addictive, not heroin or anything, but enough to really kill me in school." Like his maternal grandparents, who'd been equally in the dark about his mother, Grace and Jess had no idea what going on in Danny's life; he can barely recall their presence during that period. Sooner than his mother, but right in line with his big sister, Danny became disaffected, and "finally I dropped out of high school."

But he too was subject to family pressure, and went back, to graduate from a private school uptown, Robert Louis
stevenson, to which "rich people sent their kids so they could graduate from high school without having to do anything. It was a joke school; a lot of famous people sent their kids there." He was able to attend Stevenson because both of his parents were finally making some money. Not only was Jess getting a number of good assignments, but Grace had also begun to teach college classes, so the Paleys had at least one steady paycheck coming in.

Like most children, Danny Paley perceived his mother's increased activism and time spent at her work as his personal loss. "By the time I was a teenager--of course it may have been as much my fault as hers--I felt like she wasn't always there when I needed her." Now that he is a father, he views her chosen methods critically, suggesting that she should have been more directive, should have offered him more guidance. "I was doing a lot of stupid things, hanging around with the wrong people, and letting school get away from me. [But] she had a different kind of philosophy than in fact I would have as a [teenager's] parent. She felt she could trust me, and she wasn't going to interfere....luckily it worked out all right. (It might not have though, because I had a lot of friends who didn't even live--you know, who O.D.'d on drugs or something [else] terrible.)"
But at one point, when he was close to danger, his mother's intervention was dramatic and effective. "I was taking amphetamines in powder form, and somehow my mother became aware of it--I guess it was obvious because I wasn't sleeping at all. And then she got real angry--it was almost the same anger I had seen with that cop. And it affected me the same way." She yelled at him. She didn't mind about his social life, or his grades, or the hours he was keeping--"but this (taking amphetamines)--if you do this, just don't even come back here; I just don't even want to see you.' And I never did it again after that--because I knew, when I saw that side of her, just like that cop must have known that day: Don't do it! And if a cop with a club and a gun knew not to, then I certainly would know not to."

Nora and Danny Paley's disinclination to accept the system is ironic in terms of their mother's educational history. When Nora was a teenager she never once considered the resemblance between her own behavior and her mother's earlier experience. It never occurred to her to make the comparison during that time. This is because Nora,

2. Ultimately, though, both of Grace's children, after transferring from their first colleges, Marlboro and Franconia (which perhaps established an early family foothold in New England) did break their mother's pattern and decide to take degrees; both have also done graduate study in their fields (Education and Health).
like most adolescent girls, was thinking of Grace as her mother—solely in terms of the maternal role—not as an actual person, a woman who'd been a girl, a girl who'd once had the same kind of life experiences she was having. Nora thinks though, that the fact of the repeated pattern—even if unconscious—"might have been why I was mad at her. [I probably felt that] she, having had that experience, should have known better, should have understood, should have been able to deal with me and help me." Like Grace, who had resented the same responses in her own parents, Nora was angry that a mother who professed a radical analysis of society and its institutions would not apply that analysis to her daughter's life. 3

While the children were growing up and out in miscellaneous difficult directions, so was their mother. Grace too was changing. Thinking about the so-called "empty-nest syndrome," she comments: "In my view, nobody really ever goes away; they're always coming back—they come

3. A few years later, Grace was able to provide her daughter with a tuition-free education at Sarah Lawrence College, where she had become a member of the Writing Department faculty. Sarah Lawrence took Nora on probation because her grades and attendance record from high school were so unusual. As her brother would do later at CUNY, Bora saw to it that she excelled in her first term. Once she had proven to herself—and the college—that she could be a superior student, Nora was free to study as she wished.
back a lot. When I went away with Jess, I didn't put my family behind me. I wrote letters, they wrote letters, we were in touch. We always had contact. I didn't take myself away from them." She points out that when Nora and Danny were leaving home, she was leaving home too. "So it was very complex, very complicated. I was really too busy to worry whether they left or they didn't leave. And it seems to me that all their lives they keep coming back. So I think it's a big thing that psychologists just made up." 4

Thus the Paley family rearranged itself through the decade of the sixties, like much of American society. While her personal "neighborhood" enlarged--extending her network of local and family ties--Grace reshaped or created new emotional alliances and connections, some of which have provided essential sustenance for years, and continue to do so in the present.

Among the people who gradually grew more intimate with Grace, and more important in her life, was Bob Nichols.

4. But, discussing the fact that in this culture, in which for many decades mothering has been the whole purpose of middle class women's existence after the age of twenty-five or so, she says, "Well, naturally. You lose a job you've had for life....and then nobody's there, nobody's at home with you anymore." She recognizes the grief and confusion women suffer while understanding its real cause: "You know, it's just like menopause--treating that as a psychological disaster. It's a made-up thing--it's just like treating getting older as a disease."
Bob was a political ally, working at the Peace Center and taking part in various demonstrations. By the mid-sixties, around the time Grace began teaching, Bob says that she "more and more did serious work in the basement of the Washington Square Methodist Church," where the resistance movement and draft counselors had office space. He frequently "went on actions and often stopped to hang around and wait for her--or we'd all go out for espresso." Bob's life coincided with Grace's beyond his political commitments. While continuing to practice as a landscape architect, in the sixties he was a member of The Village Poets; in addition to writing poetry, he wrote "about twenty" plays that were performed off-off-Broadway or in the streets.

One of his plays, typical of much urban street theater of the time in its community base, was an adaptation of *Everyman*, in which many neighborhood and Peace Center people took part; Sybil Claiborne remembers being asked by Grace to sew the costumes. 5 As in other towns and cities in

5. The costumes were designed by Lucia Vernarelli, who also illustrated one of Bob's first books with her woodcuts; Lucia is notable here because she is one of the few people--perhaps the only person--who appears in one of Grace Paley's stories under her own name; her family's story is told in "Debts" (which first appeared in 1971, and then in the second collection in 1974). Moreover, if that story is as autobiographical as it appears in the scene between the I-narrator and "Lucia," she may have been one of those who encouraged Grace to continue to write family and
In that atmosphere, Grace Paley and Bob Nichols spent hours and days together—indeed, they worked years together, their camaraderie growing into friendship, and friendship into love. Bob's marriage was over by the mid-sixties, and he had had liaisons with a few other women before he and Grace became a couple. Her own marriage had been relatively static until the early years of the decade, when the gaps between her and Jess opened painfully.

Lucia explained to me that it was probably hard to have family archives or even only stories about outstanding grandparents or uncles when one was sixty or seventy and there was no writer in the family and the children were in the middle of their own lives. She said it was a pity to lose all this inheritance just because of one's own mortality. I said yes, I did understand....I thought about our conversation....It was possible that I did owe something to my own family and the families of my friends. That is, to tell their stories as simply as possible, in order, you might say, to save a few lives. (ECLM, 9-10)
Though he had encouraged her to write stories, and was enthusiastic about them when she did, Jess did not so actively cultivate his own art. Though this hadn't mattered in earlier years, when Grace had not yet published, it may have begun to make some subtle difference after the late fifties. For she had become "a writer," regularly working at her craft. After 1960, and certainly by 1965, when she had begun to make new friends who were writers and teachers of writing, Jess was no longer in the center of her life. At the same time, as her political involvement increased between 1960 and 1965, and began to take her out of the neighborhood—or to jail—her closest attachments developed among those who shared that experience. Though Jess certainly held a similar world view, would probably have voiced many of the same opinions, and must have pulled the same levers in a voting booth as Grace did, he never became an activist.

Additionally—and ironically, given his encouraging influence in her early story-writing and his sporadic absences due to assignments out of the city—his frequent presence in the house lessened her opportunities to write. Karl Bissinger explains that when Jess wasn't working on a film, like a husband on early retirement "he would be around a lot. He would start at nine o'clock in the morning, and
ask Grace to have cups of coffee with him through the day, and there was no time for her to write. It simply didn’t occur to him that he ought to leave her alone. He was always there. As an artist she had no room to function."

Moreover, when he did work on films, his assignments took him away from his family for long periods. In fact, Jess Paley was on his way to Southeast Asia when *Little Disturbances* appeared at the booksellers, and he missed the public’s reception of his wife as a writer. He wasn’t there for the excitement of the reviews, or the thrill of seeing the book in stores. While Grace didn’t necessarily resent his absence in all the major areas of her life, she regretted it. Regret seems to have been the overriding tone of her slow, difficult separation from Jess Paley. She regretted their lack of mutual interests and activities. She regretted his absences. She regretted that her steadily increasing success as a teacher and writer was occasionally concurrent with hard times in his own work. She regretted his lack of commitment to action for social change.

Like many couples then, the Paleys didn’t break up so much as come apart; they moved in different directions. Or, perhaps more accurately, Grace moved away from where they had been together, and Jess, no matter how much he traveled, stayed there. The Paley divorce, which didn’t
actually occur until 1972, was not an unusual one. It produced all the requisite pain and doubt; it included the grief of the children, disillusionment on both sides, disagreement about who would leave the family home, and the complication of at least one new lover.

Grace and Jess' marriage was subject to the cultural and political circumstances that broke open so many American marriages in the nineteen-sixties. The Paleys were actually among those most likely to come apart: they had married young, in a period of national stress and uncertainty; the husband had been deeply affected by his war experience, professionally and emotionally dislocated; the wife was eagerly moving beyond the immediate concerns of a traditional wife and mother, and she was changing while her husband's projects and interests remained static. Moreover, she had finally begun to work at a job that would make her financially independent. In previous eras, such women rarely worked for pay, generally suppressed their interests, and arranged themselves around their husband and children's needs and desires. But Grace Paley's natural obstinacy and determination were explicitly encouraged by a decade of rapid, intense sociopolitical change.

Grace's own mother had remained--long after necessity, until her death--in a family household that was
far removed from her ideal; Grace's aunt Mira—eventually as bitter as she had been beautiful—did the same. Neither woman had acted decisively in her own behalf. Grace defined her mother's situation in "Mom," first published in 1975: "Her life is a known closed form" (86). Beyond these cautionary models of her mother and aunt, we can look to the character of Grace herself. Her friends say that one of the reasons she took so long to leave the marriage is that she doesn't really believe in divorcing anybody. Jane Cooper, who came to know her just as the separation began, says: "Relationships that have been family to Grace, that have been really close over the years—those she never really lets go. Those people are always her family. So [the separation] must have been not only excruciating for her, but also really really hard to understand; it took a great deal out of her. I think it actually tore her apart, truthfully. But finally she got to the point where it was necessary to separate; there was no question about that."

Where some of Grace's people found Jess remote and preoccupied, even narcissistic, Grace seems to never have blamed him. Karl Bissinger explains that "Grace is loyal. She's in it for the long haul. She doesn't take on anything lightly. My sense of [their relationship] is that there was a whole lot going on" that no one but Grace and Jess would
ever know. But Karl did feel that he could see that Grace was "driven to the point where she decided to call it a day...it was clear that Grace had called it a day."

Whatever was difficult or painful between Grace and Jess Paley, everyone who knew them understood that the issue was not initially a loss of love. Having to choose, once Bob Nichols entered the scene, was all but impossible for Grace. Sybil Claiborne says that in the middle and even late sixties, when both men figured prominently in Grace's life, she probably would have liked to be married to both of them, holding both of them dear as she did. "Wants," a story Grace wrote at the end of the sixties and published first in 1971, is narrated by a woman who--prompted by an encounter with the man to whom she "had once been married for twenty-seven years" (3)--ponders the kind of romantic and realistic considerations Grace must have weighed in those years:

"I wanted to have been married forever to one person, my ex-husband or my present one. Either has enough character for a whole life, which as it turns out is really not such a long time. You couldn't exhaust either man's qualities or get under the rock of his reasons in one short life. (ECLM, 5)"

The chasm between Grace and Jess was neither prompted by, nor finally the result of, her attraction to

6. Danny Paley says that he has always been certain, despite Grace's disavowal, that "Wants" is absolutely autobiographical.
and growing love for Bob Nichols. Bob could only have moved into a life where there was room for him, and that room had already been provided by the Paleys' divergence. At first, they did the sort of thing couples do in such straits: Grace traveled to Europe to join Jess on an assignment in 1966; he photographed her looking beautiful in a gondola on the Grand Canal in Venice. He remembers that in their pension in Florence, one afternoon they discovered a copy of *Little Disturbances* on a tiny marble table in the hallway. Though of course she accused him of planting it there, he still insists he was as astonished as she to find it.

But they continued to grow apart. In the face of increasing intensity in the anti-war movement, one of the major problems between them had to be that, cynical as he was about government policy, Jess still did not choose to take action. Some of their friends and family felt that because he had no apparent substantial political convictions, he resented her expense of energy in that direction and even sometimes doubted the sincerity of her commitment. He often expressed annoyance with her; he complained about feeling neglected. His personal unhappiness and disapproval of her activities constrained Grace. He refused to take part in the life she and her friends lived. He eventually refused to go anywhere with her, her sister recalls, though sometimes Grace would cajole or plead with him to come. But finally she stopped pleading
and went, Jeanne says, "on her own."

In this period she began to be arrested for various forms of civil disobedience. One of the first big actions (one which brought out lots of people, garnered good media coverage, and created an impact felt by the authorities) was in that same year of 1966; Grace and Bob were among those who rushed out into the street and sat down under the Army Day parade's rockets and missiles on Fifth Avenue. Carrying daffodils, the demonstrators sat down to register their objection to the celebration of the military and its weapons. Their refusal to allow the parade to continue led to their arrest and removal; that was the first time Bob Nichols and Grace Paley were arrested together. So, in the same year as that romantic sojourn in Italy, Grace was sent to the Women's House of Detention, causing a separation that was a more appropriate emblem of her relationship with Jess than their gondola ride had been.

Naturally, the children were affected by the growing antipathy between their parents. Danny remembers his father's growing anger towards his mother, and a general increase of tension in the house—"until it got to the point where I couldn't stand to be there anymore—although I was at the age where I didn't want to be there anyway. Beyond that, it was a kind of drifting apart—it just seemed to happen. The splitting up period lasted a few painful years. I guess it started when I was about fifteen, and by the time
I was 18, they were pretty split up. When they finally did get divorced [in 1972] it was a relief to me, because I thought that was something they certainly needed to do. By that point it was pretty clear."

He suggests that "some of it had to do with my mother's own life taking away a lot of time, probably [time] that my father felt he was losing. She was spending more and more time writing, which was part of the argument [between them] I think. And the Vietnam war was in full swing; she was spending most of her time involved in that. I'm sure there were other things I didn't know about, but that was one thing I was aware of; there was a lot of tension about that." Those times, he recalls, were "painful for everybody."

His sister concurs. Talking about the difficulties between her mother and herself from 1963 to 1967, when Nora was moving from school to school, disgusted with the absence of useful alternatives, she recalls that those were also years of grief between her parents. Their daughter was nearly eighteen when Grace finally left Jess, and Nora says she felt upset and angry even though she understood that the split was a good thing, certainly for Grace. Like Grace explaining that life in an extended family is good for children but not for grown-ups, Nora points out that her parents' divorce was ultimately good for them though it initially made their daughter miserable. Like many
adolescents in that situation, she took on a burden of responsibility; she worried about both of her parents, and about her brother. She remembers resenting Grace's relationship with Bob; she knows that she didn't want anybody to replace her father. Referring to this now as a "childish and typical reaction," she explains that she accepted the new family configuration only after several years.

In 1967 Grace moved out; Jess had insisted he would not leave the apartment. Karl remembers that "she was floating; she was literally living out of paper bags, staying with friends--and Jess couldn't take it seriously. He wouldn't get the hell out of the apartment like a gentleman should--he stayed there. And she packed her overnight clothes in a paper bag," and stayed days and weeks at a time with Del (Adele) Bowers, and also with Mary Gandall, both pals from the old playground days, when all their children were small. Clearly Grace thought that the apartment on Eleventh Street was hers; she made no efforts to find a new home, and waited for Jess to leave, which he finally did.

By then she was able to support herself, working at Sarah Lawrence and making "decent money. Not great, but decent." She was "all right" financially; "yeah, I didn't have a high rent, the rents weren't high there and then." Asked if, like so many wives, she might have stayed married
to Jess too long because she was economically unstable, she says, "No, not then." This answer suggests that such a situation might have obtained at another time--maybe early in the marriage, early in their lives. Visiting Chicago in 1987, she recognized landmarks at the corner of Halsted street and Chicago Avenue. "Look at that. That's where we had that big fight [during WWII, when he was stationed just outside Chicago]. If it had ended differently, my whole life would have been different. Might have been, might have been."

Exhilarated by her community's commitment to political action--and its frequent mobilization--Grace was among those who experienced an accelerated rise of consciousness that matched the swift change in the society. The intensity of national and international political movement fused with her own excitement. This is not to say, as we might of so many Americans in that period, that she was radicalized. Grace was already a radical thinker; her analysis of the place and time in which she found herself was always politically rooted. She was already aware of the mutual impact of citizen and state, and the interrelationships among capitalism, racism and imperialism. The Civil Rights Movement, the Peace Movement, and the developing coalition to end the Vietnam War were readily absorbed into her world view. But she now began to make some new connections: her emotional life, her sexuality and
maternity, though interestingly Freud-resistant, had not yet been consciously integrated into her analysis. Nor were they spontaneously absorbed once the Women's Movement had explained that the personal is political. The rising of Grace Paley's feminist consciousness--its fits and starts, fears and regrets--may be traced in her stories.

Examining the early years of her political development, scholars might be led to consider Grace Paley feminist in her early portrayals of women and children. The stories are indeed distinctively radical in their placement of women and children at the center. Her characterization of mothers is especially notable: they struggle with the disparity between the patriarchal institution of motherhood and their lived experience. And her non-mothers as well are unusual in fiction; witness the tenacious self-control of Dotty Wasserman and the integrity of Rosie Lieber in the first two stories. Characters whose lives have been left out of canonized literature, or have been depicted solely in terms of their connections to men--lovers, fathers, sons, husbands--Grace Paley's women and children are remarkable for the fact that they appear in stories about their own lives.

7. The stories clearly depict "institution" and "experience" as Adrienne Rich defined them in Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.
However, not until after 1970, when she was nearly fifty years old, did Grace's stories begin to display a feminist consciousness. For though the women in her earlier stories often laugh at or seem to ignore patriarchal power, and display attitudes and behavior that are markedly different from those traditionally presented by both male and female writers, they are nonetheless complicitous in their own oppression, and do not actively challenge the status quo. In fact, Grace's characters and narrators often echo her own early reluctance to include self-definition in the obviously defined fate of women in male culture. Faith describes (her own) single motherhood, in "A Subject of Childhood," but denies the political analysis manifest in her generic situation:

For I have raised these kids, with one hand typing behind my back to earn a living. I have raised them all alone without a father to identify themselves with in the bathroom....It has been my perversity to do this alone....(LDM, 139, my emphasis)

However grudgingly or wittily--and sometimes quite happily--Grace's women accepted and played out the roles defined for them by men. Until recently, they still sang a song we recognize as the lowdown blues of women in a man's world. Singing a song of fathers, sons and husbands, her women croon and moan, "Oh yeah honey, I know he's no good, but I love him"--and variations on that theme. Grace Paley's version of these blues is written repeatedly into her early
208 stories. In "The Used-Boy Raisers," for instance, Faith's narration includes this self-assessment: "I rarely express my opinion on any serious matter but only live out my destiny, which is to be, until my expiration date, laughingly the servant of man" (LDM, 132).

And who is "man" to these women? Rosie Lieber (created ca 1952-4) knows that her lover Vlashkin—who would have her travel with him "on trains to stay in strange hotels, among Americans, not [his] wife"—is "like men are....till time's end, trying to get away in one piece," but she still believes that "a woman should have at least one [husband] before the end of the story" (LDM, 21-2). Young Josephine and Joanna (ca 1954-6) get mixed—not to say garbled—messages from their mother and grandmother, who were a battered daughter and abandoned wife respectively; Marvine and Grandma continue to take care of or lust after men even as they acknowledge, "it's the men that've always troubled me. Men and boys...I suppose I don't understand them....[My sons are] gone, far away in heart and body" (LDM, 28).

In "Faith in the Afternoon" (1958-60), Faith's wandering husband Ricardo is described as the quintessence of exploitive masculinity, but she misses him, feels sorry for herself in his absence, and weeps for her loss when she thinks about friends who've also lost their husbands—though all are unappealing or tragically stricken, to a man. Dolly
Raftery (mid-nineteen sixties) denies and sidesteps her anger—and its disclosure through her sarcasm about her husband's "skinny" Ukrainian "cuntski"—explaining that "Men fall for terrible weirdos in a dumb way more and more as they get older; my old man, fond of me as he constantly was, often did. I never give it the courtesy of my attention" (ECLM, 17).

There is one exception, and that is the brief flash of hilarious satire in "The Floating Truth" (ca 1957-9), in which the "career" possibilities of a young single woman are considered, and detailed on a phony resumé. Resumé entries include a description of her traveling around the country "for five months by bus, station wagon, train, and also by air" to "bring Law and its possibilities to women everywhere"—with the purpose of urging women to increase their consumption of legal services. Another entry on the bogus resumé is a stint writing "high-pressure" copy for "The Kitchen Institute Press's 'The Kettle Calls'" (its title a Yiddish-inflected pun), which was designed "to return women to the kitchen" by means of such fear- and guilt-producing slogans as "The kitchen you are leaving may be your home." On radio and television, and in ads in "Men's publications and on Men's pages in newspapers (sports, finance, etc.), Men were told to ask their wives as they came in the door each night: 'What's cooking?' In this way the prestige of women in kitchens everywhere was
enhanced and the need and desire for kitchens accelerated" (LDM, 183).

That this character, a young woman seriously seeking work--whose only actual employment in the story is pointless, a waste of her time and mind--should be thus ironically represented as an agent of the duping and oppression of other women, is an unmatched phenomenon in the early and middle years of Grace's writing. With the young woman's anger and dissatisfaction articulated in the text--though deftly displaced onto another woman--this story displays a startling recognition of women's socioeconomic condition; it even includes an incident in which sexual intercourse substitutes for cash payment.

The fact that this story is one which most readers and scholars find stylistically disturbing, even incomprehensible, is neither accident nor coincidence. The eruption of feminist politics and the extremely frank, not to say bitter, view of young women's life choices are disguised--buried, really--by the extraordinary style and breezy tone of the text. The I-narrator/major character is never named, which makes her difficult for readers to

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8. Neal Isaacson and Jacqueline Taylor, contemporary scholars working on Grace Paley's stories, agree that this story is the most difficult to analyze, or even to discuss. College students insist that they "don't understand" the text, though some do enjoy it while reading. Grace Paley herself laughs and says, "Who knows what it's about?"
identify with. Her employment counselor is called by at least ten different names, including Lionel, Marlon, Bubbles, and Richard-the-Liver-Hearted, all of which render him comic, masking his exploitive relationship to her. Notwithstanding the fact that he mocks her desire to work for social change "in a high girl-voice" (176), and that his final appearance is an image of him standing in the street to "pee...like a man--in a puddle" (189), his nastiness is less notable than his amusing conversation, and especially his sympathetic and fascinating situation: he lives in a car--which, years ahead of its time, has a phone--and he keeps houseplants on its back window ledge. Despite his failure to actually earn the payment she has made in the back seat, the protagonist is "not mad" at him (188). Nevertheless, "The Floating Truth" was unique among the collected stories of Grace Paley for many years, stylistically and politically ahead of its time and its author.9

Not until the early seventies, in three stories ultimately published in *Enormous Changes*, did Grace Paley's women begin--in words and actions--to openly question the necessity of the traditional power dynamics and social arrangements between women and men. As in the late forties and early nineteen-fifties, when the socioeconomic position

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9. This story was dramatized and taped for a television network showing, but is unavailable at present.
of women in the United States was in flux, subject to deliberate manipulation by such forces as government policy and rapidly codifying psychological theory, the choices and definitions in Grace Paley's life were strongly affected by society in the late sixties and early seventies. But this time the effects were produced by the rising influence of women themselves, organized for social change as women.

"The Immigrant Story" and "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute" were originally published in 1972, in Fiction and the Atlantic respectively, and "The Long-Distance Runner" appeared in 1974, in Esquire. They are all characterized by Grace as having been written "late" in the period preceding the publication of her second book—that is, after 1970—and all contain evidence of a newly rising feminist consciousness. We may contrast them with the original version of "Faith in a Tree," which was published in 1967 as "Faith: In a Tree,"¹⁰ and did not include its final episode yet. As it appeared in New American Review, the story concludes with Faith's interest still focused on a potential male lover—whose interest has unfortunately just turned from her to her friend Anna. The addition of the final section about a demonstration against the Vietnam War and its effect on the people in the park, which is the now-

¹⁰. The change in this title is typical, not only of Grace's playfulness, but of her willingness to foster the active participation of readers in determining the meaning of her texts.
familiar conclusion published in 1974 in *Enormous Changes*, shifts Faith's consciousness decidedly, lessening—if not wholly discarding—the effect of her emotional dependence on men in the wake of her own enormous change at the last minute.

These three stories provide a clear indication of the future development of their author's feminism. In "Changes," Alexandra deliberately chooses to raise her child without a father-in-residence,¹¹ and to do so in concert with her young pregnant unmarried clients (to whom she has previously paid less attention than to "the boys"). In "Story," Faith—as character and narrator—openly refuses to accept masculinity as definitive¹²:

Bullshit! She was trying to make him feel guilty. Where were his balls? I will never respond to that question. Asked in a

¹¹. This decision is utterly distorted in the feature-length film *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*, which contains lines from and bits of several Paley stories while dramatizing three of them: "An Interest in Life," "Dreamer in a Dead Language," and "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute." In the film, the pregnant Alexandra and her young lover Dennis walk off into the sunset together (almost literally), implying the perpetuation of the patriarchal nuclear family.

¹². Though Grace does make her assume that most married women enjoy coitus with their husbands: "She didn't want him to fuck her," Jack says of his mother and father, to which Faith replies: "Most people like their husbands to do that" (ECLM, 172). Current research has demonstrated that this is, alas, not the case.
worried way again and again, it may become responsible for the destruction of the entire world. I gave it two minutes of silence. (ECLM, 172)

And in the final story of Enormous Changes, "The Long-Distance Runner," Faith wishes to create a bond with Mrs. Luddy that will transcend their romantic and sexual attachments to men. When the two women discuss men, Faith expresses the opinion that men don't have the same creative "outlet" as women, and "That's how come they run around so much"—to which Mrs. Luddy replies, "Till they drunk enough to lay down." Faith answers, "Yes.... on a large scale you can see it in the world. First they make something, then they murder it. Then they write a book about how interesting it is." Mrs. Luddy concurs: "You got something there" (189).

Faith and Mrs. Luddy come to almost the same conclusions as Mrs. Grimble, who is the narrator and central character of "Lavinia, An Old Story." First published in 1982 in Delta, and then included in Later the Same Day in 1985, "Lavinia" was actually written at the end of the sixties. Grace says that she "lost it for a long time"; but it's also possible that she may not yet have been willing to go public on some of the issues raised in that story. As when she undermined her sharp burst of feminist consciousness in "The Floating Truth," she might have simply buried it. In any case, Mrs. Grimble goes even further than the other two women; her opinion is that "What men got to do
on earth don't take more time than sneezing.... A man restless all the time owing it to nature to scramble for opportunity. His time took up with nonsense, you know his conversation got to suffer. A man can't talk. That little minute in his mind most the time. Once a while busywork, machinery, cars, guns" (63).13

These stories presage the further development of their author's feminist consciousness and its erosion of women's acceptance of male dominance in her work; they also serve to illustrate the beginnings of that erosion in her life.

13. It is striking that Grace has put such strong statements about men's place and purpose in this world into the mouths of black women. Does she think that black women have a more negative view of men than white women? Or does she think that black women are more clear-sighted, and capable of articulating what they see, than white women? What does it really mean that the "mama" Faith finds and learns from, when she goes home to her old neighborhood, is a black woman? Has Grace Paley fallen into romanticizing black women's strength, and their struggle against multiple oppression? Is she offering her respect and admiration here? There are too few black women characters in her work to support a useful analysis, but these questions nonetheless arise.
Out of the Classroom and Into the Streets

At the same time that Grace was leaving her marriage and writing more stories—and all the while working against the Vietnam War—she was becoming a teacher. In 1964, she was asked to lead a group—six or eight women, as she recalls. They met in each other’s homes; as the teacher, Grace “read short stories, and commented on them.” But she began formal teaching in 1965; her first class was at Columbia University, where she’d done all that typing. She had gotten the typing job through her friend Ellen Currie, a writer who now teaches at Sarah Lawrence College; Ellen then worked full-time in Columbia’s offices. Grace is vague about the circumstances, but she recalls that the first class was “in general studies or something,” and she got it because they “just gave me a chance.” She says, though, that that doesn’t count as “a real job,” like the one that began the next year at Sarah Lawrence up in Bronxville—half an hour’s drive north on the Hudson River Parkway.

From the fall of 1966 through the spring of 1988, from her office and classroom in Bronxville, Grace Paley taught fiction writing. “Some years I taught in two
I got paid very little when I began to teach, but at least I made a living at Sarah Lawrence. I got Blue Cross and all of that."

She was usually a part-timer, though in several years, like the years when Nora was a student there, she would teach full-time to make more money. But, she explains, "I'm not thrifty; I never have been. Sometimes we had money and sometimes we didn't. We lived like sailors. I've never been cautious about money, and I think it's because when I was a child my family was pretty well off, and my father was very generous. He never said, 'Boy, did we used to be poor'--which they were when my brother and sister were growing up. If you asked him for a dime he gave you a quarter. He reveled in the fact that he could do that. And so [saving money] really has not been important to me."

Saving money has not been an issue, but making enough to live on--enough to write on--has definitely mattered, and Danny Paley points out that his mother was very lucky to get that job at Sarah Lawrence, since she had never graduated from college herself. "There she was, getting a job at the most expensive girls' school in the

1. She has often taught at CUNY, occasionally at NYU.
country; her writing got her that job, and really made her more secure." As she has told her interviewers for years now, Grace began teaching "for the same reason that many creative artists do: to make money. Her teaching job...was taken to subsidize her writing, not to sustain and nourish her as did the writing itself" (Darnton, 65). But she found, as the best teachers always do, that teaching enriched her life, and thus her writing.

Young people read different books and think about different things; [this is important as a resource for teacher-writers] because as a writer one of your jobs is to bring news of the world to the world....To me, teaching is a gift because it puts you in loving contact with young people. You don't get that from your children's friends, and your children go ahead and grow up on you, so it is a present that these eighteen-year-olds come into your life. (Darnton, 65)

And come into your stories. Though college classrooms and teachers are virtually absent from Grace's stories, young people--aged roughly sixteen through twenty-five or so--are frequently featured as subjects of older characters' conversation or as characters in their own right. These latter are often Richard and Tonto, Faith's

2. There are many descriptions of and references to grammar school life, both in the early stories ("The Loudest Voice," "An Interest in Life," "Gloomy Tune") and more recent ones ("Ruthy and Edie," "Friends"); even high school turns up in "A Man Told Me the Story of his Life." But, except for one (now ironic) snide reference to Sarah Lawrence in "The Floating Truth," and some brief mentions, as in "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute," and "The Long Distance Runner," college students, classrooms and teachers have not been Paley subjects.
boys, but after the mid-sixties\textsuperscript{3} include Dennis, Alexandra's lover in "Enormous Changes," the title character in "The Little Girl," the boy and girl in "Conversation," Cynthia in "Runner," Mickey in "Friends," Zagrowsky's daughter Cissy, and the young soldier in "Listening." Like Faith's sons, these characters are circumstantial representatives of the ideas and movements of their times and places. Even the tragedy of Juniper in "The Little Girl" may be read as a sociohistorical case study of the "hippy" period of the sixties:

Why Carter seen it many times hisself. She could of stayed the summer. We just like the UN. Every state in the union stop by. She would of got her higher education right on the fifth-floor front. September, her mama and daddy would come for her and they whip her bottom, we know that. We been in this world long enough. We seen lots of the little girls. They go home, then after a while they get to be grown womens, they integrating the swimming pool and picketing the supermarket, they blink their eyes and shut their mouth and grin. (ECLM, 157)

Grace Paley may have felt that not only "these eighteen-year-olds," but the job itself, was "a present."

She never applied for a position at Sarah Lawrence College, but was invited to teach there through the recommendations of writer-teachers Harvey Swados and Muriel Rukeyser, and

\textsuperscript{3} Earlier stories, written before she became a teacher, also sometimes contain young people of course--the estimable Eddie Teitelbaum and his pals--drawn from her Bronx adolescence, and the assorted mothers in "Northeast Playground"--drawn from Washington Square Park in the Village and the facts of her own motherhood's maturity.
was probably welcomed not only because of her writing, but as a result of her participation in a series of Teachers and Writers Meetings, which took place in 1965. Jane Cooper, who remembers those meetings clearly, believes that the decision to hire Grace was much influenced by the impression she made on one of the college deans in those discussions.

Jane met Grace Paley at the first of the Teachers and Writers Meetings. These were gatherings at which writers from outside the academic community came together with teachers of writing to suggest "various ways in which writing could be made more attractive" to students. The opportunity for this program and its government funding were a result of the trajectory of Sputnik-caused dismay about the ignorance and incapacity of US youth in science and mathematics: by the early sixties school administrators had added to their anxiety by "discovering" that American students could not read or write.

The purpose of the meetings was to define ways in which teachers and writers could cooperate, and ways in which teachers could begin to open up the standard writing curriculum. At Sarah Lawrence, certain staff members were "tapped" to attend the series of meetings; Jane Cooper, though not a delegate (she hadn't yet published her first book), was the secretary at each meeting, and kept notes of all that happened. "There was quite a lot of ire eventually, and a lot of it seemed to be going off in all
directions. You couldn't imagine how anything was going to come out of [the series]." Anger and chaos notwithstanding, several successful programs did come out of that series of meetings, including the popular Poets in the Schools.

There were about forty people at the first meeting, writing teachers, delegates from national and state organizations, and members of small community groups. Most were writers, some were arts organizers and neighborhood group leaders; Grace Paley was among these. Jane says that she particularly noticed Grace, who "was one of my heroes of the meeting." She had not yet read *Little Disturbances*; she says that it was still "an underground book. But anyway, there was this wonderful woman, and every time she opened her mouth she made sense. Everybody else was sort of windy, and then Grace would speak and she would say, 'Well, I really care about my neighborhood. I don't think you can do these things unless you think about what your neighborhood is.' And she would say, 'Now, at PS 41 we're doing such-and-such.' And the sense that I got of her was that she was not only a remarkably honest person, but someone who dealt in grassroots politics, [always] asking the question, 'how do you [meet] the exact needs of my street, my block, my neighborhood?' Everything she said was pithy, to the point, and humane. I was struck by her; as I was writing up [my notes] I kept coming back to things that she had said."
When Grace began to teach at Sarah Lawrence, she and Jane "immediately became friends." Twenty-two years later, Jane says that their intimate friendship "still seems to me so unlikely--so unlikely. Grace and I couldn't be less alike." The truth is, though, that they came together out of apparently diverse but actually overlapping backgrounds. One a Jew from the Bronx and the other a Southern/East Coast WASP (Florida, North Carolina and New Jersey), they were middle class girls only two years apart in age. Both grew up through the Depression into World War II, raised in families for whom political discussion was one of the dishes on the dinner table; they were young women for whom the soldiers of their girlhood had been a center of their consciousness. Both had surprised their families with unorthodox approaches to education and career choice. Jane Cooper and Grace Paley came together at Sarah Lawrence College and formed a friendship that nourished and encouraged their work of writing and teaching. "We laughed a lot," Jane says.

Together the two writers played an important role in the creation of the unique and nationally prominent

4. Jane had been teaching at Sarah Lawrence for sixteen years before Grace arrived; she retired two years earlier than Grace, in 1986.

5. Jane dropped out of Vassar after a few years to attend and graduate from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, a source of extremely diverse, not to say suspect, social and political influences.
undergraduate writing program now in place at Sarah Lawrence College. Though herself a poet, Jane had been teaching story writing "for years and years and years." When Grace came into the department Jane was still teaching fiction writing, so they shared some of the early students in the new program. At that time there were five writing teachers, three for fiction and two for poetry. The writing department began to grow; they created a senior seminar in which each of the teachers would take two senior students in conference courses and see them an hour a week. "When anybody had any work that seemed finished, it would be dittoed up for all five teachers and all ten seniors, who would then meet together and discuss it." Several students who had already worked with Jane later worked with Grace, so the two women had many reasons to confer at work—creating a professional partnership which remains a strong component of their friendship. "We've always worked very well with the same people. Though teaching in different ways from different points of view, I think we had a common sense of what teaching should be doing," Jane says.

Grace's teaching has, naturally, the same political base as her other concerns. Just as she presented a "grassroots" perception in the Teachers and Writers meetings, she perceives student writers as generators of

their own style and sensibility. Literally unschooled in academic style and presentation, her classroom ethics the same as those that increasingly made her a conscientious objector to the social and political status quo, Grace was a catalyst even for her colleagues. Jane recalls that as soon as she began to work with Grace, to teach with her, she felt a radical shift in perception in her own course, "which had been a very good course in the well-made story. I suddenly wanted to blow it to bits. It just didn't make sense to me anymore to think in terms of the well-made story. I really heard, in what Grace said, ways in which people were going beyond the well-made story. And this was terribly important to me, and it became very important to the way my poetry was moving also."7

Despite that suddenness and abrupt effect, despite her being "technically brilliant," Jane explains that in class Grace "always says the humane thing. She's very capable of criticizing a student's story without demolishing anything. The core of the story still is absolutely alive, and that's a wonderful thing to witness. Underneath the

7. In Writing Lives: Conversations Between Women Writers (ed. Mary Chamberlain, London: Virago Press, 1988) Grace was asked "if she made a conscious decision not to produce the traditional "well-made story." Grace answers: "Well, I didn't know how to write the well-made story. I tried, God knows. I just failed miserably, so I just wrote the way I could. I made honest efforts to write a typical novel, but I failed, I just couldn't do it." And, like Jane, she says that "writing the stories [her own way] loosened my poetry and made it easier" (19).
technicality, there is [always] the moral vision. Students who have worked with her will tell me how she would send them back and back and back with the same story to go over it again—and go more deeply," which is Grace's own way of writing, her way of finding her stories.

Her classes were popular almost immediately; her reputation as a valuable and exciting teacher was generated in just a few terms. Not only other students, but other teachers, would tell young writers to be sure they had at least one course with Grace Paley. Always there are many more applicants than openings for her classes. Both undergraduate and graduate writers are grateful for Grace's criticism—a combination of sensitive questioning and thoughtful, frank commentary. Her skill brought invitations: she began to teach summer writers' workshops, traveling to Iowa, California, and North Dakota. In more recent years, she has joined the visiting professor circuit, and teaches full terms at colleges and universities, giving readings and interviews in the school's community. She increasingly accepts offers to be a visiting professor; in spring of 1987, for instance, she taught at Stanford, and in the spring of '89, she took a two week seminar assignment at UC Santa Cruz.

Students recognize in Grace the combination of an actively questioning contemporary mind with a romantic passion for the beauty and truth of the classics. For years
she maintained a schedule of small group meetings in her office or a nearby empty classroom; she and her students would read the classics out loud. Among her favorites is Milton—which sometimes shocks critics who shortsightedly assume that her politics dictate only more recent writers; one spring morning in 1988, when Grace had to miss the meeting, students went on without her, reading aloud their planned selections from the book of Genesis. Often she begins her classes by calling on students to recite memorized pieces which they have chosen from the works of traditionally taught writers; that same spring morning, the class opened with a young woman's recitation of lines by Emily Dickinson. Grace, who went to school when memorization was a primary pedagogical method, believes that it "clears your brain; it's like taking a bath."

Much of what Grace learned and taught in her first few years at Sarah Lawrence has remained central to her philosophy of teaching, and to her own writing—and this is simply because it embodies her essential world view. She has never changed her style to adapt to the academic world, nor has she taught her students to do so. In 1970, the year in which she received an award for short story writing from the National Institute for Arts and Letters, she contributed "Some Notes on Teaching; Probably Spoken" to Jonathan Baumbach's anthology Writers as Teachers/Teachers as
Writers, listing "about fifteen things [she] might say in
the course of a term" (202).

Among those "things" is the issue of language; she
emphasizes the importance of "the language that comes to you
from your parents and your street and friends". Of course
this emphasis is a result of her own discovery that
literature could be written in one's real voice, and could
then move into the language of others. In this essay she
writes that she would ask her father to tell her stories,
and that she tries to remember her grandmother's stories;
she urges her students to do the same, asserting that
"because of time shortage and advanced age, neither your
father nor your grandmother will bother to tell unimportant
stories" (203). She entreats students to be open, and to
"remain ignorant"; she warns them "to remove all lies" from
their work, naming--like the recitation of plagues at a
Pesach seder--the lie of "injustice to characters," the lie
of writing to another's taste, the lie of "the approximate
word," the lie of "unnecessary adjectives," and even the lie
of "the brilliant sentence you love the most" (205).

Years later, she continues to insist upon the
primacy of honesty: "The story is a big lie. And in the
middle of this big lie, you're telling the truth. If you
lie [there], things go wrong. You become sentimental,
opaque, bombastic; you withhold information" (Darnton, 66).
At the heart of her teaching is the memory of her own early
work. She remembers the beginning of her love of language, and how that young love sometimes blinded her to excess, or led her to imitation. She remembers the teaching she received—when it was wrong, like the teacher who expelled her from class for using "inappropriate" language or subject—and when it was right, like Auden telling her to write in her own voice. She knows that every artist imitates the masters when she is young in her craft, and respects the youthful passion that bathes itself in words for their own sake, for the sake of their delicious sound and thrilling sense.

Grace insists that fiction writers and poets should read aloud, that poems and stories must not be left to "just lie there in books on a table." And so she became the primary organizer of Sarah Lawrence's now-traditional Tuesday night readings, at which both students and faculty read from their work. She felt that the readings would only continue if students eventually took them over—which would be fine—but that if the students didn't take them over, they'd die—which would be appropriate. Jane, who resisted the idea at first because their workdays were already so long, remembers that "Grace said she thought it was really important that students share their work through reading it, and learn how to read it. So every other week a faculty member would read with three or four or five students—and
it became a very important program, a very important influence within the writing program.

"I said to her, 'Grace, these days are so long already. We're exhausted. I'll sit there and I'll just fall asleep.'" (Sarah Lawrence's professors spend time outside of class, one-on-one, with all of their students, every week of the term.) Grace insists that Jane helped to start the program, but Jane's memory is different. "I guess, in effect, I went along because she believed in it. I thought I'd [just] stay the first year, support it [and see what would happen]. But I was very dubious." In 1988, the first September after both Grace Paley and Jane Cooper had retired from the campus, students were still reading their poems and stories aloud to each other, their writing teachers and their guests on Tuesday nights. It turns out that Jane and Grace were both right; the Tuesday night readings are a success, and they certainly do make for a long day's work. Jane Cooper's last day on campus, when she retired after 37 years, was a Tuesday. "And it was a typical Tuesday at Sarah Lawrence," she says. "Fourteen hours."

This rigorous academic life, which encouraged a tacit entrance into the literary life and was by no means a vague aesthetic entanglement in ivy, was never really separate from the life of political activism. In 1967, the year after Grace Paley joined the faculty in Bronxville,
student protesters held a major demonstration at Columbia University, and many Sarah Lawrence students took the train into Manhattan to join them. In 1968 there was a substantial anti-war demonstration at Sarah Lawrence itself. And in 1969, Grace Paley went to Vietnam.

That journey, which she has since referred to as one of the most important events of her life, was, naturally, a result of her increasing activism. She had been active all along in the neighborhood, at the Village Peace Center, and by now was working also in Resist and the War Resisters League, both national networks. Once again among the boys—as in the army camps of WWII—Grace now studied the military from another perspective. All that she had learned in years of political readings and meetings was now augmented by the anti-military, anti-draft, anti-war struggle of the sixties and seventies.

Many members of Grace's neighborhood organization took Quaker training in draft counseling, and during most of that long war, they counseled "about a hundred kids a week," Sybil Claiborne estimates. Karl Bissinger remembers that "on some nights in the summertime we would have kids lined up clear around the block waiting to get free counseling. Of course, every tenth person was an FBI informant, but that didn't matter. We cheerfully counseled them too." The group also helped to set up the national Medical Committee for Human Rights, and assisted those men who, already in the
military, were seeking medical justification and documentation to get out. Center members eventually created and maintained a support program: they found jobs, homes—even doctors and dentists—for all that young army who'd rejected the Army.

Grace was one of the organizers of The Women's Vigil (a weekly demonstration that lasted eight years), which was staffed by members of the center and their friends. Angry Arts—artists for whom political action was integral to the creative process—and a lot of street theater were also generated or supported by the Peace Center, which offered desk space, or phone use, or just an address. Even the fledgling women's health movement got some assistance from the center; though Grace never worked on reproductive rights issues in those days, "in the very first abortion speak-out (in the late sixties) I was there, and I did talk about my abortion, and the Peace Center gave some desks to the new Abortion Rights Center."

Through this period, Grace Paley still thought that she had to make a conscious effort to keep "politics" out of her fiction, though much of the success of her earlier work is due to the failure of that effort. One of the most notable aspects of her fiction is that it offers the

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8. Similarly, The Women's Pentagon Action(s) used the offices and mailing facilities of the War Resisters League in the late seventies and early eighties.
inescapably political quality of daily life without dogma or polemic. Nonetheless, in her pre-feminist years, the obvious political nature of anti-war work kept her from deliberately placing it, as subject, at the center of her writing when she worked at the job called "literature." Because feminist politics were not so clear to her then, she felt no compunction about writing and publishing "Politics"—one of the rare explicit presentations of "politics" to appear in Paley stories composed before 1972—a somewhat ironic picture of community action as a process born of maternity (ECLM). Not until "Listening" in _Later the Same Day_, written and published in the eighties, would

9. She was reticent here in the same way she had been uncomfortable in her early writing years, because her subject matter (the lives of women and children, the ethnic communities of park and tenement) seemed inappropriate for "literature," seemed, as she had said many times, to be "just this ordinary crap." We have to remember that though Grace Paley was little schooled, the little schooling she had gotten in "English" and "Creative Writing" was theoretically fostered by the New Critics.

10. Others include a one paragraph polemic on the state of Israel (in "The Used-Boy Raisers," composed in the middle/late fifties), one sentence about women working for peace (in "Living," composed in the early sixties), another single sentence about partisans in the Eisenhower/Stevenson elections (in "Northeast Playground," composed in the mid-sixties), and sporadic references to sixties "youth culture" (in _Enormous Changes_, composed throughout the sixties and early seventies). The title story actually contains dialogue in which Dennis stops Alexandra from speaking about the Vietnam war by saying, "Alexandra, you talk a lot, now hush, no politics" (128), and, as if in reply, the text then presents Alexandra querying Dennis about the kind of language and subject one may properly use in poetry (129-30).
she directly address soldiers' lives—per se—in a short story she had worked on extensively and included in a collection. ¹¹

Instead, throughout the sixties and into the seventies, Grace wrote essays, stories and articles for political journals and little magazines with movement sympathies. ¹² Journalism has been, historically, a strong influence on the American short story form, and perhaps its content as well, since the nineteenth century when Harte and Twain wrote for newspapers and then published (sometimes expanded) versions of those stories as popular literature, through the 1920's, 30's, and 40's, when Hemingway was a correspondent and Parker wrote reviews, when Boyle and Porter sent dispatches back from war zones for international magazines and US newspapers. Though academic criticism had begun to move the short story in other directions by 1950, its journalistic aspects—immediacy, realism, stripped-down

¹¹. There is almost no military quality to Corporal Brownstar's life in the early story "A Woman Young and Old." Military service is fleetingly referred to by the romantic Marvine as life in the "Army of the Republic," and the only even-slight discomfort of that life is that Browny gets shipped out to Joplin, Missouri.

¹². She also wrote "statements," usually in conjunction with other writers; these include "A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority," written with Paul Goodman for the Support-In-Action Program to back draft resisters in the sixties, "On Soviet Dissidents," written with six other peace activists in 1973, and the "Women's Unity Statement," written in 1982, in collaboration with "about thirty" other women who'd taken part in the two Women's Pentagon Actions.
prose, non-Romantic subject matter and political perspective--were never cut out.

One of Grace's first such ventures was the publication of "The Sad Story About the Six Boys About to Be Drafted in Brooklyn," which appeared twice in 1967.13 "The Sad Story" is not so polished as her collected fiction, but, as the following excerpt shows, it contains many of the now-classic Paley trademarks. Like a number of her stories, it is shorter than most short fiction; its language is unusual in its quickly executed images and occasionally bizarre sentence structure; both the framing and phrasing of the story remind the reader, visually and rhythmically, of poetry. The story is funny, ironic and terribly sad in its essential truth (except for an amusingly pivotal foray into Lamarckian theory), and it offers hope in a sweetly utopian conclusion; it even contains a tiny bit of self-referential metafictionality in its title.

There were six boys in Brooklyn and none of them wanted to be drafted. What could the others do?

13. First in I-KON 1.3, and then again in WIN, 21, the December issue.
One shot off his index finger. He had read about this in a World War I novel.

One wore silk underpants to his physical. His father had done that for World War II.

One went to a psychiatrist for three years starting three years earlier (his mother to save him had thought of it).

One married and had three children.

One enlisted and hoped for immediate preferential treatment. ("The Sad Story," 18)

Her choice to not publish such fiction outside the movement did not prevent her from admiring the art and appreciating the social impact of mainstream work that did focus on war, the life of soldiers, and the military mentality. She remembers being at a meeting with students during the war when Joseph Heller was present—perhaps as the invited speaker. Someone asked him if he thought that Catch-22 had anything to do with people not registering for the draft, or with the spread of anti-military feeling in the country. He said no; he didn't see any connection. Grace was surprised, disappointed, irritated, and maybe angry. She stood up and said, "I think they have everything to do with each other. I think they're very closely connected. I think Catch-22 has been a tremendous influence, and I think you should be proud of that." 14

14. First published in 1955, Heller's first novel was reprinted in 1961, and then saw more than twenty editions by May of 1968, a high point in the rapidly growing anti-war movement.
Her own anti-war work remained outside the classically drawn literary sphere, within that apparently ragged but actually quite well-defined arena called "the movement." The peace movement in the United States has always been made up of a multitude of organizations, loosely joined in coalition for national and international action. Grace's decade of work, developing out of neighborhood resistance to shelter drills in the fifties and growing into nationally coordinated anti-war organizing and action in the late sixties, constituted her membership, her credentials.

Though her family was disturbed by her actions and their consequences, they became accustomed to their steady increase. Isaac, despite--or because of--his own political history, was angry about her radicalism, and they argued frequently. Jeanne was frightened the first several times Grace went to jail, but finally the sisters had a long

15. Nonetheless, she was one of those invited to join the New York literary branch of concerned citizens at home: Elizabeth Hardwick, Robert Lowell and Susan Sontag spent an evening with community activists. As Karl Bissinger remembers it, they discussed "the quality of the prose coming out of the peace movement." As Grace recalls, though, the major debate was over the question of whether to actually counsel draft resistance, or to simply dispense information, to young men facing the draft. "They yelled at us," Grace says. Hardwick and Lowell were against such counseling, as were many liberal supporters of the anti-war movement, possibly because it threatened to carry the same penalty--and the same stigma--as draft refusal itself. Shortly after that evening's discussion, Grace--and many others in the country who'd been arguing the question--decided that such action was the right choice. Hence, the national proliferation of movement posters reading "I Counsel Draft Resistance," and the resultant arrests.
conversation in which Grace explained that imprisonment was sometimes part of the action and that, while inside, she continued to work; she told Jeanne that in jail she had an opportunity to learn from women she could never have known otherwise—and that she actually enjoyed going to jail sometimes, for those reasons.

The first time Grace was put in jail, she was only one block away from home, in the old New York Women's House of Detention. The proximity and familiarity made Nora feel that her mother hadn't really been "sent away." In fact, the teenager was "excited," because throughout her childhood she had seen and heard all the people on the sidewalks calling out to women on the inside. "They would be out there yelling and screaming at the tops of their voices, out on Sixth Avenue, but you could never see the people up in the windows. So it was real exciting when Grace was actually in there, in this place I was so interested in."

But Nora, like her aunt and grandfather, also feared for Grace in the streets of the later sixties and seventies. At one huge demonstration, a march down Fifth Avenue for which the streets were lined with almost as many observers

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16. This was when she was jailed for six days in 1966 for taking part in a sit-down demonstration in the middle of Fifth Avenue, blocking and thus protesting the annual Armed Forces Day parade. When she was released, she joined the movement to change the intolerable conditions in the old prison.
and police as participants, she and Grace were marching with the Bread and Puppet Theater. Their group had a big puppet of Uncle Sam, all suited up in red, white and blue, and smoking a fat cigar; like the famous Camel billboard, the puppet puffed steam from its stogie. It was a giant figure, with two people inside the puppet and more holding it up and maneuvering it from the outside. At one corner, where the march was turning down a side street near Central Park, a gang of men with baseball bats waited behind the police line. When they saw the Uncle Sam puppet, they became enraged; here was the reason they'd brought their bats. A tiny mob, they broke down the police barrier and surged toward the Bread and Puppet contingent.

Grace immediately moved to meet them, putting her arms out wide in a holding gesture, to stop them. Nora couldn't tell if she actually stopped every one of them, but the angry group halted. And nothing happened to Grace. Later, to her daughter's passionate--and angry--protests, Grace replied, "Ah, they wouldn't hurt a middle-aged lady." For Nora, "it was the most terrifying experience for me to see my mother do that--just step right into danger. She would do these little brave acts, and I would really be angry that" she was endangering herself. "I didn't want her to do it--but I was also proud of her. I wasn't afraid she would go to jail; I was afraid she'd get hurt."
Grace Paley was, in some ways, typical among movement activists. Grace was among the urban guerrillas who protested the rapidly rising numbers of Americans killed in Southeast Asia; that group planted three hundred sixty crosses in a park near City Hall, creating overnight a field of symbolic graves for the G.I.s killed in one Easter week. She sat down with hundreds of friends in the middle of dozens of streets and avenues in New York, and joined those who took small boats out into the river for a blockade of the Navy in New Jersey. She was one of the regulars who turned out in public support, with banners and posters, when young men refused induction at the local draft board, and she traveled the crowded buses from New York to Washington for repeated demonstrations of citizen anger and disapproval.

But in other ways, Grace Paley was an exceptional candidate for public work. Out of the PTA and into the streets, she had developed into a charismatic speaker and

17. Her brother-in-law Sam Tenenbaum used to say that there wasn't "a street or avenue in New York City worthy of the name if Gracie hasn't lain down on it."

18. Grace was at the War Resisters League's first anti-Vietnam War demonstration in 1963; naturally, she had been with the Village Peace Center when, even before that demonstration, it sponsored a Village meeting about the coming war. In April of 1967, she and her friends were in the protective circle surrounding the young men who committed the first mass draft card burning; she was among WRL members arrested at the draft induction center in December of 1968.
organizer. Like the voices of her fictional narrators, her own voice is compelling. In the gritty charm of its Bronx cadence and pronunciation, Grace's voice is easy to understand, compellingly sincere, simple and intimate, revelatory and explanatory without being directive; her public style is no less personal than her immediate presence. A live model of the feminist axiom—the personal is political—Grace Paley often catalyzes and embodies the thoughts and feelings of her audience as she speaks.

By 1969 this combination of the ordinary and the unusual had brought her to the fore. Though she never got caught in the kind of notoriety that dogged—and damned—some anti-war activists, she was prominent enough to be chosen to represent the non-violent branch of the nation's anti-war movement in a small delegation that traveled to Hanoi to receive three prisoners of war and bring them home; these anti-war activists represented the American people, not the American government. Other members of the group were Rennie Davis (representing the New Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam), Linda Evans (from Students for a

19. As she had protested to Nora, Grace was "a middle-aged lady." In a society that perceives women in terms of sexual body imagery, and demands passivity or manipulation as the female modus operandi, this motherly little lady with graying hair, forty-seven years old in 1969, never aroused the rage and hatred that Joan Baez, Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave had to endure. Grace neither symbolized female sexuality nor threatened patriarchal sexism. Her own "wild" past—however much the FBI might have known about it—was not at issue.
Democratic Society), and Jimmy Johnson (of the Fort Hood Three). The four were accompanied by three members of a movement film collective called Newsreel, who documented their travels. 20

Recognizing the positive value of such a mission, especially in the face of its own failure to effect enough prisoner releases or exchanges, the State Department made propaganda, if not hay, out of the occasion. But of course, almost no mention was made in the media of the role the peace movement had played in the return of these prisoners—all bomber pilots; credit went to the State Department. Moreover, despite the usual governmental assurances to the contrary, Newsreel's film was impounded immediately by customs agents when they returned to the States, and all of the delegates' papers and personal belongings were examined exhaustively.

On the home front, Grace's children were in much the same position they'd been in since the mid-fifties—worried about their mother, amazed by her, and working out a stance that could encompass their conflicting feelings. Now aged twenty and eighteen, they had long understood her purpose and certainly felt both pride and respect, but they also felt a consistent low level of anxiety and fear. Danny was opposed to her going: "I thought it was really dangerous,

which--obviously--it was." He was always, in fact, worried about her physical safety, especially in the streets. He kept thinking that "something would happen--maybe some cop would be brutal." But in the face of her intense commitment, he gave up trying to stop her. Nora recalls that people were always astonished when they learned that her mother was in Hanoi; they literally couldn't believe it. But the trip was substantial enough; when Grace came home to the Village after three weeks, the "souvenirs" she brought represented the exotica of Southeast Asia as it been compounded by the strange necessity of war, like buffalo hide sandals made with rubber tire soles.

When she returned, Grace spoke and wrote about her experiences; we have those recollections in her nonfiction prose, which weaves her fascination with language through her interpretation of the culture and people she found in Vietnam. She loved their names, and recited lists of villages and cities in her speeches.

...our interpreter Nhan said, "Grace, if you would stay another two weeks, I could teach you the tune of the language." Speaking is singing--a lot of up and down anyway. The word Hoa means flower, Hoa means harmony. The tune's important." ("Report from the DRV," 5)

In her articles Grace displays the same clarity and economy we find in her fiction, so that one line, one image, one
brief remark, can tell the whole story in miniature, a microcosmic mirror within the larger text.

The woman who called before I left for Vietnam was a pilot's wife. She had not heard from her husband in 2 1/2 years....[When Grace returned with no word of the man] I had to tell her this. She asked me why the Vietnamese insisted on keeping the pilots. I explained that they were considered war criminals, who had come 10,000 miles to attack a tiny, barely armed country in an undeclared and brutal war. She said, "Well, they're airmen. They're American officers." I told her about Nien Trach, Dong Hoi, Vinh Linh, the dark tunnels, the people seared by napalm, shattered by pellets, the miles of craters, the bloody mountains. She said, "Oh, Mrs. Paley, villages and people! My husband wouldn't do that." Before my eyes filled with tears in sorrow for my country, I said, "Oh? Well, I guess it must have been someone else." ("i guess...," 33)

With the same kind of images and punctuation before us, with a "real" voice in our ears like the voices we hear in her stories, we read the nonfiction, in which--as a war correspondent of sorts--Grace struggled to understand and interpret the war, and to define her country's responsibility.

...well of course it's a war and they are bombing communication, transportation. It's true, they are overkilling the Vietnamese countryside and the little brooks, but that's America for you, they have overkilled flies, bugs, beetles, trees, fish, rivers and the flowers of their own American fields. They're like overgrown kids who lean on a buddy in kindergarten and kill him. ("Report," 7)

Throughout her magazine writings and speeches, as in her fiction, she includes children, alludes frequently to motherhood, makes metaphors of mothering and childhood. In
an edited speech transcription published soon after her return, she describes a place "near the sea" where an American pilot named Dixon is buried, and says that the Vietnamese have marked it with a cross "in case his mother should want to come see it after the war" ("Report," 8). She considers the proliferation of "military targets" and muses, "...the next thing a logical military brain hooks into is the fact that [in a people's war] every person is a military target, or the mother of a military target..." (8).

Much later, when the war was over and her energies had been further invested in anti-nuclear and related ecological activism, she recalled her Vietnam work in a similar mood:

In another time, my friends and I vigiled every Saturday afternoon for eight years on Eighth Street in Manhattan....One day, an old lady stopped me as I was giving out leaflets. I loved her at once, because she reminded me of my own mother and several aunts....[The two women converse about the importance of supporting resisters in prison.] I remembered my job...."Could you give me your name? We're a local group." "Yes, certainly," she said. "My name is Sobell. I'm Morton Sobell's mother." I said, "Oh, Morton Sobell. Oh..." Then, without a thought, we fell into each other's arms and began to cry, because her son was still at that time hopelessly in jail and had been there for years, all through his young manhood. And the sons and daughters of my friends were caught in a time of war that would use them painfully, no matter what their decisions. ("Living on Karen Silkwood Drive," 12)

This emphasis reflects not merely Grace Paley's nurturant consciousness, but her preoccupation with the global need for taking care, for mothering-in-the-world, which is reflected in the preponderance of her stories that focus on
mothers and motherhood issues: of forty-five collected stories in three volumes, twenty-two have motherhood as a central focus, and at least eight others include it as a major issue.

Grace believes that going to Vietnam in 1969 was of tremendous importance in her life; being there "deepened" her thinking. For the first time she went to "a place that was totally different," not different like California, or different like Europe, but an utterly unfamiliar culture in which even the alphabet, her major resource, was unknown to her. She notes, too, that she went to a place that was being assaulted, systematically destroyed, by her own people. And, "another thing was that then I saw war. You know, I had been through the second world war, but I hadn't seen it. There I saw war."21

Out on the road, traveling from Hanoi into the countryside, the American peace brigade saw that every city they passed had been destroyed. "We were not military men, not even people who'd been to wars, we weren't bored by the repetition; we didn't even get used to it" ("Report," 6). She compares Dong Hai to Pompeii--historically the site of "a great, grass-terraced open theater" and a "thousand year old wall"--once home to 33,000 people, but in 1969 a ghost

21. She became, then, one of the very small percentage of American women--including those in the military--to do so, since 1865.
city of white doorsteps, "as though Baltimore had disappeared into the grass" ("i guess," 31). Grace crawled through the tunnels of the province of Quanh Binh, called The Land of Fire, where the people lived completely underground because of the constant bombing--day and night with not one break--for more than two years.

And she met soldiers again, talked to American soldiers in prison--the ones she'd come to bring back home, and the ones who weren't getting out. "I learned a lot about the military, about the people in the military, about what it really is." She was touched by the fact that men who were in prison "weren't cold to us at all, even though they knew we were from the peace movement; they really did talk to us." Grace remembers particularly one man who had not been selected to go home; he'd been among the first Americans sent to Vietnam, and in 1969, he'd had been a prisoner of war for six years. All the pilot-prisoners were officers of course, and many had signed on to stay because they needed a little more flight time. They had made career decisions in taking repeated Vietnam duty; "they wanted to go from major to colonel. And before my very eyes, when we brought this guy home in the plane, they turned him from a major into a colonel."

Many of the military men Grace spoke to, on that trip and back in the states, engaged her affection or interest; very few were like one of the POW's she negotiated
for—who was "a complete and total shit." Most were what Grace calls "perfectly nice guys." She flew back to the United States in conversation with a perfectly nice guy who said, "Gee, Grace, I don't know what I'm gonna do when I get home. I just don't know what I'm gonna do." She suggested, "Well, you know how to drive an airplane; you know how to fly a plane. You could do that." He looked at her when she said that, and answered, "That's like driving a truck. That's not interesting." Then he said, "I'm sorry to say this, but I really liked bombing; it was very exciting." So you can see, Grace says now, "how I learned a lot. Here's this perfectly nice man telling me this"; he was no doubt the sort of fellow Marvine would have called "a soldier of the republic" ("A Woman," LDM). 22

After her late summer expedition in 1969, Grace spent much of the fall speaking about what she'd learned in Vietnam, working toward the big November march on Washington. There were several actions planned for that demonstration, demanding various levels of commitment; for some protesters, the Pentagon was again a major target, as it had been in the first major "siege of the Pentagon" in the fall of 1967. Grace was there with friends, and to

22. She has incorporated that exchange with the pilot—quoted here from a retelling in personal conversation—into both her essays and her fiction. The most recent incarnation is in a short piece in the 1989 War Resisters League Peace Calendar, called "POW" (opposite the week of June 5th).
their surprise, they met Nora, who had come by herself on a bus from New Hampshire, where she had just started school at Franconia College. With no knowledge of each other's presence in the city, after the chaos of a long night of struggle and confusion among the National Guard, D.C. police and the thousands of demonstrators who'd come to protest the war, the mother and daughter serendipitously met at the doors of the Pentagon.

Arriving alone, and knowing no one else there, Nora had sat through the night on a cold staircase with hundreds of others, huddled together for body warmth. Their sitting had been declared illegal by the District of Columbia police, who were pulling demonstrators off the steps and taking them away throughout the night. Nora was near the front when the morning light came, for many people had already been carted off. In the dawn Nora could see clearly the soldiers in their riot gear, up on the roofs, out in the streets, and right there on the stairs, their guns pointed at the people--and she was frightened. As the sky continued to lighten, and faces emerged from the shadows of the crowd, Grace appeared. After a dark cold night of anxious uncertainty, in the dawn of drawn bayonets, suddenly her mother appeared--what a story!

Her own fear was immediately dispelled, but not so much by the classic "flood of relief" as by the resurgence of that old anxiety: please, Grace, don't do anything
dangerous! That was all Nora could think about in this scene, a grotesquely enlarged version of what she'd experienced throughout her childhood and adolescence--this time there were thousands of armed riot police and soldiers wearing gas masks. On such nights in Washington, the air was nearly palpable, toxic with tear gas and exhaust from the thousands of vehicles jammed into the Capitol. Ironically, the big buses which brought protesters into the city--sometimes from half the states in the Union--waited to take them home with their engines running, clogging the streets with noxious fumes that mixed with spreading tear gas and Mace in the cold wind.

The two women spontaneously generated a classic mother/daughter duet. Nora says that her desire to protect Grace, to keep her mother away from the most dangerous action, was what made her brave. Grace remembers being so worried after meeting Nora that she determined to take on nothing extraordinary because she needed to protect her daughter. As the police worked over the crowd, grabbing, clubbing, often injuring the people they "arrested," Nora forced herself to be calm. She saw her companions of the nightwatch being beaten, dragged across the cement and tossed into steel trucks, "literally lifted and thrown into the trucks"; when it was her turn, the pretty, white-skinned, redhaired college girl was hustled very quickly but quite decently--almost solicitously--into a truck by "a cop
who was protective of me!" Grace—who had seen girls and young women beaten on their breasts, pregnant women punched in the belly—was as amazed and relieved as Nora. Like mother, like daughter; tough—and lucky.

Karl Bissinger, who was in the streets with Grace many times in those years, speaks of her courage as a kind of intelligence of emotion. He and Grace were in Washington together at the huge march in November of 1969, and during the 1971 Mayday Protest, another demonstration that led to thousands of arrests. They began their day's work at five in the morning; they left the apartment of a local family who took in visiting demonstrators for every major march and rally, and went downtown to the Capitol. One plan was to cut off the city of Washington, or at least isolate the center of government, by keeping traffic out and letting no one leave. Karl and Grace were in a group whose tactic was to sit down and stop traffic on the bridge coming over the Potomac. The simplicity of this plan cannot begin to predict the reality of the action. "It was really a scene out of the Inferno. I'd never seen anything like this," Karl remembers.

The police came through with tear gas, throwing canisters directly at the people; they threw the tiny bombs sometimes called "poppers," making a terrible noise to confuse and frighten "the enemy." Soldiers wielded drawn bayonets, and police brandished billy clubs; "people were
getting their heads cracked right and left. They were trying to round us up and the arrests were beginning. And I was scared. I was really, physically, scared." Karl looked around at Grace, and saw that she did not appear frightened. "Grace was alert. Grace was with it--she was remembering what you should do, but she was not physically scared. And I was sort of knocked out by that, because Grace has more imagination than I do; Grace knows better than I what's gonna happen." The demonstrators had, of course, anticipated and prepared themselves for the arrests that followed. There were thousands arrested on Mayday, and the area jails were literally overflowing. Grace was one of hundreds kept in the Washington football stadium, home field of the Redskins. She was there for three days, sleeping on the ground; people repeatedly walked the round of the stadium to keep warm in the late spring chill.23

Karl points out that the qualities he saw in his friend Grace that day in Washington are rooted in the same dignity--masked by simplicity, and the same patience--refined from simple stubbornness, with which she had moved from place to place at home, carrying her nightgown and toothbrush in a paper bag. Her life was now so complex that

23. Grace walked and talked with Barbara Deming, comrade in the movement and sister writer; they shared a warm friendship which ended with Barbara's death from cancer nearly fifteen years later. See Bibliography for Grace's introductory essay to Barbara's last book.
its personal and political aspects were interwoven too tightly to distinguish and separate. The children's growing through and out of high school, the escalation of the war and her resultant education and activism, the development of her consciously political writing and speaking, becoming a teacher of writers and a designer of curriculum, writing and publishing her short fiction, struggling with the dissolution of her marriage—plus visits with Jeanne and Isaac and the maintenance of an intricate network of friendships—all of these things designed and called out the essential character that had become the mature Grace Paley.
In 1972, Grace and Jess Paley divorced; in that same year, she married Bob Nichols. The following year, in which her father would have celebrated his ninetieth birthday, Isaac Goodside died. In those years, Grace began to travel again, so that her 1969 trip to Vietnam became the first of several important visits to distant places; between 1972 and 1977 she went to Chile, Russia, and China, as well as Puerto Rico. Before 1969, Grace had lived by the movement adage to "think global, act local," which was personally strengthened by her twin desires to stay in the neighborhood and avoid the literati. But now, though she carefully maintained her connections on the block, the center of her life was no longer that extended family of park, playground and PTA; her territory had expanded.

Her father's death changed her relationship to the Bronx; the real streets were so much altered that the old place—though the house on Hoe Street still stood, intact—was located now in memory, rather than family life. Even the oldest folks who lived there in the late sixties and early seventies had never gone to Doctor Goodside with their
aches and pains, nor seen little Gracie running up and down the block, and the younger ones hadn't grown up watching the teenaged Grace rush in and out with her friends. Moreover, at the other end of Manhattan island, Grace's children had begun to make their own way, in fits and starts, to and from different addresses. Grace herself was now "based," so to speak, in Bronxville as well as the Village; Bob's Vermont house, and the towns and land around it, were beginning to become yet another home to her, and her work on the national level—as organizer, writer and teacher—had begun to develop an international component.

In these years, one decade giving way to the next—her own sixth decade—Grace's stories still did not overtly depict her movement work, but their characters are clearly drawn from the metamorphoses she was undergoing; her title for the second collection, published in 1974, suggests both the impact of such changes and their felt rapidity. The first and last stories of Enormous Changes at the Last Minute offer narratives of careful introspection and keen observation that lead to personal transformation in the context of a changing world. We might consider the creation of all three collections as a means of organizing the past, a sophisticated filing system that orders, integrates, and analyzes what the author has learned over time.

1. Actually, the collected stories were written over the full fifteen years from 1959 to 1974.
Their publication, then, is a statement: what has been learned in the chaos of experience as "fact" has been transformed, and is now deliberately arranged in sequence and published as "fiction." The creation of sequence is part of the writing; it does not replicate, but represents or evokes, "real life." Even if a story has been published earlier, separately, its new public appearance—which is often altered—indicates the writer's desire to place it in a context, a matrix which instantaneously begins to construct new meaning.

It is true though, that, like any thoughtful editor, Grace makes decisions about the placement of individual pieces for the sake of balance, in terms of tone and (likely) emotional impact; she tries to effect a change of emotional pace, and staggers the order of sad or funny stories when she can. These are practical, mundane matters; she also arranges stories by length—she wants the very short ones distributed throughout, to avoid the effect of several long stories together. Such concerns do not diffuse the larger effects, considerations of theme, political consciousness, or character development. They may instead create that same sense of "reality" within the collections that the individual stories suggest. And it is accurate to say that the collections move through an effective, if not strict, chronology. If we consider both style and political consciousness, and track her stories through all three
collections, we would begin with "Goodbye and Good Luck," which is relatively straightforward and direct in both areas, and come eventually to "Listening," which is an exceptionally complex story, thematically and structurally labyrinthine.

Grace chose to open ECLM with "Wants," a story in which the narrator encounters her ex-husband in the street; because they were married for twenty-seven years, she feels justified in greeting him, "Hello, my life"—but he rejects the definition: "What? What life? No life of mine" (3, ECLM). In the midst of their rapid meeting-cum-argument—which takes place in and around the public library—she decides to re-read Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and *The Children*, which she says "is about how life in the United States in New York changed in twenty-seven years fifty years ago" (4, ECLM). Having thus placed herself in a literary/historical context, the narrator concludes her story with a self-assessment: "when a person or an event comes along to jolt or appraise me, I can take some appropriate action" (6, ECLM). This collection, we understand, is going to be about the coming of such persons and events, and the actions taken in their wake. This book,

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2. This statement clearly points to Faith's announced "change" in "Faith in a Tree," near the center of the book (discussed in a previous chapter of this text).
we come to see, is also about "how life in the United States in New York changed in twenty-seven years."

The concluding story, "The Long-Distance Runner," is narrated by Faith, who announces therein that "One day, before or after forty-two," she became a long-distance runner. Though she admits to being "in many ways inadequate to this desire," she still

wanted to go far and fast...round and round the country from the seaside to the bridges, along the old neighborhood streets a couple of times, before old age and urban renewal ended them and [her. She] had already spent a lot of life lying down or standing and staring. [She] had decided to run. (ECLM, 179-81)

Faith embodies Grace here; she wants to make an accounting of the past, to see where it has gone and to understand how she carries it inside her. Her marriage is over; her father is dead; her children are practically self-sufficient. The world is at war--again, or still--and now the writer has lived nearly half a century. The examination of time and age and their relationship, their almost physical joint history, is a favorite subject in individual stories, and thematic in the collections as well. Often whimsically introduced--as in "Faith in the Afternoon," where we learn Faith's antecedents when the narrator tells us that she is "seasick with ocean sounds" because
her grandfather, scoring the salty sea, skated for miles along the Baltic's icy beaches, with a frozen herring in his pocket. And she, all ears, was born in Coney Island. (ECLM, 31-2)

--these issues are always interwoven with examinations of family, of generations and relations. So, in "Runner," Grace recorded both the remembered past and the changing present by describing the rearrangements time makes in the lives of houses, families, and cities. After living three weeks in her Jewish family's former apartment with four black children and their mother, Mrs. Luddy (who answers the door when Faith pounds on it in terror, screaming "Mama! Mama!") Faith concludes her story by trying to explain to her own children, her lover and, eventually, her readers, what has happened.

A woman inside the steamy energy of middle age runs and runs. She finds the houses and streets where her childhood happened. She lives in them. She learns as though she was still a child what in the world is coming next. (ECLM, 198)

The selection and arrangement of stories for ECLM was part of that process for Grace Paley. She looked back over her years of changes--and all the years of changes that had led up to them--and tried to see what was coming next. Much of what was coming next--a new home, some new family, and an ongoing in-house dialogue about political theory and action--would come to her in the person of Bob Nichols.
Bob Nichols' family life and background are notably different from Grace Paley's. Born in 1919, Bob grew up in the town of Worcester, Massachusetts and in rural Vermont, where his father had a house built as a retreat from urban life. An only child, he went to boarding schools from the age of ten through adolescence, and spent but short periods with his parents after that. Robert Nichols grew up with inherited money; he has always had a private income, as had his father. In 1987—now that the money has dwindled considerably—he said that he was "just beginning to understand what it means to live a life in which money is not taken for granted." His parents divorced when he was seventeen, right around the time he went off to Harvard.

He says that his father "was something of a loner," who designed his Vermont house to get away from the upper middle class social milieu of which he had grown contemptuous. Like Bob, his father was interested in the people of the Vermont countryside and towns, but unlike his son, he maintained a distance from the people who became his neighbors; he called them "characters" and rather romanticized them. Bob's mother had what her son calls "a pretty unhappy life" during her marriage, but enjoyed herself with both friends and suitors after the divorce, when she moved away. Unlike her husband, she had not sought isolation, and when he moved her to Vermont, she missed the family and community life she'd had in Massachusetts.
After his parents' divorce, his own years at Harvard and the many months of World War II he spent in the South Pacific—like Jess Paley and Victor Goodside—Bob spent only a few more seasons in the Vermont house; he married and moved to New York City in 1952. He stayed in Manhattan over twenty years, working as a landscape architect. His full-time residence in Vermont began only about seven years ago—he just came up one time and stayed on, he says—hadn't necessarily expected or planned to, but has been there ever since. He was one of the city planners who urged the creation of "vest-pocket" parks in the city, and designed playgrounds—including the one in Washington Square Park in the Village—with children's safety and imagination in mind. He was one of the originators of the now-popular large scale log installations with chain-hung tires, unpainted wood, multi-level platforms and tunnels.

Bob was politically active; like Grace, he became involved in neighborhood organizing in the parks, and then "ban-the-bomb" and peace work took up much of his non-working time. Also like Grace, he began to take his writing seriously in the fifties; his early work included collections of poetry published by small presses in artist's editions, as well as several plays, his street productions, often done in concert with a loose repertory company of
His wife Mary Perot—a member of what he calls "the impoverished upper class" of Philadelphia—a former editor of *The Village Voice*, is now head of public relations for the mayor's office in New York City, but she had three children, two girls and a boy, before she took on such work, and before the marriage began to falter; at the time of their divorce, Bob and Mary's children—unlike Nora and Danny Paley in the next few years—were not yet teenagers. All three Nichols children went to private schools. That difference would have been one of the few major philosophical and practical disagreements between Bob and Grace in the late fifties and early sixties; Grace would have disapproved of that choice, but in those days was not a close enough friend to have argued it out with the Nicholses.

The families were casually friendly, however; Danny remembers visiting Bob's Vermont house one summer. "In fact, my father helped him build the pavilion, which is a little building" next to the house. But Bob and Mary separated before the mid-sixties, and Bob and Grace didn't have a romantic or sexual attachment until some time after that. Danny says that even when Bob became a good friend to Grace, "I never really thought of it in romantic terms, you

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3. See Bibliography for list of selected work.
know, between my mother and him....later on it gradually
occurred to me that they were going out together."

Bob's marriage was well over by the time he and his
neighborhood pal and movement comrade came together as a
couple. When Grace left Jess, and was staying with various
friends, she began to see Bob more and more often. In those
days, Karl Bissinger remembers, Bob "always looked like
Ichabod Crane--his hair sticking out to here, his shirt torn
and [pulled] out. And I know that he could afford Brooks
Brothers clothes. [At the same time,] Bob was the kind of
artist that Grace could respect and understand" because of
the work he wanted to do: he was serious about his writing,
and he construed his art in political terms. Bob Nichols
was a visibly eccentric fellow whose art and politics were
so consuming that his disheveled appearance was of no
concern or even notice to him, and Grace Paley found him
charming.

Bob was, even with his Brooks Brothers shirt tucked
in, an exotic for this Bronx Jew. Though she has never been
exploitive or condemnatory of Jews in her stories like her
brothers-in-print who often attach the unfortunate effluvia
of twentieth century American materialism to Jews (and
especially Jewish women), Grace's Jewish women nevertheless
often couple with non-Jews. From young Shirley Abramowitz's
tolerance through Faith's two Catholic husbands (and including her brief dalliance with Nick Hegstraw), to the newest autobiographical figure in the cycle, Ruth Larsen, who has taken the Christian last name of her husband, Joe, Grace's Jewish women exhibit not only an acceptance of, but a romantic interest in, goyim.

In her poetry, which she has always acknowledged to be even closer to the bone than her stories, Grace explicitly depicts herself as one who suffers because she has forgotten Jerusalem, one who has coupled with a Gentile. "Even my lover, a Christian with pale eyes and the barbarian's foreskin/has left me," the speaker realizes in "A Warning" (LF, 24). And the speaker in another poem, untitled, admits that she "cannot keep [her] mind on Jerusalem" and wonders what will happen "when the Lord/remembers vengeance/(which is his)/and finds me" (LF, 43).

4. One of whom, in his violent rejection of Mother Church, strongly echoes Jess Paley in his denunciations of Judaism.

5. In the past several years, prompted by the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinian people, and especially following a trip to Israel in spring of 1987 and the intifadeh beginning in December of that year, Grace has grown much more active on Jewish and Israeli/Palestinian issues. Her earlier work, both the poetry collection and the stories ("Used-Boy Raisers" and "At That Time"), has been rendered somewhat dated by this development of consciousness and action.
But though her sexual and romantic interest in the Christian "other" might be related to that lust for "blondies" we find so often in fiction by Jewish men, it is also based in her lifelong laissez faire acceptance of whatever her companions may be, and especially her desire for an ongoing cultural and ethnic, as well as racial, mixing and blending of peoples. Grace Paley has been mining that symbolic vein in her stories, and has worked into it the related issues of difference, otherness and, especially, Jewishness. Thinking globally is not an axiomatic exercise for Grace; she understands the world in politically ecological terms, as one entity, made up of inextricably related and interdependent, though variously exploitive and supportive, elements. Her stories repeatedly present both metaphoric and actual racial blends and mixtures.

On the metaphoric level, she offers cultural exchanges, like the ones that occur in "Runner" when white Faith returns to her old Jewish neighborhood and stays in her family's apartment with black Mrs. Luddy--in what has now become a black neighborhood--for three weeks (ECLM); in "Enormous Changes" when the middle-aged Jewish social worker Alexandra has an affair with--and a baby by--a young non-Jew, Dennis the cabdriver, who shuttles back and forth from his commune to his rock band and her bed (ECLM); 6 in "The

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6. Intergenerational exchange was one of her first themes, actually. When thirty-eight year old Charles C. Charley finds himself married to Cindy Anne, a high school student, in "An Irrevocable Diameter" (written in the late
Expensive Moment," when Xie Feng comes from China and visits Faith at home (LSD), and in "Listening," when straight Faith is confronted by lesbian Cassie (LSD).

She has also written stories in which skin color per se figures as a major theme or issue. Babies who are born to parents of different colors, or are being raised by a mother whose skin doesn't match theirs, are found in at least four stories, and in each the babies bring satisfaction, pleasure, contentment, and even higher consciousness to the adults around them.7 In "Northeast Playground," first published in 1967, one of the characters is Leni, a young white Jewish street whore whose baby, acquired from a john in payment of a debt, is "dark brown" (ECLM, 146). Becoming Claude's mother has pulled Leni off the streets and into the playground, where she is more than happy to raise her son on ADC.

"At That Time, or The History of a Joke," first published in 1981, offers a young woman who receives "a

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7. This is not true in the early story "In Time Which Made a Monkey of Us All," which ends on a sober—even grim—note, but does contain this theme: the "child" is Itzik, a monkey in Teitelbaum's Zoo, the family pet shop. Eddie Teitelbaum suggests that his father has raped a chimpanzee at the city zoo, and that "Itzikel" is his half-brother. Eddie is literally his brother's keeper.
uterine transplant" and "almost immediately" begins "to
swell, for in the soft red warm interior of her womb, there
was already a darling rolled-up fetus" (LSD, 93-4). When
the child is "unfurled," it is revealed to be "as black as
the night which rests our day-worn eyes" (LSD, 94). But
this would hardly be notable if the young woman were not
white. The child is hailed as a messiah, "A virgin born of
a virgin," and her birth is a sign of goodness, even
redemption, for much of humanity: "Throughout the world,
people smiled" (95). (The narrator is careful to note,
however, that "certain Jews who had observed and suffered
the consequence of other virgin births" are less than
delighted with the symbolic value of this baby.)

"Ruthy and Edie" was first published in Heresies in
1980, but was lengthened to eventually include this theme by
the time it appeared in LSD in 1985. Sara, the daughter of
Ruth (who is probably Jewish, and married to Joe Larsen, who
is probably not), is married to Tomas, whose name suggests
that he is Hispanic. Letty, their daughter, is her
grandma's darling. The child Letty embodies two aspects of
this theme: she is not only a child of her parents' own
rainbow coalition--and thus represents hope for an end to
racism--but, as a little child in need of both freedom and

8. Her race/color is not described, but only
assumed--Grace Paley is not immune to the ingrained white
narrative assumption of a character's being white by
default, black only when labeled so.
safety to grow up, represents the urgent necessity for adults to protect the world for her, for the future of humankind:

Letty began to squirm out of Ruth's arms. Mommy, she called, Gramma is squeezing. But it seemed to Ruth that she'd better hold her even closer, because, though no one else seemed to notice--Letty, rosy and soft-cheeked as ever, was falling, already falling...onto the hard floor of man-made time. (LSD 126)

In "Zagrowsky Tells," published singly in Mother Jones (as "Telling") in 1985 and collected in LSD in the same year, Grace presents Emmanuel, the five-year old son of white Cissy Zagrowsky and a black gardener who worked at the mental hospital in which she has been a patient. Emmanuel, in whom the suggestions of Claude's, Letty's and the unnamed baby girl's situation are developed fully, is "a little boy brown like a coffee bean," a "brown baby. An intermediate color," his grandfather says, just a little lighter than a chocolate popsicle (LSD, 159, 170, 173). His name--insisted upon hysterically by his mother--means Messiah in Hebrew, and he is indeed the harbinger and catalyst for Izzy Zagrowsky, whose garden-variety racism has receded considerably since his grandson's birth.

Emmanuel is a literal result of his mother's institutionalization, but he also serves to heal the grief and misery in his family, embodying a bond which holds the generations together. Not only the baby's name, then, but his situation, as well as his grandfather's commentary on
his life and character, emphasize this theme and its positive values. Grace began to work with the theme in the mid-sixties, when she moved further out of her neighborhood, and often worked closely with many different kinds of people—including Bob Nichols—creating a cultural exchange of her own.

Bob remembers moving into the Eleventh Street apartment with Grace in 1969; he had been separated from Mary, and living in his office, since 1966. Once they became a couple, Grace began to go up to Vermont with him for the summers. But there was no New England idyll for the radical writer-lovers; rather, a typically gendered arrangement evolved between them. The first time Grace went, Bob's young daughter Liza came to stay with him—and when Bob didn't take up the necessary mothering, Grace did. She took the child swimming every few days, arranged to meet some women with children her age, and slid back into the role she'd just been growing out of. Writing stories, organizing against the draft and the war, involved in a serious love affair, her own children nearly out of the nest, Grace had "really [been] looking forward to the next few summers alone" with Bob, but found that her life remained as complicated in the country as it ever had been in the city.

Both of them tell stories about Grace patiently brushing the summer tangles out of Liza's long hair every
day, pulling the brambles out one at a time. Bob remembers the scene with sweetness and nostalgia, gratified at the warmth between his child and his lover; Grace remembers it as a reluctant but deliberate resumption of mothering. Though this was obviously a necessary coming-together for Grace and Liza in the time of a new woman's presence in her father's house, this newly-single sixties woman--like so many others--was moved by a combination of old patterns, her own nurturant compassion, and good sense. In fact, this newly-single sixties woman got married again, in the seventies.

Danny Paley recalls that he and his wife Debbie were the only other people, though not exactly "guests," present at Grace and Bob's wedding. Debbie and Danny may actually have provided a contemporary version of the influence Grace remembers from her friends in 1942: the young couple had just gotten married themselves, in October of 1972.9 They

9. Debbie Weissman came from a more conservative background than her young husband. She'd known, she says, only "parents who had no politics of any sort or were right-wing," and she had had "to sneak to demonstrations" in her teens. So for her "it was sort of nifty to meet an older person who had this view of the world." They met one morning when Debbie had stayed overnight on Eleventh Street. "I woke up in the morning and there was this little woman, and Danny was talking to her like she was his mother but he kept calling her Grace. And I couldn't figure out who she was; where I grew up nobody called their mother by her name. It's very funny." Debbie had never heard of Grace before meeting her--"I didn't know she existed. I only found out she was a writer after I'd met both her and Danny, because one day I was in a bookstore with a friend who held up a copy of Little Disturbances and asked, 'Is this the Grace you met?"
happened to be present when Grace and Bob, after some conversation about whether or not to marry, decided "to just get it over with," and so the newlyweds accompanied them, as Danny recalls, to the appropriate civic offices. But the line of engaged couples there was too long; neither Grace nor Bob wanted to wait. He, with no patience for waiting in line, said, "Well, forget it then, forget the whole thing." And she agreed: "All right, forget it. I don't care anyway." But they were both visibly upset. Though they had been casual about the decision, the snag in the timing became a snag in the feeling; even though they had been somehow determined not to acknowledge its importance, this wedding was--after all--major business.

Then "someone," Danny says, suggested going over to Judson Church on 4th Street, one of the Village gathering places for activist organizing, to ask Al Carmines, the pastor, to marry them. Al Carmines was a composer--he had done the music for one of Gertrude Stein's New York productions--and a peace activist, but he was also an ordained minister, though Danny thinks he probably hadn't made a wedding in twenty years. "We went over there and he just did it on the spur of the moment as a favor to them." This odd little church wedding, with its renegade pastor officiating, took place on November 26, 1972, just a few
weeks before the bride and groom left to spend two months in Allende's socialist Chile.

Grace says that she and Bob got married because of historical circumstance; in "my generation," she says, "that's what we do." And besides, they "were traveling around together, we were together all the time. So we thought we should [get married], and we did. And the truth is that then we forgot to change our passports anyway" when they went to Chile at the end of the year. Sybil Claiborne asserts that the timing of Grace's decision to marry was accidental. "She might have felt differently ten years later. But at that time people were marrying each other."

Actually, despite the apparent evidence of the line of waiting couples, this is not the case. At that time—early in the seventies—people were divorcing each other, in greater and greater numbers. Grace and Sybil seem to believe that the decision to marry was almost no decision at all, that the Paley/Nichols marriage was bound to happen—a cultural accident; but in such thinking they are rejecting the historically left/bohemian call to "free love" that echoes back beyond Emma Goldman for their generation of political activists, in favor of the adopted-bourgeois standards of the Goodsides.10 Both women are speaking in

10. Faith's second marriage, to Jack, is hard to find in the texts of the stories. She might be married to him in one story, she might be living with him in another; in others, she might not be either, but he's still near the center of her life. The ephemerality of Faith's marriage in the fiction is a good reflection of the vagueness, and
the present, out of considerably different standards--born of their feminist activism of the past decade--than they would have had in 1972.

Jeanne Tenenbaum saw her sister's marriage as an old-fashioned love match, and imagines no problems stemming from the couple's differing backgrounds and ethnicity. Nora Paley too makes little of Bob Nichols' being a Christian and a monied New Englander. She says she never thought of Bob as being particularly different from Grace, because he was, after all, "a guy from the Village, one of the people around." He was a poet, and Nora had known him for years; if she had thought of him as a New Englander, she might have considered him an outsider, but that was never his identity. She says that Bob, in doing street theater, writing plays for one of the local churches, doing a lot of anti-war work, was simply one of the Village family. Danny also saw him this way, acknowledging that Bob is indeed different from Grace in terms of ethnic, cultural and religious heritage, but insisting that he is "really in a lot of ways very much like her," because "he comes from the same kind of Village bohemian fifties New York City background--and they've really got a lot in common in their politics."

certainly the unorthodox arrangement--maybe even some embarrassed denial--of Grace's own marriage.
They've also got a lot in common in their eccentricity of personal style and the impact of their physical presence—which is considerable. Grace has cut off her long hair, which she used to twist round the crown of her head as it grew grayer and grayer. Now the visual drama of her appearance is supplied by a small cloud of silvery white waves and curls that emphasize her broad rosy face and dark shining eyes. Like her mother, she is a short round buxom woman; her big smile remains slightly cockeyed because of uneven front teeth, but it is—really—dazzling. She always wears sensible clothes, but in surprising colors, or with earrings and scarves that provide the pleasure of color and light. She chews gum—and snaps it—when she makes speeches and reads her stories aloud to audiences. She writes at a board table, seated on a wooden chair with a small pillow on it; her electric typewriter is a concession to the end of the twentieth century, and no computer will appear on those boards.

Despite all those years in the city, Bob looks as if Norman Rockwell had been commissioned to invent him: the Vermont man. He wears thick heavy boots and scruffy pants with plaid flannel shirts and hooded sweatshirts. His face is ruddy and seamed, with sharp brown eyes; his hands are rough and cracked, knobbed like pine branches. His eyebrows, crowning supraorbital ridges like cliffs, are wild, tangled black and white in contrast to his absolutely
white hair and beard. He makes no small talk, but he'll engage in big talk about politics or books, and enjoys argument as exercise. He gets up every morning at five to write in his upstairs room with its long window facing Grace's garden and the White Mountains across the valley. Though he doesn't farm the land around his house, Bob owns some sheep; their social behavior, he explains, is just what everybody says—even outside of metaphor.

When they left for Chile with their passports unchanged at the end of 1972, they were both energetic and hopeful, excited by the prospect of visiting a socialist country working to educate, feed, and rebuild itself. Their two month visit, spent with no prescience of Allende's impending death and the subsequent militarization of Chile, encouraged them enormously. They stayed for six weeks at a student boarding house, and attended socialist party meetings; they met people who spoke openly to them—truck drivers, newsvendors, people in the cafés and on the roads—telling them about their lives, before and since the coming of socialism. They traveled around the countryside, and read about the internal politics of the revolution in the fourteen different newspapers they were delighted to find in the capital. By no means an accomplished workers' paradise, Allende's Chile was in conscientious struggle with its own revolution; Grace and Bob brought back with them a
strengthened belief in the possibilities for personal and social change they saw there.

When they returned, they published a series of articles called "Chilean Diary" in the War Resisters League journal, WIN. Appearing over both their names, the series was actually written in the first person by Bob, after he and Grace had discussed and wrangled over their memories, judgments, and decisions about what should be reported. The style of the article series is identifiably Bob Nichols'; in diction, syntax and point of view, it is much like the quartet of politically and stylistically visionary short novels he published at the end of the nineteen-seventies. 11

In the article series, the narrator is "I," and, rarely, "we" or "us"; Grace is cited by name once in the text. Her presence is otherwise distinguished from Bob's by a classical division: as they appear here, her interests and his are predictably gendered. Bob's narrating voice establishes itself as masculine immediately, early in the first installment of the series; describing the well-dressed crowds of people in Santiago's modern central district, he says that "The women are all in miniskirts and look absolutely wonderful" (6). This remark is exactly the sort

11. Bob's novels reflect and draw from all the travel of this period, but especially the journeys to Chile and China, which he and Grace would visit in 1974. See Bibliography.
defined in Grace's "Midrash," written in 1983-84, in which Faith had

democratically tried walking in the beloved city with a man, but the effort had failed since...he had felt an obligation, if a young woman passed, to turn abstractedly away, in the middle of the most personal conversation or even to say confidentially, wasn't she something?--or clasping his plaid shirt, at the heart's level, oh my god! (152)

Though other sorts of comments about women, and children, might well have been prompted by Grace's interest, like descriptions of young Gypsy beggars in the city and women's relationships with men in the countryside, and some are probably born of Bob's special interests--which include agriculture, the technology of energy, and locally based political structures--we cannot be absolutely certain who noticed or commented on what. (For instance, the comparison of Chilean peasant landholdings with those of the North Vietnamese in the second installment of the series might well have been made by Grace [11].) What we can see, though, is that when the narrator is plural or when Grace is named, the subject is women or family life, as in the third installment, when she is absorbed in conversation with a Quillota mother and daughter (10).

Despite these effects of gender socialization, this couple is a case in which the wife is often given public precedence over the husband. Grace and Bob, from the beginning of their relationship, have had to deal with the
consequences of her growing reputation outside the neighborhood. Whatever effects her fame had had on Jess Paley and on that first marriage, Bob and this second marriage were new when Grace was already on the way to becoming GRACE PALEY. So, though Bob did all the writing and much of the reporting, Grace's reputation—even in WIN, where, presumably, the two writers were equally valued—dictated an inequity of published credits. The blurb accompanying the first installment of this series reads:

Grace Paley is a widely known author of short stories and WIN articles. She teaches at Sarah Lawrence College and is active with the Greenwich Village Peace Center, Resist, the WRL, and other groups. She is married to Robert Nichols, who is a well known landscape architect, playwright and pacifist activist. (6)

By 1979, when Grace was featured in a photo essay in People magazine, Bob was accurately described as "a landscape architect and author" (22) and even noted for having "once protested the Vietnam war with a two-week fast" (23). The two are pictured together in the Eleventh Street Apartment. But he is quoted as saying, with what must have been multi-layered irony, "I'm here to take her phone calls and see that she gets dressed" (23). Granted, People had an interest in trivializing them, and in making Grace look cute—not dangerous—as they featured one of her major arrests of the decade. But this situation is in fact a
problem for them, as it is for others whose careers bring public recognition to one member of a couple.  

After Allende's government was struck down, Bob wrote "Chilean Diary Revisited" in the first person plural. "Grace and I," he says, and "we." He mentions his wife when he refers to their trip or their earlier articles, but these are not writings in which Grace has taken part. This, and two more articles in which he analyzes the position of the left in Chile before the coup, and discusses what may be learned from the Chilean experience, are thoroughly his own, as is the later series, "China Diary" that followed their 1974 trip.

Unlike Grace, Bob has always made progressive politics the obvious and intentional center of his fiction and much of his poetry, as well as his essays. In this period he encouraged her as she began to move the content of her political life into her fiction, where her consciousness was already in residence.  

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12. By 1987, when their friend George Denison, himself a well known writer (The Lives of Children) and activist, died, Grace was called by reporters for statements—"quotes" they could use in their obituary articles and radio coverage of Denison's important work. Bob, who had been much closer to George for many years, was not queried.

13. In his article, "Chile: The Left Before the Coup," published in March of 1974, we find what might be the original of that now immortal noodle factory (8), of such interest to the western travelers in his own quartet of novels, and a center of controversy for the travelers from the United States in Grace's later "Somewhere Else" (LSD).
before working with her in the Village Peace Center, but when he did, he asked about what her second book was going to be, what her plans were for collecting the stories she had written since 1959. These questions, he says now, "were incomprehensible to her; she had very bad writing habits." She had no formal--or even informal--plans, though of course, she was writing.

"At one point," at least, he remembers that he "did say to her--'you're doing a lot of politics, it's important to your life, better get some of these characters into your writing.'" Given his own experience, he had to say, too, that "'America dislikes it, but maybe you can find a way somehow.'" Over fifteen years," Bob estimates, "this development [in her fiction] took place, to the extent that it came naturally," as all the elements of her life were integrated into the evolution of her story cycle. (And as the stories integrated themselves back into the life.) This was the period in which she wrote the new conclusion for "Faith in a Tree," and incorporated some of the actual slogans and images of the anti-war movement into her text.14 Between 1971 and 1973--and especially in the fall of '73, in residence at the writer's colony, Yaddo, in Saratoga

14. i.e. the actual series of picture posters, "Would you burn a child" etc.
Springs—she also wrote "Changes," "Immigrant Story," "Little Girl" and "Runner," all of which contain, and some of which focus on, specific socioeconomic and racial issues.

This development, or the political aspect of art in general—his daughter's, his new son-in-law's, Pushkin's, or Chekhov's—could not have met with Isaac Goodside's approval, nor would it have been his inclination to even mention politics, except as an obstacle, in a discussion of literature. Bob Nichols met Dr. Goodside in his last years, when Isaac had become, for his family, someone else; Bob liked and admired the old man, and says that senile or not, Isaac was "very smart, very clever, and a very funny guy." But he understood that Isaac was not the slightest bit interested in him, the new man in Grace's life—not because he disapproved of Bob, or his politics, or the idea of his daughter having a new man, but simply because he wasn't interested. Isaac's own life was coming to an end, and Bob was just a bit player in the last act of that rich life.

15. She says that she "really got a lot done there that time," and took another residency there in 1974, but was not so successful on the second occasion; little work came out of that period. She has not taken any other writers' residencies.

16. As Grace deliberately depicted him in "A Conversation with My Father," first published in 1971 in New American Review, he was a classicist who had come to resist even the idea of change—social, personal, or aesthetic.
Isaac Goodside, like Mr. Darwin in the Faith stories, never saw his younger daughter enough in the war years; she was so busy all the time. But Grace and her father were close throughout his life; their bond remained strong. This was probably because she had been the baby of the family, and certainly because Manya had died so early, but surely also because--in their likeness--they continued to strike exciting sparks whenever they were together. Unlike the socialist Mr. Darwin, Isaac Goodside became very conservative in his later years, and disapproved even more than he had of his daughter's radical activities in her youth. He loved her no less of course--maybe even more for making their relationship so interesting and complicated--and always accepted her, but expressed perpetual disapproval of her choices and regularly disagreed with her opinions, fighting with her at every visit until just a few years before his death.

Everyone in the family believes, as Danny Paley explains, that his grandfather "was a very dominant figure" in her life, and "had a profound effect" on Grace. Danny

17. However, when Karl Bissinger accompanied Grace to visit her father in his last years, he had a conversation with the old man in which Dr. Goodside whispered to Karl, when Grace was out of the room, "Have you any influence with that girl? Can you keep her from doing these crazy things she's always doing?" Karl, who often accompanied "that girl" on some of her "crazy" missions, just said, "No sir, I don't. And I can't."
himself, like his sister Nora, always felt close to Isaac, and corresponded regularly with his grandfather when he went to school outside of New York. The love between her children and her father pleased Grace enormously, and she gave it—so to speak—to Faith's son Richard and his grandpa in "Conversations." At the appearance of the contentious Richard (who is disgusted with his elders for the low level of their political activity), "His grandfather looked at him and nearly fainted with love. 'He looks wonderful, this boy,' he said. 'I like his hair long'"(15).

Isaac Goodside died in early 1973. He had retired from medicine in the nineteen-forties because of his wife's death and his own dangerous heart condition; he thought then that he had only a few years left. By his mid-seventies, he had become an artist, painting portraits, still lifes and landscapes, and he wrote stories and memoirs as well. In this new incarnation he lived another thirty years; he never had another heart attack, and he died quite peacefully. In the last few years of his life, still living in the Bronx apartment his wife had died in, he had a stroke and became senile in what his grandson calls "a kind of wild way."

18. On the spring day Isaac Goodside died, Grace was officiating at the first Women's Studies/Women's Literature event ever organized at Sarah Lawrence College. She got a phone call at mid-day, telling her that her father was dying. She left immediately—Jane took over her duties at school—and arrived in time to spend a few hours with him before he died.
Like Alexandra's disapproving father in "Enormous Changes," whose accidental head injury made it possible for him to appreciate his daughter, becoming senile changed Isaac Goodside in what Danny Paley calls "unexpected ways." The fictional old man

...fell hard on the bathroom tiles, cracked his skull, dipped the wires of his brain into his heart's blood. Short circuit! He lost twenty years in the flood, the faces of nephews, in-laws, the names of two Presidents, and a war. His eyes were rounder, he was often awestruck, but he was as smart as ever, and able to begin again with fewer scruples to notice and appreciate. (134-5)

Grace's father, the model for Alexandra's,19 was rendered no longer conservative; he had gone back in his mind to the early days of the Russian revolution. Nora remembers that her grandfather had "wild dreams" about the czar's children—and that almost all his concerns after the stroke were about Russia. Even though he was senile, and didn't recognize his grandchildren half the time, they

19. And Faith's. When Grace published ECLM, she prefaced the stories with this paragraph: "Everyone in this book is imagined into life except the father. No matter what story he has to live in, he's my father, I. Goodside, M.D., artist, and storyteller. G.P." There are three stories in which Isaac Goodside will be readily recognized as a model—or at least a major inspiration—even without this directional signal from the author: Mr. Darwin, in "Faith in the Afternoon," Alexandra's father in "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute," and the father of the writer-narrator in "A Conversation With My Father." There are three other stories in which less notable fathers might also be modeled after Isaac: Jack Raftery in "Distance," the title character in "The Burdened Man," and Jack's father in "The Immigrant Story."
enjoyed his company just as much at the end as they ever had. Nora says that the essential character of her grandfather was "still very much there, and I loved being around him. I was privileged to be with him in this time when he was in another dimension."

In those years, Dr. Goodside even forgot that he had been ill, though he would still walk with his cane; his children had hired a companion for him, but he would go out alone whenever he could get away. Jeanne says that he would bang the cane on the floor of the apartment, or go to the door and try to get out. He would call out, "Let me out of this prison! Let me out of Siberia!" Then Jeanne, if she were present, would say to him, "Look, Pop," and show him the pictures he'd painted—which would bring him back to the present. "Look, Pop, look at this painting. Do you remember you did this? Do you remember this one? (The whole house was full of his paintings.) And he'd say, 'Of course. I must be getting senile.' And he was."

But if he could get out on his own, he would get on a bus and go somewhere, anywhere. He was in fine shape, an affable, intelligent fellow who just happened to be talking about the czar of Russia. Jeanne says that he used his cane mostly for the visual effect, and that he always wore a homburg, and looked quite beautiful when he went out to stroll. His character and wit, his sense of humor, were such that strangers rarely suspected that there was anything
"wrong" with him—and indeed, since he took on these adventures with great verve and strength, there apparently wasn't.

But once he disappeared completely, and created an indelible chapter in the family folklore; everyone tells the story of how one day Dr. Goodside went out for a walk on his own, and didn't come home. He was eventually picked up by the police, and when the family was finally contacted, he was in a rage because he had determined that the police were the czar's army, trying to impound him or press him into military service. When the family came to pick him up, he complained angrily that they had refused to give him any vodka!

Grace experienced a surge of writing in the fall of 1973 that was, at least in part, prompted by her father's death, and her recollections of his life—which probably included a reassessment of her parents' marriage. She was, in terms of her slowly-growing feminist consciousness, released by her father's death; soon afterwards she wrote "Mom" (first published in 1975), her first story in which the narrative voice is clearly a mother's daughter's voice, woman-identified, as opposed to a father's. In that piece she even defends mothers, generically, from the widespread mother-blaming of male psychologists and writers. Within the next few years she also wrote "Dreamer in a Dead Language" (published 1977), in which the beloved father has
become simply a man, and a husband. As such, he is linked deliberately to Faith's unreliable men, rather than to her mother or herself and is shown to be incapable of empathy with his daughter. And by 1980, she had written and published "Mother," in which she described the poignant sadness of her mother's mature wifehood.

Grace says that her poems--more than the stories--directly express her thoughts and emotions. After Isaac died, she wrote, in "On Mother's Day,"

I am especially open to sadness and hilarity since my father died as a child one week ago in this his ninetieth year (LF, 34)

and has written of their relationship in various other poems. In one untitled poem, she alludes to the strong correspondence between her father and herself, that longtime identification:

\begin{verbatim}
in my drowned father's empty pocket there were nine dollars and the salty sea he said I know you my darling girl you're the one that's me (LF, 41)
\end{verbatim}

In two poems called "My Father at 85" and "My Father at 89," she traced the change in his consciousness from before the stroke to after it. The first "quotes" him in four stanzas; he is passionately addressing the political issues of the time, naming presidents Nixon and Johnson,
questioning the future of the USA. The second, one brief stanza, also "quotes" him, but his focus is much changed:

.........he
asked us children
don't you remember my dog Mars
who met me on the road
when I came home lonesome
and singing walking
from the Czar's prison (LF, 70)

Victor, Jeanne and Grace could not remember the dog or the road, having never seen them; but in October of that year, as a delegate to the World Peace Conference in Moscow, Grace went to Russia, spoke her father's language again, and felt some of what he might have known there.
By the middle of the nineteen-seventies, her second book published, Grace Paley had undergone another series of major changes. Publishing sporadically over the fifteen years since her first collection had come out, she won a Guggenheim fellowship in 1961 and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1966. Her teaching at Sarah Lawrence had provided entré into a network of writing contemporaries, and her travels had introduced her to a global network of political colleagues as well. She had engendered a larger-than-national reputation in two spheres, and was recognized as an accomplished writer and successful activist. Whether she wrote stories based in what she learned on the streets, or was carried by her linguistic preoccupation into actions that were based in language, the two spheres were always combined in Grace Paley.

That combination was manifest when she traveled to the USSR. Often, when American citizens-in-the-street see posters or hear speakers criticizing the policy of the United States, their response is, "Go tell it to the Russians!"—or less civil words to that effect. When this
had happened to Grace a certain number of times, she took their advice. At any rate, she took the opportunity when it came along. In October of 1973, Grace traveled to Moscow as a delegate to the Congress of World Peace, a representative of the War Resisters League. This trip, sponsored by the League, was indeed business, but it provided certain extraordinary pleasures. Closest to her heart was the fact that Russia, not the USSR, but Russia, was

Mother Russia! Oh my country of my mother and father's childhood! Oh beloved land of my uncle Russya killed in 1904 while carrying the workers' flag! Oh country my own of storytellers translated in my ear! of mystics and idealists who sharpened my English tongue. (Conversations in Moscow, 5)

With her father's recent death, all the immigrant family of her childhood was gone, and she was on pilgrimage to the homeland. Everywhere she went in Moscow, she heard the voices of her mother and aunts, saw the faces of her uncles. Every day, all day long, she heard murmurs and laughs and whole conversations in Russian, evoking her girlhood on Hoe Street in the Bronx. When she first arrived, she stood listening in the lobby of the Hotel Rossiya, with her "nose somewhat stuffed by sentimental remembrance of those dead speakers." Riding a bus "up Kalinin Prospekt," she saw "one lady looking like my mother"
who "said of another lady who looked like my aunt, 'Listen to that one, she knows nothing, still, she teaches...''' (4).

Memory, stirred by language, was aroused in her; the past was suddenly present in the words, rhythm, and sound of her own childhood's talking.

Three times a day, in the dining room, my bones nearly melted. "Please," I said starting the days listening and answering, "one egg only, but coffee now." "Oh of course my darling, my little one, only wait." Day and night I received this tender somehow ironic address, full of diminutives, of words hardened by fierce consonants, from which the restrained vowel always managed to escape. (5)

The wordswoman, the lover of language for its own sake, was surrounded by the sound of her birth tongue, the words that are roots in her life. This immersion in the past is curiously foreshadowed in two of the stories she completed before going to Russia, the last ones she wrote before collecting seventeen of them into ECLM: "The Immigrant Story," which is at least three stories, about turn-of-the-century immigrant families in the United States, and "The Long-Distance Runner," about the later fate of those immigrant Europeans and the black American families who came to walk the same streets. Both pieces focus on a people's way of talking--in both sound and sense--and on the importance of exchange in language: telling, listening, and re-telling.
From another intimately experienced perspective, Grace was aware throughout the conference that, as a woman, she was in a minority among the delegates. In her long essay, "Conversations in Moscow," she comments on the small number of women delegates from India and the Mideast, and the greater numbers from African countries (10). When she describes meetings between Soviet dissidents and American activists, she includes descriptions of Yelena Sakharov and Angelina Galich talking about their grandchildren, and whispering, contradicting, and interrupting each other and their men (7). She acknowledges her own weakness, of position and disposition: When she and Paul Mayer were both censured by their colleagues for their part in the creation and presentation of a leaflet criticizing both the USSR and its dissident intellectuals, "I was more contemptuously dealt with as a woman and a mere leaflet carrier" (6); and when she is talking with the Russian intelligentsia, Paul Mayer suggests switching from Russian and English to a language in which he is fluent but she does not know—German—and she "foolishly defer[red] as is my habit" (7), and so lost much of the subsequent conversation.

1. A few years earlier, she had been overlooked entirely. When an action she organized and directed in a distinctly Ghandian mode of non-violent civil disobedience (at a draft induction center) was severely criticized in Print, despite her obvious presence and obvious leadership, the "blame" for her strategy was assigned to a man, a prominent colleague who had taken part in the event. (See WIN, 5-1-70, pages 6-8)
None of this is unusual; in fact, by this time, radical women's writing had begun to be published again by mainstream presses in the United States. Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* had already appeared, and Andrea Dworkin's *Woman Hating* was in the works. But the deliberate inclusion of this kind of commentary in Grace Paley's writing is, like the beginnings of change found in her stories of this period, further evidence of her rising feminist consciousness. (She did, however, deploy at least one shot that qualifies as argumentum ad feminam, in her slightly snide description of the angry women in her own delegation, whom she calls "American ladies" [Moscow, 6].)

The purpose of the Congress was, of course, to afford peace activists the opportunity to share ideas, learn strategies, and strengthen international networks. But Grace and Paul Mayer, who was one of several delegates from the Peoples Coalition for Peace and Justice, had taken on an additional task. They had, along with five other Americans, created an independent statement to read and

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2. It came out in 1974, like Grace's *Enormous Changes*, (for which Andrea had read the manuscript and helped Grace put the stories together), and its dedication reads, "For Grace Paley, and in Memory of Emma Goldman." But within the next few years, Andrea and Grace were estranged, in a complex of personal/political conflict.

3. Noam Chomsky, Dave Dellinger, Daniel Berrigan, David McReynolds, and Sidney Peck; there were no other women.
distribute in Moscow. The seven signers identified themselves in terms of their documented criticism of the United States government, condemned the Soviet government for silencing its people and—in an unusual and surprising addition—called upon known Soviet dissidents to join world protest against repressive and murderous actions by the Chilean and South Vietnamese, as well as the Soviet and American, governments. Some delegates immediately "corrected" or "excoriated" them, Grace writes (5), but many others approved. Notwithstanding that approval, Grace and Paul were both subject to harsh criticism in their own group; at least some of the angriest Americans—apparently forgetting the peacefulness of their mission—said they thought Grace should be shot, and Paul Mayer had to resign from his position as co-chairman of the American delegation.4

Grace and Paul had other extra-curricular activities planned as well. They had arranged to meet with some of the dissidents whose critical voices they were encouraging. Paul had been working in Russia since April,

4. Less violently hostile, but still irritated after all these years, similar critics (also WRL connected) castigated Olive Bowers—another United States peace activist who had solicited contributions to support her trip as delegate to a peace conference— for what they called "chasing dissidents" while she was in the Soviet Union. (Reported in an interview with Ruth Benn in The NonViolent Activist, the Magazine of the War Resisters League, December 1988, "Eugene to Moscow: Making the Connections," 6-8.)
planning the Congress, and had already met Aleksander Galich and Vladimir Maximov. In October, he and Grace, "welcomed [by the Russians]...with apples, sardines, tomatoes salted and unsalted, glasses of Georgian wine" (6), began a brief series of informal meetings with those two men, and Angelina Galich, Aleksander and Nellie Voronel, and Yelena and Andrei Sakharov. They met, Grace writes, "in Moscow 70 years after my father and mother ran for their lives," in a home that was "in food, furniture, language, gesture--very like my own home in the East Bronx" (12). The Americans offered their statement of urgent criticism, the Russians responded just as strongly, and so began a succession of mutual teachings and learnings, arguments and agreements all offered and accepted in various languages--an exchange, one might say, "very like" the sort that used to take place in the Goodside's home in the East Bronx.

Grace writes about Russian Jews in her long essay, and notes that she "cannot write about the[ir] conversions"--a reference to the desperate attempts of contemporary Russian Jews to gain full status as citizens (8), reminiscent of the Marranos in medieval Spain. She cites her family's teachings about the role of the Russian church in fomenting Jew-hating (8), and quotes a long, 5 All of these men (but none of the women, except perhaps as wives) have received publicity in the United States as leading intellectuals, writers and scientists who have been silenced in the Soviet Union.
subtly anti-Jewish commentary as retold by Galich to "explain" the situation of Jews in the USSR (10). Galich himself, born a Jew, had recently converted; this did not produce the desired effect, however—he was soon denied permission to emigrate (12). More overt than her growing feminism, Grace's sense of her Jewishness is manifest in her essay about the Peace Congress. She records her delivery of an ironic commentary on repressive Soviet policies to Alexei N. Stepunin, Secretary General of the Institute of Soviet American Relations, who worked with her throughout the Congress, with this preface: "In the end I had to be true to my American creed which is to leave them laughing and to my Russian Jewish creed which is to leave them in a little pain at least" (11).

Unlike her trip to Vietnam, this venture provoked only positive responses from her family; maybe they too were responding to a pull on their roots. Jeanne says that she admired Grace for making the trip: "She had a lot of courage, that girl, I must say. A lot of courage." Danny, perhaps the most outspoken family critic of his mother's trip to Vietnam, was very proud of her. Unfortunately, some of Grace's extended family—including at least one longtime friend—did not share these views. When the trip was being planned, money was raised in the community, primarily by Karl Bissinger, to cover expenses for Grace and Maris Cakars, another WRL delegate. The money naturally
represented a pledge of support as well as plane tickets and hotel bills. But when Karl called folks to ask for money, he didn't tell them that Grace would be distributing the controversial leaflet, or that she was going to see the dissidents while in Russia—"I knew [that] on her agenda was [a plan] to break out of the regular thing and go see the dissidents. But you couldn't say that to anybody. You couldn't tell anybody that."

Given that situation, Karl says now, there were some people that he shouldn't have asked, no matter how close they were to Grace. These were people who absolutely did not want to criticize or embarrass the Soviet Union, and at least one of these was a good friend of Grace who became "very angry, very aggravated"; she felt "betrayed" because Grace "had taken some of her dough and gone and criticized" the Soviet Union. "And she didn't talk to [Grace] for a long long time," Karl says, feeling heavily responsible for the situation himself. He feels that his judgment was off in this case—that he should have known who to ask and who to skip over. This episode—or the skeleton of it—is the basis for the central incident in "Love," written through the mid-seventies and first published in The New Yorker in 1979. Faith, who narrates the story, tells her husband Jack about an encounter she had on the street.
Suddenly my eyes saw a fine-looking woman named Margaret, who hadn't spoken to me in two years. We'd had many years of political agreement before some matters relating to the Soviet Union separated us. In the angry months during which we were both right in many ways, she took away with her to her political position and daily friendship my own best friend, Louise—my lifelong park, P.T.A. and anti-war movement sister, Louise. (LSD, 6-7)

This instance, one of the thousands in which we can specifically locate the use of fact in fiction, is a good example of the dynamic, integral relationship between "the life" and "the work." A story is not--cannot be—simply a replay of a "real" incident; after all, writers and readers cannot even agree on, much less replicate, exactly what happens or is. Writers make texts; thus the life produces the work. But then, the work produces the life; Grace Paley's stories incorporate life, transform it. The stories, once written, rebound to transform her. As ideas and drafts, thought and written, they are known to the writer; as texts, printed words on paper, they are known to others, received by an audience that acts on the writer in its turn.

Certainly the two women Faith calls "Margaret" and "Louise" saw themselves in the text, and understood "Love." Karl, who knows both women, is witness to the fact that they recognized themselves. But whether they threw up their hands, dropped their copies of The New Yorker, and rushed to the phone to forgive Grace and speak to her with "Love" is not precisely the point. Whether the three women have ever
spoken of this to each other or not, all have been changed by knowing that Grace wrote the story, and by having read it; now they all must have more complex feelings about those "matters relating to the Soviet Union" because of this story. So Grace Paley, who made art out of her life, has subsequently and repeatedly experienced her life as it is made out of that art. Oscar Wilde said that life imitates art, in a deliberate turnaround of the classical concept of mimesis, but imitation is not what is at issue here; the ongoing, organic process by which life and art are in constant relation—in a constant mutually influenced reflexive dynamic—is the point.

The specific effect of any one story is not the only way in which "the work" affects "the life." One of the most obvious changes Grace Paley experienced as a result of the publication of her stories was that by 1974, when Farrar, Straus and Giroux brought out her second collection, she had become not only a writer but a literary figure.6 Despite her initial hesitation and fear, she accepted that appellation; it was, by 1974, a self-definition. She had, both deliberately and by default, "sought for her form somewhere else," as Jane Cooper says. But now, Grace wanted

6. She was also, of course, a political figure; the two are inseparable. The two "professions" are interlocked; the same consciousness urges and permeates writing and activism. Within the texts themselves, Faith—like Grace—is ultimately identified overtly as both a writer and an activist.
to be a writer among writers; she'd had no writing community for almost thirty years.

In the western tradition of letters, noted in the writing of scholars and critics, there is a false image of the lone writer as the clichéd poet starving in his small bleak room—in the United States this may be construed as the literary version of the lone wolf—passionately bleeding his ink into lyric. The writer in the image is male, solitary, an idealistic aesthete, frenzied with the burden of his gift—and so on. Though this scene has been enacted by canonized men of letters only rarely, patriarchal culture has always imposed a harsh measure of loneliness on its women writers. Though most women writers have (literally) written on tables in parlor or kitchen, and have been—like the majority of their non-writing sisters—mothers, the few who have been canonized are those who come closest to the romantic male ideal. That is, most have not been women engaged in raising children and, even if they have lived with family, were in relatively isolated circumstances (like Emily Dickinson and Emily Bronte), or lived with a single companion, had servants, and moved among the social, intellectual and aesthetic brahmins of their time (like Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf). When women writers have been able to realize professional community, and meet or correspond, they are—like their male peers—inevitably enriched and inspired.
Grace's self-defined and self-imposed isolation as a writer is neither precisely nor exclusively the matter of personal taste she insists upon calling it. Jane Cooper, considering Grace's finally coming in from the cold, speaks of all artists' self-doubt, and specifically of women's difficulty in saying "'I'm a writer. Yes, that's what I do; I write.' There's a great deal of difficulty naming that, saying that, and taking responsibility for whatever it means to say that to other people. But," she adds, very gently, softly—and accurately—"I don't think you find that so much with men, denying that they are writers."

Grace was not peculiar in her hesitation; whatever her individual reasons for shunning the literary establishment—the politics of elitism, critical emphasis on form, arguments about the importance of sociopolitical relevance, (to say nothing of such treatment as Norman Mailer offered when her first book came out)—she falls well within the recognized range of women writers as outsiders, as delineated and analyzed, for instance, by Joanna Russ and Tillie Olsen. Historically, few women have been able to define themselves as artists or writers, and fewer still have been able to sustain that definition and turn it into reputation, as Virginia Woolf explained A Room of One's Own in Britain in 1929—and as scores of feminist critics and scholars continue to explain in the United States in the 1980's. Grace Paley did not go so far as to change her name
to George, but she did send out stories signed G. Goodside and G. Paley, hoping to "at least get in the door" that way. Though she never spoke of this in her earlier, pre-feminist, days, Grace always understood she'd have an uphill battle as a woman, and as a writer of short stories as well. She turned away from poetry and then, once she'd published fiction, rejected the privileged form of the novel; those two genres were traditionally more esteemed than short fiction by both publishers and critics. Grace says that her attempt to write a novel in the seventies was "a mistake" and that she never should have let herself "get talked into it." That pressure was a result of the longstanding belief—in both aesthetic and academic circles in the United States—that the short story is an inferior genre, meant only to serve as an exercise for serious writers on their way to the big book, the novel.

But, as with her fortunate timing in terms of the market and audience for women's work, Grace's timing was serendipitous here too. Not only did she realize that the novel form was wrong for her (thus far in her development), but also the reputation of short fiction had begun, by the end of the sixties, to rise. American publishers realized that people were buying books of short stories, and critics

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7. At Loyola University of Chicago in March of 1987, when asked by her audience if she'd ever consider writing a novel, she said: "No. Yes. I don't know. Well, I might. I mean I have considered it, and I might again."
began to see that virtuoso work was being done—as it had been for some time—within the genre.

The short story genre has been embattled from its beginnings, usually marked in the United States by Washington Irving's tales from the early 1800's. By the turn of the nineteenth century, only a few critics in the United States took it seriously, though American writers had embraced the form. Their enthusiasm may have been rooted in the fact that the storytelling tradition is honored in all of the various racial and ethnic backgrounds of this patchwork society. Nonetheless—or perhaps because of this equality of access—critics labeled the form "minor"; but the attention of scholars did begin to increase. Rigid formality (i.e. "the well-made story") was considered crucial—perhaps to gain credibility—and scholars' prescriptive definitions stood side by side with their reluctant recognition of the great variety among stories. Everyone admitted that, unfortunately, the sketch, the tale,

8. Some critics would move the date up to Poe's definitive, prescriptive analyses of the form; others would go back literally thousands of years, finding "the story" at the root of all narrative prose. For our purposes here, Irving will serve.

9. National magazines with wide readership had popularized the genre; thousands of stories were published every year. This situation continued until well into the twentieth century, with the mid-century erosion of large format slick magazines and their replacement by "little magazines" and academic journals as publishers of short fiction.
the short story, the novel, the novella, and the romance all overlapped at their boundaries of definition. In fact, the form has always stimulated experimentation, innovation, and variety. The line from Washington Irving to Grace Paley could hardly be straight as the crow flies.

In the modern period, specifically in the decade after World War I, narrative time sequence, cause and effect, motive and act, intention and consequence, the relationship of the individual to society and its various cultural myths—all changed, as Virginia Woolf chronicled in *A Room of One's Own*. The form of experience had been altered—so fiction altered too. Critics realized that writers had had to discover new ways of writing to suit new ways of being, and eventually endorsed the burgeoning variety they had found so disturbing.

In 1933, when Grace Goodside was eleven years old and just about to leave off being a darling prodigy, the OED Supplement finally introduced the term "short story" as a designation of literary form—and so conferred its admission to the international literary vocabulary in English. Those critics who favored the genre were emboldened, and grew expansive; they began to write about the relationship between the short story and the cinema and photography—both rapidly rising art forms—claiming that short fiction was a
visual, fluid form, cut loose from the weight of the novel. Not only did they dare to suggest such alliances with new, quickly developing arts, but also claimed music, painting, sculpture, and poetry as analogues to and sources for the short story genre.

They began to write about the history of the form, establishing its credentials by identifying antecedents in Hawthorne, Twain, Harte, Melville, James, and Crane, as well as Poe and Irving. Occasionally they even mentioned women—who had been the majority of short fiction writers in the nineteenth century. They were tired of being defensive about the form, making excuses for it; they attacked the novel, comparing it unfavorably to the story. Contemporary critics friendly to the form still point out that there are several journals specializing in the novel in English, and only one in short fiction; they say that only rarely do bibliographies list the form as a separate category; and they note that almost all the greatest story writers have earned their reputations in other genres, i.e. Lawrence, Wharton, Hemingway, Porter, McCarthy—even Chekhov.

By 1950, just as Grace Paley was on the verge of writing her stories, American critics had begun to divide story writers into two broad categories—those who (basically) maintained the traditional form, and those who experimented with it. In the middle of the twentieth century, plot came under heavy critical attack, denigrated
as unrealistic. Plotting doesn't occur in real life, the more radical critics and writers said; things just happen and we move along by fits and starts, not on an Aristotelian track. Writers began to write stories which approximated or represented that allegedly more realistic movement through time and space—or created utterly fantastic movement—abandoning or altering chronology, and jettisoning clearcut characterization as well. A few lines, an image or two, would suffice for a character by the mid-sixties—no more details of dress and body were necessary. Plot was pronounced old-fashioned, and relegated to ancient history with Poe and O. Henry.

American stories in the second half of the twentieth century are born of the anti-plot movement and raised in sociopolitical disillusion. In a sense, all short fiction since World War II is politically motivated, consciously social in content; writers can no longer pretend that their characters and events exist separate from the horror of contemporary life. Correspondingly, postmodern short story writers have done with both denouement and resolution; their conflicts are no longer reconciled. Stories go on, beyond the words on the printed page; characters continue their lives. Readers are let into some few episodes in

10. Unless, in such forms as science fiction and fantasy, or even formulaic detective or romance novels, they have made clear that they are doing just that—pretending.
those lives, and then let out again. For decades, readers were trained to expect endings that would tell us what stories are "about"—even Henry James usually did us that favor. Modern stories too were more or less closed. But now the open ending is standard, and we are forced to accept ambiguity and possibility in short fiction, as in the other arts.11

Grace Paley is a master of the swinging door that lets us in and shows us out of her characters' lives. Reading her cycle, entering her characters' neighborhood, we may go in and out several times in one volume. Her work is not so fragmented as Barthelme's nor so blatantly self-conscious as Barth's; she is a technical innovator who is comparable both to them and to the modernists Wharton and Anderson. Her kinship with earlier, fundamentally moral, canonical writers like Conrad or even Charlotte Bronte is not mitigated by her similarities to her contemporaries.

In "A Conversation with My Father," perhaps the most overtly metafictional—and certainly the most analyzed—of all Paley stories, and one which she acknowledges to be autobiographical, the narrator takes a theoretical,

11. Certainly "well-made" stories are still being written, just as some contemporary films have wrapped-up endings and some recently designed buildings contain no large open spaces—or the illusion of them—to mitigate their density and ponderousness. But such are now recognized as "traditional" structures, and considered, in most genres, romantic, if not retrograde, in their insistence upon the illusion of finality and closure.
philosophical, anti-plot position. The father asks his daughter to "write a simple story"—which she construes to be "the kind that begins: 'There was a woman...'
followed by plot, the absolute line between two points which I've always despised" (ECLM, 161-2). Actually, Grace insists that she does not despise plot and quite naturally, of necessity, uses some whenever she writes a story. Things do happen in her stories, after all. But since those things rarely happen by moving from A to B to C, and since she dislikes transitions and avoids natural chronological order, like Robert Altman's sound tracks her texts offer the reader contemporary naturalism. That is, they sometimes seem to be more like life than they are like the literature/cinema we've been schooled to recognize and read.

Moreover, as the narrator explains, her aversion to plot is not "for literary reasons, but because it takes all hope away. Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life" (162). Her motive is social—indeed, political. In that same story, the narrator goes on to espouse the open-ended text, and to definitively relate that choice to social circumstance: "...I had to say, 'Well, it is not necessarily the end, Pa....It doesn't have to be....it's a funny world nowadays'" (166-7). The last phrase is essential Paley; it points to her reason for

choosing the openended structure. She seeks a form which will accommodate personal and social change, both evolutionary ("later the same day") and revolutionary ("enormous changes at the last minute"). Though she loves language, plays words like music, and might be described as making metaphor like a verbal sculptor, she is essentially about the business of meaning; a writer who believes that art should offer truth and serve justice, she is not interested in structural design for its own sake.

Like many of her late-twentieth century colleagues, Grace Paley is not interested in symbolism either; she wants only to say what she is saying, just one thing at a time. That one thing may be complicated and important, and may reverberate throughout her cycle, but it is itself only—it doesn't stand for something else. Likewise, linear narrative is less and less prominent in her stories over the past thirty-five years; readers' responses and perceptions tend to be diffused throughout the stories, rarely epiphanic. This is not to say that the texts are utterly realistic; her stories have always had at least a hint of the unreal and fantastic about them (which is one of the father's complaints in "Conversation"). Is Faith really up in a tree? Are her two husbands really there together at breakfast? Did Eddie really believe that Itzik was his half-brother, and could the cockroach segregator really have worked? The surrealism—maybe even cubism—of "The Floating
Truth'' and the bittersweet fantasy of "At That Time'' belie the possibilities of realism, but they never attempt allegory.

With the publication of her second story collection, Grace Paley took her place among postmodern American fiction writers, though her position as a political figure became more and more a part of her culturally defined--and widely known--persona. Critics, always seeking the appropriate appellation, have had difficulty identifying her place, and offer various visions of her work in terms of narrative theory, theories of fiction, or political criticism. In 1982, Annie Dillard published Living By Fiction, in which Grace and her work are not featured; Dillard's theories of fiction, however, are especially applicable to Grace Paley's lifework in that they do not employ critical jargon, and are accessible to the common reader. In fact, they suit this analysis of Grace Paley's writing most when they seem to deny it, and so provide a fine counterpoint for critical discussion.13

13. Dillard's book bears an intriguingly contradictory relationship to this one. Here, for instance, is her conflicted disapproval of biographical criticism: "Our inquiry into a writer's personal opinions and private visions of things is bankrupt intellectually and nasty as well. Nevertheless, those opinions and that vision are not entirely irrelevant to the production of the work'' (151). Grace Paley, less emotional but similarly contradictory, says this about the value of knowing writers' lives: "I don't think there's any value. It's just fun. People like to know; that's all. It can make a person more interesting; it can sell a book. But I don't think it makes a book more interesting to know the life of the writer...that has nothing to do with the text itself. But on the other hand,
The critic mentions very few women and almost completely ignores the short story, but has nevertheless analyzed what she calls "contemporary modernist" fiction in such a way that Paley stories are always implicated. Asserting that "diverse contemporary writers are carrying on, with new emphases and further developments, the Modernists' techniques" (20), she describes "abrupt shifts, disjunctive splicings and enjambments of time, space and voice" in the work of "almost all contemporary writers" (30). This is a good description of Grace Paley's fiction. But Dillard also asserts that "contemporary modernist characters are not interested in society at all. Their sphere of activity is the text" (39), and they "are no longer fiction's center" (40). In this assertion, she does not account for the diversity of fiction writers at the end of the twentieth century. Dillard suggests that "contemporary modernist" narration draws attention to the teller, not the tale, and thus diminishes emotional involvement in the reader. But Grace Paley's fiction presents the illusion that the teller is the tale—-the

for young people, it's encouraging" to know the life of the artist. "For instance, when I was in school and studied with Auden, it was wonderful. It was wonderful to know a poet--to really know a poet."

14. Thirty-one of the forty-five collected stories feature a first person narrator; arguably at least twenty-two of these are autobiographical.
Dillard suggests that such "limited points of view emphasize the isolation of individual consciousness" (43), but isolation is the antithesis of Grace's characters' situation; their location within both her story cycle and their neighborhood emphasizes instead the complex interconnectedness of their lives. The critic argues that contemporary writers have moved "fiction's arena from the material world to consciousness itself" and thus "stress modern self-consciousness" (43-4). Grace, however, never leaves the material world; if anything, she brings self-consciousness to it. This is her stance: her stories are designed to meet the commitments of consciousness, the need, especially in contemporary society in the United States, to locate and anchor the self in urban chaos.

Grace lives in social criticism; she keeps it on the surface of her life--and on the surface of her stories. More and more often, her characters talk about the frontpage issues of daily life. Children are kidnapped. They are raped. They become addicts, and die far away from home. Marriage is forever fractured, despite heterosexual attempts at love and romance. Friendship is a source of sustenance, nurturance, inspiration--and sometimes pain--for women. Motherhood is still basic in most women's lives; the patriarchal nuclear family, though, is under fire from all
sides. War is constant. The purchase of food is an issue. The drinking water is an issue. Abortion is an issue.

Annie Dillard takes on "the intrusion of the author" (44), dealing with the often exploitive egotism of contemporary fiction: "A writer may interrupt... narration not only with his voice but also with his disconcerting presence.... All these interruptions and cameo appearances celebrate the art of it all; they remind us that we are as it were in a theater, and that the narrative itself is a conscious and willed artifice" (45). Grace Paley, in contrast, opens up the act of storytelling, revealing her manipulation of language, but--like Penn and Teller when they "reveal" the mechanics of their tricks while stupefying audiences by performing those very tricks--she has integrated that manipulation so that her narratives are both story and voice. No intrusive external consciousness or voice "interrupts" her narration, for the voice is always present.

Dillard makes yet another argument that bears upon Grace Paley's work in her discussion of "the very short story," which is sometimes called "the 'prose piece'"; she prefers to call these "short prose objects." Grace Paley

15. The masculine pronouns may be appropriate here.
has written many such pieces, and has found that some critics, unwilling to perceive and judge them as anything but short fiction manqué, simply dismiss them as unfinished, incomplete. Dillard, however, recognizes the form and comments that "fiction in this century has been moving closer to poetry in every decade"; she considers "the very short story" evidence of that movement. But she argues that the form is almost wholly concerned with technique, despite its occasional references "to the world" (114–5).

When Dillard decides that poets write the best "short prose objects," we recall that Grace herself wrote only poetry until around the age of thirty—but the critic insists that the "intentions" of such works "can only be aesthetic," for "no sentimentality of subject matter interferes with their formal development" (114–5). Notwithstanding that pronouncement, Grace's very short story "Mother," written in the late seventies and published in 1980, is a fine example of the sub-genre; it has a

16. None of the first collection of stories is short enough to be considered here; Grace was more conventional then, and so was the genre. "Living," "Northeast Playground," "Politics," "Debts," and "Wants" in ECLM might qualify; all are less than three pages long. In LSD is "At That Time, or The History of a Joke," which is also less than three pages, but this collection contains "In This Country, But in Another Language, My Aunt Refuses to Marry the Men Everyone Wants Her To," "A Man Told Me the Story of His Life," "This is a Story About My Friend George, the Toy Inventor," and "Mother" which are all less than two pages long. These are not fragments; they are complete stories.
complicated three-part skeleton, and the three basic structural elements turn on a hinge, a pivotal paragraph in the center of the story. Though we would hardly call it sentimental in the old pejorative sense of the term, it is absolutely concerned with sentiment, with feeling; moreover, it is strongly autobiographical, and is about emotion—the narrator's longing to see her/his dead mother, the love and pain flowing between the narrator and the mother, and the thwarted tenderness between the mother and father.

Annie Dillard expounds one of her central theses by rejecting "formal development" as a crux of aesthetic interest; deliberately reactionary, she asserts—tongue-in-cheek—that only in France does anyone really write the way she has been describing, with secret personal self-absorption and public textual self-reflection. Then she insists, "Fiction keeps its audience by retaining the world as its subject matter. People like the world. Many people actually prefer it to art and spend their days by choice in the thick of it" (78). Here the critic sounds very much like Grace Paley, but when she asks, in her discussion of students, critics and writing, "who is writing fiction these days who has not been to college?" (94) we see that the space between Annie Dillard and Grace Paley is a gulf.

Her bias is manifest when Dillard designates what she calls the "crank narrator" in contemporary fiction: "a prose style so intimate, and so often used in the first
person, that it is actually a voice." This voice is "a character outside bourgeois European culture; so is its creator. These writers either derive from peripheral countries, or are Jewish, or émigré, or are in some other way denied access to mainstream European culture" (108-9). Her choice not to name writers who are women and/or non-white doesn't exclude them from her last phrase; the omission only makes that choice--like the concept of "peripheral countries"--come screaming off the page. She has here, in her delicately retrograde style, described Grace Paley's narrators.

Grace's simplicity of diction and sharply honed syntax--what critic Ronald Schliefer calls "chaste compactness"--is what Annie Dillard refers to as "plain writing," which she says has come into greater use in the past two or three decades. Dillard describes what is, essentially, Grace Paley's prose: as "restricted and taut" as a piece of lyric poetry, possessing "the virtues of beauty, clarity, and strength without embellishment." She concludes by saying that plain prose "smacks of moral goodness," that it is "mature prose. It honors the world....It praises the world by seeing it" (116-22).

Though Dillard eschews overt expression of the political conclusions her analysis calls for, she does decide that artists are the proper interpreters of the world, and suggests that sentences of plain prose exist in
order to refer to the world (146). The world is with us late and soon in the plain prose of Grace Paley's stories. In "Ruthy and Edie," Ruthy's wish on the candles of her fiftieth birthday cake is "that this world wouldn't end. This world, this world, Ruth said softly" (LSD, 124), whispering the chorus of Malvina Reynolds' "Love It Like A Fool." And in "Friends," when Tonto accuses his mother of optimism ("Next thing, you'll say...the world is so nice and round that Union Carbide will never blow it up."), Faith first asks why, to the sadness of her friend Selena's death, "did Tonto at 3 a.m. have to add the fact of the world?" (LSD, 88).

Anthony's world, [she says] poor, dense, defenseless thing--rolls round and round. Living and dying are fastened to its surface and stuffed into its softer parts. He was right to call my attention to its suffering and danger. He was right to harass my responsible nature. (LSD, 89)

She insists that considerations of the world must always include the "private" facts of people's individual lives. This is the dynamic synthesis of Grace Paley's fiction as it has evolved within the conflicting aesthetics and politics of the postmodern era.

Grace Paley's fiction is like that of many other women writing fiction in English now, in that she is translating her life--"the world"--into her stories. What Maxine Hong Kingston calls "talking-story" is what Grace Paley does in her work. These writers are willing to
dissolve right through the usual boundaries of time, space and fictional speaker. The marginalization of women and ethnic/racial minorities explains—indeed demands—autobiography in our fiction, and autobiographical literature is always political. Since critics historically recognized all white Christian male work in English as the norm, they did not consider it autobiographical, and were able to segregate "autobiography" into a separate, lesser, genre. In their andro- and ethnocentric bias, the critics thought that Melville, Hawthorne, Lawrence and Conrad were writing "everybody"'s story, and hence expressing "universal" truths. But these Others have come along and managed to get published; they too write about themselves and their own kind, in an autobiographical fiction which many critics have decided is not literature, or surely not "universal," at any rate—all these tales of dark and female people.

But it is not only in the skewed perception of white Christian male critics, which ghettoizes such work, that long-oppressed peoples are telling their stories autobiographically. From a different perspective, such fiction is of considerably higher status. These stories need to be told. They've been missing, and telling them is an act of restoration, a joining together, making whole the fabric of world literature. These people have had their hands raised a long time, waiting to be called on, waiting
to be recognized. When they are called on, they spill out
generations of energy in words; their texts are fountains of
passionately released language. And they seek, in their
stories, not just recognition of the self, the individual,
the one who finally got called on and got into print, but
recognition of the group. They are representative. They
are signposts, flares and beacons to the rest. And those
markers are necessary, for the openness of contemporary
forms is particularly appropriate to those whose presence
calls canonical principles into question, or even
obliterates them; formerly "a closed form," as Grace wrote
of her mother's life, these lives are now openended.

The story, much more than the novel, lends itself to
the open ending; most postmodern novelists writing in
English--Mary Gordon, Larry Heineman or Susan Dodd, for
instance--tend to put the past into the past and, despite
some back-and-forth movement, advance through the present
toward a foreseeable future. Even such a dreamlike, lyrical
novel as Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* offers us some
conclusiveness in its conclusion. But those novelists who
have wrestled the long form away from closure, to do their
contemporary bidding (like Toni Cade Bambara in *The Salt
Eaters* or Kingston in her two "memoirs"), do not--as yet--
include Grace Paley. Her success with her first book in
1959 did lead to the then-inevitable critical pressure to
progress according to formula, to write a novel. She
"failed" at that attempt, as she had "failed" in high school and college: the form was not appropriate. She tried to make the Darwin family the center of a saga, generations and connections that would weave their stories together into the requisite big book. But it didn't happen.

Three of the more obviously linked stories, "Faith in the Afternoon" (ECLM, written in 1959-60), "Faith in a Tree" (ECLM, written in the mid-sixties), and "Dreamer in A Dead Language" (LSD, written in the early to mid-seventies), were part of that attempt, but instead of becoming a novel, they provide a good example of the kind of connection, through their presentation of the same characters, their inter-textual references, their mutual history and world view, that Grace's story cycle offers in place of the novel. She says that whenever she tried to spin out the plot, she would realize that she could achieve her desired effects in a shorter form. Why "make it longer," she asks, when you already have what you need in a story?

After that brief capitulation to critical pressure, which frustrated her and made her angry at herself, Grace may have felt justified in having kept the literary world at arms' length so long. But she was enormously relieved when she learned that she could be part of the writers' world without engaging in what she considered artificial stylistics or bad faith. Like teaching, her work at the
PEN\textsuperscript{17} American Center in New York—where she is a member of the Freedom to Write Committee and the Women's Committee\textsuperscript{18}—has helped to bridge the gap she feared between politics and literature. PEN's membership includes a substantial number of other writers who are concerned about the treatment of those who write and speak out against government policy in their home countries—such cases as Margaret Randall's fight to regain her United States citizenship, and with the social impact and responsibility of writers; it is rumored that Grace has occasionally indulged in deliberate recruitment to be sure that continues to be true.

When she thinks about having become "a literary person," Grace agrees that the transformation took place over a long time and was thus almost imperceptible. She rarely speaks of the struggle to define herself as a writer,

\textsuperscript{17} Though the name is not printed as initials, the title letters of the organization stand for Playwrights/Poets, Essayists/Editors, and Novelists. Given the critical history of the short story in English, we should not be surprised that they never thought to make it PENS, to include writers of short fiction. Notwithstanding that exclusion, Grace Paley joined the organization six months before her friend and Sarah Lawrence colleague Muriel Rukeyser began her '75-'76 term as president of the organization.

\textsuperscript{18} This committee was founded by Grace and Meredith Tax (author of \textit{Rivington Street} and \textit{Union Square}) in 1986, when PEN women realized that the organization's retrograde leadership—the president in office was Norman Mailer—was never going to act on its marginalization of women and minority members, and its trivialization of issues important to them, unless strongly pressed to do so. The Women's Committee has since applied and maintained the necessary pressure.
but willingly generalizes from her own experience to comment on how difficult it is for women to be taken seriously—even in the midst of success. As recently as 1984, at a Northwestern Triquarterly symposium, Grace addressed this issue, "saying that her stories were considered nice, little unimportant stories about domestic situations. As if to prove her point, an article in the Chicago Tribune about the conference referred to her as an 'intellectual version of Erma Bombeck'."

Nevertheless, she minimizes that long-deferred entry into the literary community, formalized through membership in PEN, by telling the story this way: "It's just that I really like people, and I'm a person who believes in working with others. I come from a union family. A lot of Americans, now, they're not accustomed to working with other people. They may be more individualist. But I'm an organizational person, so I naturally would join a writers' organization. It would be natural for me to do that. Just as it would be natural for me to join a teachers' union. So therefore I get to know the people. I get to like some of

19. Cited by Karen Peterson in "What is Feminist Writing and Why Do We Need Feminist Publishing?" in the National Newsletter of The Feminist Writers Guild, 8.3 (Wint, 1985-6) 8. Even critics who think they are treating her work seriously can slip into trivializing language, as do Robert B. Shaw, who refers to her poetry as "perky" (38), and Minako Baba, who concludes an otherwise appropriately scholarly article by referring to the stories as a "delightful brand of sociological art" (54).
the people. And then they get to be my community too. So I have the teaching community, the writing community, the political community--and in many ways they overlap. Like Esther [E. M. Broner] is in my teaching and writing community.20 And Sybil is in my writing and my political community."

This new community, a congregation of writers as friends and colleagues, was instrumental in the publication of *Enormous Changes*, which she finally put together when she got back from the USSR. For several years, certainly since the mid-sixties, everyone close to her (and many of her readers and critics) had been urging--maybe even scolding--her to create another collection. Her family believed that her work during the war kept her from writing, but we would be wrong to assume that she was simply so pressed or so exhausted that she could not write. The fact is that she chose to do the one thing rather than the other, though in some sense--musing in a back corner of her mind, scribbling notes here and there, spending an occasional afternoon doing two pages and putting them away for three years--she was always writing. Danny remembers "bothering her to spend

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20. Now that Grace has retired from, and Esther has been fired by, Sarah Lawrence, and now that Grace, like Esther, has become an active supporter of the Israeli/Palestinian peace movement, these groups overlap in different directions, but the point remains.
more time writing. I was worried that she wasn't writing enough, and god knows how long the war might drag on."

He says that she was unwilling to discuss her writing with him, though he often asked what she was working on, or what a particular story was about. And he would "always" ask her when the next book was coming out, but she would answer "in as few words as possible." He gradually asked her less and less, and finally realized that he wasn't going to get the answer he wanted. "A few times I was tempted to look in her manuscripts, but they were so filled with corrections and revisions that I couldn't read them; I wouldn't even try to read them."

Donald Barthelme, who lived on the block, just across the street, was another who urged Grace to create a second book. He insisted, despite her denials, that she must have enough stories for a collection (her first one contained only eleven, after all) and nagged her--in the right way, of course--until she searched around (her filing system, such as it is, has never been what most would call efficient), and found that he was right. He read and commented on all the stories, as did Andrea Dworkin, who read over the whole collection when Grace finally began to work on arranging it. Andrea "was really a big help" in defining the order, and in the eventual proofreading.

Many of the stories she read aloud to Jane Cooper, who remembers the process because it was part of their
longtime exchange of critical listening and reading. "She would read them to me and I would really listen very hard. And then I would say something like, 'Well, the end just doesn't seem quite right yet,' or 'Wait a minute, there was a point way back at which my concentration left you. Could we get back to that place?' or 'Somehow this doesn't seem right' or 'Could you work a little more on this page?' or 'Here's a section that doesn't quite work for me.' Both of us do this very well in oral terms, but then I would usually look at the thing afterwards to identify those spots." 21

Some of the stories they worked on together finally did "turn up in the book," and Jane says she thought she'd never read them before in her life, so changed were they from the versions she had heard or seen in that preparatory phase.

Finally, at Barthelme's consistent urging, Grace took a batch of manuscripts to Roger Straus at Farrar, Straus and Giroux; they published the collection of

21. The roles of reader and writer are often reversed; Jane tells about the time in the early seventies that she was in residence at the McDowell Colony in New Hampshire, and drove over to see Grace and Bob in Vermont. She had with her the poetry she was working on and some older pieces, along with an essay detailing her development in skill and consciousness as a woman poet. She took this assortment of pieces over to Grace "so I could show them to her and say, 'Do you think these are okay? And what should I do with this essay now that it's gotten so huge?'" Grace, who only rarely reads through a full text at one sitting, disappeared for two hours and came back to say, "I read the whole thing. Jane, don't you see? You've got your book." Grace, Jane says, "had the vision to see that all these parts put together would make a book." [The book is Maps & Windows. See bibliography.]
seventeen stories she named *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*--and, eleven years later, the next seventeen as well.

By the time this collection was prepared for publication, two first person narrators who sound a lot like Grace Paley and Faith Darwin had been identified as writers--in "Debts" and "A Conversation with My Father." (In the third collection and in uncollected texts, Faith is unquestionably defined as a writer.) The final story here in *Changes*, "The Long-Distance Runner," depicts Faith facing several of the issues and circumstances that confront her author. Her children are nearly grown and mostly gone:

I kissed the kids goodbye. They were quite old by then. It was near the time for parting anyway....I told them they could take off any time they wanted to. Go lead your private life, I said. Only leave me out of it....I said, Goodbye. They said, Yeah, O.K., sure. (180)

Her new man, Jack, is on the scene, and she wants the kids to accept him: "Why can't you be decent to him? I asked. It's important to me" (197). She has said goodbye to "the whole house of her childhood" (184) by visiting her former home and declaring her mother dead, and by finding a nascent sisterhood with the "mama" who saves her by taking her into the old apartment.

And Faith is moving off home base; after a long time in one place, she has "decided to run" (181), and is trying to both understand and explain what these transitions mean to her. But, "What are you talking about?" her elder son
demands. "I don't know what she's talking about either," says the younger. And

Neither did Jack, despite the understanding often produced by love after absence. He said, Tell me again. He was in a good mood. He said, You can even tell it to me twice. I repeated the story. They all said, What? (198)

Though she was, herself, satisfied to have learned what had come in to her so far, Faith apparently has more to learn and farther to go before she can make herself understood. Grace's travels have only begun, then, to produce stories that will move outside the neighborhood.
The decade from 1975 to 1985 is marked by two kinds of movement in Grace's life, both of which fostered continuing change in her political perspective and activities. First of all, she began to spend more time in the country, planting a garden and growing herself into the New England countryside--its towns and people were becoming a second home for her, and her politics soon included their needs and interests. Her family preceded her there: Nora, having lived first in New Hampshire and then settled in Vermont, had become a New Engander some years before, and in 1980 Bob gave up New York City entirely and went to live on his land. Secondly, Grace continued to travel, both

1. As did her writing. See "In a Vermont jury room" in Sevendays and "Vermont Poems" section of Leaning Forward.

2. Nora's presence, and her Vermont politics, must have been instrumental in her mother's growing interest in the rural countryside, the people of the New England mountains, and ecological issues. Nora was, before Grace, attuned to the need for such work as that done in the Women and Life on Earth Conference, and the Women's Pentagon Actions. She introduced Grace and Bob to the folks who had voted in town meeting to impeach Richard Nixon before most of the rest of the country had fully recognized his abuses of the Presidency.
within the United States and to other countries. This period included a number of trips to colleges and universities as visiting author or speaker, and of course there were deliberately political journeys as well: various notable trips to Washington, D.C. took place in this time, as did her visit to the Women's Peace Encampment at Seneca, New York, and the decade ended with her traveling to Nicaragua and El Salvador. Both Leaning Forward, her first published poetry collection, and Later the Same Day, the third story collection, were published in 1985, and they reflect the accumulated knowledge and understanding born of her going outside the neighborhood and bringing it all back home.

The introduction to that decade of movement was noteworthy: Grace and Bob toured China for three weeks in the spring of 1974, with a group sponsored by The Guardian. Her previous year's trip, to the USSR, had been paid for by the movement, as had the trip to Vietnam in 1969. But Isaac had left Grace "a little bit of money," and "that's how we got to China." (Ironically then, Grace and Bob traveled as capitalists to China, perhaps the most inspiringly revolutionary place they visited in this period.)

3. Two long trips to Puerto Rico, in 1976 and 1977, both made between school terms because Grace was teaching fulltime, were also relatively private excursions. They went, she says, because Bob was working with Puerto Rican
most movement progressives and leftists in the United States at that time, Grace was enormously impressed with the revolution in China, and admired the ongoing courage, strength, and dedication of the Chinese people. Grace's enthusiasm and knowledge even turned her sister Jeanne around, when they argued about the issue of family size restriction as practiced in the People's Republic of China; Grace was eloquent in defense of the one child limit, arguing that the Chinese had no choice but to restrict their birth rate in the face of their slowly developing resources and enormous population. Like the tour group in "Somewhere Else," Grace Paley was "in love with the Chinese revolution, Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese people" (LSD, 48). In 1974, China had not yet fully embraced American cola drinks and all that they signify of compromise—not to say

people on the lower East side ("Puerto Rico is a very important part of New York"), because she was able to write there, and because it was "a warm place." But she hardly relaxed into a being a tourist on the beach, or a writer in luxurious isolation. What she learned on those trips became part of her international analysis and appeared in her writing; written into one of her Seven days columns is a story about Faith and Richard visiting the Darwins at the Children of Judea, just after Faith has returned from a conference in Puerto Rico on The Bilingual Child and Public Education. The whole piece is a discussion of the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the US—and the ignorance of US citizens about that relationship (February 28, 1977, page 15). Also see the stories "In the Garden" and "Somewhere Else" in LSD.
In Beijing, Grace bought a jacket of the sort worn by Chinese workers—in an effort, Bob reports—to be inconspicuous ("China Diary I," 8). As she has been since her Depression childhood, Grace was sharply aware of the obvious distinctions money makes; being an American tourist in China compounded the issues of class, race and privilege, making her super-sensitive. Naturally, she wrote this consciousness, with its built-in criticism, into her China story. Ruth Larsen (who, in the third collection, is almost as autobiographical as Faith) thinks that Frederick J. Lorenz, a member of her tour group, "should have been spoken to," because in this China, where all the grownups dressed in modest gray, blue, and green, Freddy wore very short white California shorts with a mustard-colored California B.V.D. shirt and, above his bronze blue-eyed face, golden tan California curly hair. She didn't think that was nice. [She is challenged immediately by the caustic Ann, who asks,] Who are you, Ruth? The commissioner of underwear? (LSD, 50)

Like Ruth, and despite her good intentions, Grace was foiled by the longstanding though counter-revolutionary and manifestly impractical institutionalization of sexism in China: she bought a jacket with pockets—which only men wore then in The People's Republic—thus contradicting her own purpose by calling attention to herself, and perhaps further
embarrassing herself by appearing to be flaunting American feminism.

Grace and Bob both wrote about their trip, he in another series of diary excerpts, as he had done in collaboration with Grace when they returned from Chile, and she in the story called "Somewhere Else." Certainly they were interested in many of the same issues, and both chose to focus on one incident, the behavior of two members of their tour group, and the results of that behavior. When Bob writes that he and Hank de Suvero took off for "an hour's stroll through some 'real' section" ("CD II," 8)—that is, out of Central Tientsin and off the recommended path for tourists—they are on their way into both adventure and fiction, for, like the women who became Margaret and Louise in "Love," Bob and Hank are transformed by Grace into Joe and Freddy, accused by their guide of transgressions against the Chinese people.

Bob's diary descriptions of the pleasure he took in solitary rambles and discoveries, as well as his now-international fascination with noodle factories—"Mr. Wong...[Joe says,] I'm crazy about your street noodle factories" (52)—in conjunction with Grace's having made Joe a playground builder, reveal him to be Joe's original, just as Bob's published details of the incident on their tour

4. First published in 1978 in The New Yorker, later included in LSD.
reveal Hank de Suvero to be the original of Grace's Freddy. Like Hank in Bob's diary, Freddy is accused both of taking a photograph without asking permission and "invading" a noodle factory. There are, of course, incidental differences, like the fact that on the Guardian's China tour, no one admitted taking such a photograph: Hank may have been accused unfairly. In Grace's story, the narrator makes it clear that Freddy might well have taken the photograph Mr. Wong describes, as might several members of the group.

Here is a place where, because we also have the text of Bob Nichols' diary, the transitional space between life and story is nearly transparent. With Bob's text as our lens, we can observe the writer's choices. This is true even when we grant the impossibility of faithfully rendered "reality"; Bob Nichols intended "nonfiction" in his diary, and we may choose to take his perspective as a different version of, rather than a perfect copy of, "reality." Grace's purpose, unlike Bob's, is not to create a lengthy report for interested folks back home, nor to tell anecdotes from and make an analysis of her trip to China. The two authors' differing intentions must have dictated even such simple distinctions as their descriptions of the moment of

5. In fact, Bob's quartet, his novel in four parts, is attributed to Joe in the text of Grace's story: "He was, when not in China, writing a novel, a utopia, a speculative fiction in which the self-reliant small necessary technology of noodle-making was one short chapter" (51).
accusation: Bob's Mr. Ho is "sitting in the middle of the sofa smoking cigarettes" in present tense, when, after a "long generalized speech....He raises his finger and points dramatically at Hank" (CD II, 8). Grace's Mr. Wong, in the past tense, is sometimes paraphrased and his accusation is interrupted by many paragraphs of the first person narrator's description, commentary, and explanation, and the other characters' dialogue. "Mr. Wong pointed his political finger at our brilliant comrade Frederick J. Lorenz" (49).

In keeping with her belief that every story is at least two stories, Grace has set the China episode in juxtaposition to another, which transforms the first by becoming its other half; the second story takes place in the South Bronx and another, less blasted, section of New York City, probably the Village. In order to go beyond the implications of the specific incident--the accusation itself--to explore its meaning and come to understand what Grace would call the truth of the event, she offers two "somewheres" and demonstrates that "else" may mean "other."6 Though Freddy is the accused, both parts of the story are about Joe, the unaccused guilty party who finds

6. As in "A Conversation with My Father," in which the stories within the title story contain many of the same ideas as their frame (the painful dialogue between parent and child, their conflicting world views, the elder's refusal or inability to change, the younger's rejection of the elder), the two stories that are combined in "Somewhere Else" multiply and amplify our understanding by becoming one story.
himself in similar situations in both parts of the text. Joe is twice accused of invasion and theft—the essence of imperialism—and the story calls up old beliefs in the camera as thief of the soul. Despite the fact that his interest in the lives and culture of the "others" he encounters is neither born of narrow self-interest nor dulled by unconscious ethnocentrism, Joe is ignored and rejected by his accusers when he wants to be seen, to be accepted and known by them. In both cases, Joe wants to be understood as himself—an individual—rather than as a member of his class, nation or race; but both times he is defeated by history. Too many who look like him have come before him—Michelangelo Antonioni, cited in the text, and all the other western artists and powers who have created "the Orient" in China, in addition to numbers of United States colonial governors in Central and South America, plus the closed hierarchy of New York City governance in the South Bronx.

Joe wants the Chinese people and the young men of the South Bronx to believe in his willingness to put sincere effort into their cause—with some vanity perhaps, some ego, but not very much. He is a student in the Chinese world, seeking entrance so he might learn from it; in the Bronx he offers himself as a skilled assistant, a teacher with the goal of empowering his students. In his job, working with young people, and in his chance encounter with the young men
on the front porch, he tries to put both the technology and
the opportunity for creative expression into their hands; he
is acutely aware of his dual position in that community,
both realistic and ultimately defensive about making "a big
Marxist deal about it" (59).

But in both China and the South Bronx communication
is hampered because Joe does not share language or culture
or class or race with the people. In both places they
disarm him, rejecting his professed purpose. And he knows
it; he understands their rejection of him. Joe Larsen's
struggle to understand and integrate all of the story's
issues--about film and cameras and "taking" people--is at
the thematic heart of "Somewhere Else." Grace worked on
this story for a long time; she kept going over it and
changing it, especially the ending. Finally, she chose to
have the China tour group come together for a reunion, and
to watch slides of their trip. The first one they see is of
an old man holding his grandchild--and though the slides

7. This situation is reminiscent of an experience
Bob Nichols had several years earlier. He had designed a
vest pocket park playground for an uptown neighborhood, and
was present at the groundbreaking celebration. The
installation, its bare wood and metal fittings considered de
rigeur in rapidly gentrifying white neighborhoods, was
accepted somewhat cynically by the local black organizers.
One of those women said to him, "Very nice, Mr. Nichols. I
guess if it'd been downtown you'd have painted it."

8. This is typical of her pacing; the events that
inspired the China episodes in this story took place in May
belong to Martin—who took over four thousand pictures—it is Joe who remembers where the pictures were taken, demonstrating the essential value he has given them, and the careful quality of his own "taking" of the people of China. Joe is struggling; his consciousness of these contradictions is visibly rising in the course of the story.

Grace Paley's own consciousness was visibly rising in the decade from 1975 to 1985. Though most peace activists at first refused to see the relationship between environmental work and anti-military actions, and considered such efforts to be counter-productive or much less important, a major shift began when the Vietnam war ended; Grace was one of those who broadened her sphere of activity. Her personal knowledge of the devastation of the Vietnamese countryside and the herculean energies required to empty the soil of poison and bring it back to fertility, taught her much that she later brought to her work as an ecological activist in the States.

Her realization of the interconnectedness of the various "issues" that often escaped—or fragmented and stalled—movement people was fostered by her travel to other countries, by her new life in rural Vermont, and by her growing involvement with women's groups, whose philosophy was based in an integrated analysis.9 Additionally, the

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9. Many earlier peace groups, certainly those dominated by male leadership, had ignored or deplored women's movement actions throughout the sixties. Progress up and away from that low level of consciousness can be
Village Peace Center, which had developed a strong single focus in its anti-draft work, had closed by 1974, for the draft was halted, and many of its members, like Grace Paley, Sybil Claiborne and Karl Bissinger, had already become active in the international War Resisters League, which is, as Grace likes to point out, one of the few large pacifist organizations that is secular.

Grace traveled to Paris as a WRL representative in early April of 1975, to meet Vietnamese ambassadors at the international peace negotiations. Her brief report on that experience, published as "Peace Movement Meets with PRG in Paris" in WIN, is more journalistic than most of her earlier non-fiction, but still presents people as characters, complete with dialogue—which always interests her most. That same year she published a passionately argued essay against the baby airlift, in which Vietnamese children were flown out of their country and given to United States families and agencies to arrange adoptions ("We were Strong Enough..."). And at the end of the year, her "Mom" appeared in Esquire magazine—a piece which utterly defies traced in the pages of movement publications like the WRL's WIN, through which women battled their "brothers" over basic feminist issues. The printed evidence of these battles suggests that Grace Paley, an occasional contributor, was slow to challenge the male power structure within the movement.
categorization: short fiction, essay, autobiography, memoir, collage.

Across that range of work we find evidence of Grace Paley's ongoing concern with language--its use and abuse, its environment and employment. The opening line of the PRG article informs us that Madame Binh's greeting was a "taped" one--though "warm"--and goes on to discuss ambassadorial "conversations." The article about the Vietnamese children, interlaced with quoted conversation and interview, turns on definition and expression, particularly of the word "orphan." And "Mom" is prime Paley, offering--in less than two pages--references to literary figures, immigrant reverence for the English language in the United States, the importance of individual sentences, the variety of languages available in one neighborhood, the mystery of naming (including the case of the ineffable name of God), and storytelling.

In the second half of the seventies, Grace actually took on a brief assignment as a journalist--she wrote a regular column¹⁰ for the impressive but short-lived magazine Sevendays. Her column had two names in its brief life: It began as "The Demystified Zone" and soon became "Conversations"--the former a declaration of her insistence upon writing as revelation, and the latter--defining

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¹⁰ Alternating with Noam Chomsky.
language intercourse—a constant theme in her work. In that column she published "Living on Karen Silkwood Drive," in which she tells the story of the occupation of the Seabrook construction site in New Hampshire.11

Here, as in her fiction, she tells two stories, enlarging the history of the proposed 1150 megawatt nuclear reactor by pointing out the immutable connection between this demonstration—a camp pitched by 2000 people in the parking lot of the reactor site—and the Women's Vigil against the Vietnam war and the draft.12 She looks at the land around the site, which has been scraped raw out of the lush tidal marsh, and she thinks of Quang Tri. The article offers the perspective of an older person who finds herself (as she often does now) among mostly-younger proponents of a cause to which she has dedicated a good portion of her time and strength.

These young folks, she relates, appear at first to be somewhat the same as the sixties variety; discussing the supplies they've brought for the length of their stay at the camp or in jail, Grace compares granola ingredients with a young woman. But these young people, perhaps having learned from the women's movement, have developed "a new democratic


12. Both Bob and Nora recall the camp as a small village, which she compares to the Women's Peace Camps at Greenham Common and Seneca.
process"; there is an "almost continuous parliament of Spokespersons sent from each affinity group to bring views and initiatives to the Decision-Making Body--the DMB" (11). Grace records how they discuss, among other things, whether to go limp or stiff when they are finally carried off--as they know they will be--and how to deal with arrest, bail, and court pleas; they want to operate in consolidation, and they seek consensus. As in the not-so-distant past, these people benefited from Quaker teachings--though Grace admits that she's too interested in what everyone else looks like, and in what they have to say, to personally match the Quaker model.

Official removal of the anti-nuke activists began in the afternoon of Mayday, 1977, and at seven-thirty in the evening, with her husband and twenty-five others, Grace Paley was "arrested"--that is, "picked up and dumped into an army truck" where they "remain[ed] sitting or organized into sardine sleep" throughout the night (12), on an icy metal truckbed that Bob Nichols remembers quite physically. More than 1400 people were finally arrested, including many other members of Grace and Bob's small Vermont affinity groups, who have remained attached to the Clamshell Alliance in its long battle against the building of the Seabrook plant.13

13. The Clamshell Alliance, which Nora Paley helped organize, caused the proliferation of such small affinity groups as Ompomponoosic and WAND, which Grace and Bob joined. Created in 1976, the Alliance represents a growing percentage of New England's populace, and remains active more than twelve years later; the Seabrook struggle has
In the following year, Grace took part in another sort of occupation, this one relatively brief and numerically tiny, but engendering a governmental response even more heavy-handed and tactically questionable than the New Hampshire governor's decision to instigate mass arrests and interminable snarls in his state's courts. The War Resisters League arranged for a dual action on Labor Day, September 4, 1978; teams of demonstrators appeared at exactly the same time in Red Square and at the White House (5pm in Moscow, 10am in Washington). Each group unfurled a banner urging the superpowers to disarm. Grace and Karl Bissinger were on the hometeam, inevitably dubbed "The Washington Eleven" by the press.

The seven Americans in Russia went individually to the giant GUM department store, crossed from there to the Square, and began handing out leaflets as they pulled open their banner. The banner was ripped down in less than thirty seconds, and they were arrested; the plainclothes police who rushed from all over the Square to cut off the advanced, now often in court.

14. The Russian text was USA-USSR DISARM!; the American English banner read NO NUCLEAR WEAPONS/NO NUCLEAR POWER/USA OR USSR.

15. WRL's chairwoman Norma Becker (who'd been with Grace in Washington the night she met Nora on the Pentagon steps), Jerry Coffin, Scott Herrick, Pat Lacefield, David McReynolds, Craig Simpson, and Steve Sumerford.
action took a little longer to scurry around collecting the leaflets, which had been tossed into the air when they couldn't be offered politely. Four of the seven were taken away, and the three left in the Square began calling out "Mir Y Druhzba"—Peace and Friendship—until uniformed police convinced them to leave. All seven were frightened, and some had visions of dank prison cells and harsh inquisitors. But all were reunited by seven that evening, and told that they could continue their interrupted itinerary. Their guide took them to a Moscow night club, where they indulged in vodka, caviar and champagne toasts to peace and freedom. But, learning of the less pleasant circumstances of their eleven colleagues at home, the group quickly decided to leave, and got back to New York City just as they were released—the Washington contingent had been in custody for thirty hours.

On the home front, a few minutes before the appointed time the eleven16 joined other tourists waiting to see the White House, and then stepped out of line at ten to open their banner on the lawn and distribute leaflets. (These had the same text as the Russian language leaflets being passed out in Moscow.) The United States Secret Service was not so quick as their opposite numbers had been

in Red Square, and there was enough time for some leaflets to be distributed— and even for one good photograph to be taken of the eleven with their banner open and easily read. 17 But the White House security agents’ inefficiency was made up for by the District’s constabulary and the judiciary branch. The pacifists were charged with illegal entry, booked, and jailed for thirty hours (Karl says the charge was really "trespassing in the garden of the presidential palace"); Grace says they were accused of "stepping on the grass"). They were threatened with a six-month to one year sentence in prison and a $1000 fine, but, after a full jury trial—that took place three months later and lasted eight days—they were eventually put on probation for three years with the proviso that if any of them were arrested during that period, they would spend six months in jail.

The strong contrast between the Soviet and American responses to the demonstration was ironic—if not absurd—in light of the far more rigid constraints on spoken and printed dissent in the USSR than in the US, and there was a swirl of publicity around the case, much of it prompted by the presence of well-known artists and writers among the defendants. There was international coverage because of the

17. The picture was taken by Karl, who worked for years as a portrait and magazine photographer, during which he took some now-famous shots of literary figures, including Paul Bowles and Colette.
dual action, and most of it was critical of the United States government's handling of their "half" of the demonstration. Grace said, surprised despite her experience, "It's as though in the midst of the terrible noise of impending war, someone dropped a feather and the Administration said, 'Did you hear that? Arrest those guys.'"\(^{18}\)

Three months later, in Washington's winter, the trial itself took place; photos recording both events show Grace on the White House lawn in a sundress, and outside the courthouse bundled in wool, with a dusting of snow on her shoulders. In the latter photo she was probably on her way to invade yet another sacrosanct national preserve: the Library of Congress. Jane Cooper had been invited to read her poems there, and the reading turned out to be on December 4, the first day of the White House Eleven trial.\(^{19}\)

There had been a luncheon in honor of the people who were reading that evening, and Jane spoke privately there to her old friend, William Meredith, who was poetry consultant at the Library then. She told him that after lunch she was going over to watch the trial of the Washington 11, and that she planned to "mention it" that night at her reading. "I'm

\(^{18}\) Quoted by Sybil Claiborne in *Climbing Fences*; np.

\(^{19}\) Jane shared the spotlight that night with another poet, Louis O. Coxe.
going to talk about it," Jane said, knowing that the Library was taping the reading, and that the tape would be available for high school use. "Bill looked a little taken aback, but I must say he rallied nobly and said, 'You can do anything that you have to do.'"

And she did. At the beginning of the reading, Jane dedicated her reading to the Eleven, and then explained who they were, and why they were on trial. She had just read the first line of the first poem when the Washington Eleven walked into the reading room. The tone of the reading had been one of propriety, of high decorum; the audience sat on little gilt chairs, there were antique musical instruments in glass cases--"when suddenly in walked this mob of somewhat less decorous folks." They had arrived in time to hear Jane give her first public reading of the entire text of her Rosa Luxemburg poems.20

Jane used her work further to benefit the Eleven: she conferred with Jan Levi, whose Flamingo Press was just beginning to consider such projects, and they acted so quickly that the first edition of the Luxembourg poems appeared as a small pamphlet just three weeks later, at a reading fundraiser. Then another, bigger, reading was held, and the first printing of five hundred sold out, as did an equal second run shortly afterward. By donating her work to

20. A politically apt reading; the poems are in Scaffolding (see Bibliography).
raise money for the Eleven, Jane probably could have kept that little Flamingo chapbook in print indefinitely. Bob Nichols speculates that the number of rallies and benefits to raise money for bail, defense funding, and court costs for this--and other actions in this period--may nearly equal the number of actions themselves.

As the movements for peace and the maintenance of the ecology of the earth had blent together, so too had environmental activists and feminists. In early spring of 1980, Grace was one of the planners and presenters for a conference called Women and Life on Earth, which took place in Amherst, Massachusetts. Hundreds of women from the Northeast attended, and many of them, charged by the fire of that meeting's revelation of the interconnectedness of racism, militarism, the oppression of women and the tremulous safety of the planet, began immediately afterward to meet in regional and local groups.

Grace was not the only woman who had turned around in her politics, and thus faced the criticism or hostility of men with whom she'd worked for years--who resented the feminism of her current actions, and refused to struggle with their own consciousness beyond old boundaries--nor was Grace any different from all the other women who changed. Her heterosexism, for instance, if not homophobia, was recognized and challenged by the many lesbian women who were, more and more often, among her sister workers. The
social and political distance between Grace—the recovering daddy's girl who had always pleased men and been pleased by them—and the radical feminists she now met began to narrow rapidly.

As the smaller groups of women continued to meet, their desire to demonstrate—literally—what they had learned about the economics and effects of militarism on a global scale grew with their knowledge and understanding. Out of the arguments and revelations of those months, and out of the actions of the next two years, Grace eventually wrote the Unity Statement which, because she understood her role to be that of scribe, one creator among many, is always printed with the phrase "A collectively written working statement" after its concluding sentence, in place of an authorial attribution. The women did demonstrate what they knew, in November of 1980, in the Women's Pentagon Action.

More than two thousand women went to Washington, and surrounded the Pentagon. They wove webs of yarn over the five doors, chanted in their circles, sang to the armed men who entered and exited—so that, for perhaps the first time in their lives, those men were unable to ignore the meaning of the presence of women. Hundreds of women were arrested and sent to jail, some for as long as thirty days in federal penitentiaries; though many were treated badly—some even kept in leg irons—that response was proof of the anxiety that women could produce among men of power.
In 1982 they returned in the Second Women's Pentagon Action, to roar and hum and chant, to weave their webs, and to hold hands in a dense circle of spirit around the armed men who dispense pain, poison and death across continents. Grace planted a small sign in the war department's earth, a printed marker that read: "The Unknown Woman." (No soldiers in spit-shined boots and white gloves have been sent to guard that spot.) This kind of action, based in magic and in women's craft, would not have appealed to Grace Paley in former years. She was not among the witchy women who had hexed Wall Street and Washington in the past, nor had she endorsed the necessity for women to separate from men—at least sometimes—to make policy, to take action, and to keep strong. But by the nineteen-eighties, she had become one of those women. The change was neither simple nor easy.

When she returned from China, she had often been asked to report on what she'd learned about the lives of Chinese women, and about the situation of lesbian and gay people there. But she did not satisfy her questioners on these issues, and on at least one occasion, back home in the Village, she was challenged, accused of having either passed over such matters or not taken them seriously. At first, she offered the standard excuse: people in revolutionary China do not have the time to deal with sexuality—that is a western luxury; they must struggle with "important" issues. "Do you mean, Grace, that in all of China," one angry young
woman demanded, "in all of China, you couldn't find even one tiny little lesbian? Come on, Grace!" Ms. Paley did not contradict this metaphoric assessment of her blooming feminist consciousness. She took it in and considered it. Her critics were right, she realized, and she began to make the slow deliberate change that would finally surface in "Listening," written in the early eighties and published as the concluding story of her third collection.

Acknowledgment of the existence of lesbians is absent from Grace Paley's work published before 1985—with two exceptions. In "Northeast Playground," first published in 1967, two of the "unwed mothers on relief," close friends who care for each other's children, are described by the Faith-like narrator as "very handsome dykey women." They are "whores and junkies," mothers of toddlers in daycare as well as the baby daughters they keep pristine "in ribbons and white voile in fine high veneer and chrome imported carriages" at the park (ECLM, 146-7). These two women never let their kids play in the sand, and are "disgusted to see them get dirty or wet and g[i]ve them hell when they d[o]" (147). The passage is interesting for its combination of "dykey" with "very handsome," and the description of a rigid mothering style—at odds with that of Faith and her friends in the story cycle—superimposed with hyper-feminine trappings. Though both the context and the description
appear to be sincerely positive, they dip into longtime stereotypes of lesbians.

And, in "Dreamer in a Dead Language," first published in 1977 but probably written a few years earlier, Philip Mazzano's disdainful listing of Ricardo's connections reveals his bigotry to readers with political consciousness of sexuality: "Four old maids in advertising, three Seventh Avenue models, two fairies in TV, one literary dyke..." (LSD, 14). Here, when a character uses the term "dyke" along with "old maid" and "fairy," we don't attribute his attitude to either the narrator or, in the case of those readers so inclined, the author.

But in "Faith in a Tree" (even in the final version published in 1974), as in "Northeast Playground," the powerful narrating voice (which is Faith's) is the source of homophobic language, and makes mockery of gay men seem acceptable to the reader's eyes and ears: About the "handsome man in narrow pants" who sits beside Lynn Ballard on a park bench and whispers in her ear, clever Faith disagrees with soft-hearted Kitty, in her romantic assessment of the situation. Faith says it's "obvious that he's a weekend queer, talking her into the possibilities of a neighborhood threesome" with "his really true love, the magnificent manager of the supermarket" (ECLM, 86). The man is a "queer"--and a devious creep. In the same story, we are reassured by Faith that two men walking along "leaning
toward one another" are "not fairies" but "music lovers inclining toward their transistor" (ECLM, 88).

These examples are a long way back behind the consciousness of the narrative voice that describes the American tourists' yearning, in "Somewhere Else" (first published in the fall of 1978), "to walk along a street in Shanghai or Canton holding hands with a Chinese person of their own sex, just as the Chinese did—chatting politics, exchanging ideological news" (LSD, 48). We aren't told if they also want to do this with an American person of their own sex, but the tone definitely allows for such a possibility—which is certainly not the case in the earlier story. 21 1985's Later the Same Day publicly presented a leap of consciousness in its author's sexual politics, far from and ahead of that expressed in 1974's Enormous Changes at the Last Minute.

Like her author, Faith begins taking some lessons and some lumps after 1970; not only is she attacked by an old friend (Ann in "Friends" [LSD])—accused of having been her parents' spoiled darling—but her imperfections are

21. Karl Bissinger, himself gay, explains that "Grace had had no concept of the lesbian, the woman lover, who was born that way and is that way—no concept at all." Grace told him, as they talked about her slowly growing consciousness of heterosexism, that "it takes a long time to learn." About a young friend of theirs, "who was incredibly attractive and poised, well dressed and pretty," he recalls Grace saying, "You know, it wasn't so long ago that I'd have been asking her to dinner with every stray man I knew."
revealed in "Zagrowsky Tells," completed in 1984 and published in both *Mother Jones* and LSD in 1985. Grace had great difficulty composing this story, and could finally write it only when she realized that Faith must not be the teller. This issue, the author's assignment of identity to the narrator, has become central for Grace Paley in recent years. With the arguable exception of "This Is a Story about My Friend George, the Toy Inventor," the last seven stories in *Later the Same Day* are all about telling and listening. At one point, in fact, Grace had conceived of a series: "Zagrowsky Tells," to be one of the set, was first published as "Telling," and thus was one of a pair with the last story, called "Listening." Zagrowsky had to tell his story himself—and when he did, for the first time in the story cycle, readers experience the power of a narrator/character who knows her—and Izzy has known Faith a long time—being brought to bear on Faith herself. Faith appears peremptory, nosy, and at least slightly insensitive to the relationship between Izzy and his grandson Emanuel. And though she is a strong foil for his revelations, she is specifically designated a listener here, as her author has

22. The theme is present in several of the other stories in that collection as well, like "Friends," in which the characters are telling each other and the reader alternate versions of their mutual past, present, and future throughout the text. This issue continues to be of great importance to Grace Paley; see Endor and Thiers interview in *Bibliography.*
been, in the period of these later stories and this third collection.

From this critical perspective, Grace's own early imperfections come into view. In stories written before the late seventies she had included violence against women as mild humor (see "A Woman Young and Old" [LDM, 29]), the trivialization of rape (see "Enormous Changes" [ECLM, 127--this one also insults old women]), and a subtle anti-Hispanic linguistic slur (see "An Interest in Life" [LDM, 91]). The small number of such (obviously unconscious in every sense of the word) choices is impressive in the body of Grace Paley's work, especially given her time and place of living and writing, and may be attributed to concerted efforts to grow beyond herself--a constant theme in her work. In recent stories, she is more likely to slip some consciousness raising into the dialogue, as she does in "The Story Hearer," when Faith educates two men in the inner story (Eddie and Jim), one in the frame (Jack), and readers of both genders throughout, even as she makes Eddie a representative of the limits to our capacity for immediate change.

At this point the butcher said, What'll you have, young lady?  
I refused to tell him.  
Jack, to whom, if you remember, I was telling this daylong story, muttered, Oh God, no! You didn't do that again.
I did, I said. It's an insult. You do not say to a woman of my age who looks my age, What'll you have, young lady? I did not answer him. If you say that to someone like me, it really means, What do you want, you pathetic old hag?

Are you getting like that now too? he asked.... Eddie, I said, don't talk like that or I won't tell you what I want.

Whatever you say, honey, but what'll you have?...

Did I hear you say City College? asked Eddie as he cut the little chicken's leg out of its socket. Well, when I was a boy, a kid--what we called City College--you know it was C.C.N.Y. then, well, we called it Circumsized Citizens of New York.

Really, said Jim. He looked at me. Did I object? Was I offended?

The fact of male circumcision doesn't insult me, I said. However, I understand that the clipping of clitorises of young girls continues in Morocco to this day.

Jim has a shy side. He took his pork butt and said goodbye. (LSD 137-8)

Grace had begun to listen to the voices of lesbian and gay people, and, as she had done with immigrant New York Jews, and then with voices not-her-own, she created a character to speak with the new voice. In "Listening," named for that necessary exercise and for the repeated motif in the text, written "late" in the period preceding publication of LSD, Grace created her first lesbian character, Cassie. She gave Cassie Faith's loving friendship, a forum for righteous criticism, and the last word. Challenged by Cassie--not in terms of her personal life, for she is a woman who obviously has a dear lesbian friend, after all--Faith is criticized as a writer. It is of the exclusion, the being written out, the silencing and
erasure of herself and her people, that Cassie accuses
Faith.

Listen, Faith, why don't you tell my story? You've told
everybody's story but mine....you've just omitted me
from the other stories and I was there. In the
restaurant and the train, right there. Where is Cassie?
Where is my life? It's been women and men, women and
men, fucking, fucking. Goddamnit, where the hell is my
woman and woman, woman-loving life in all this? And
it's not even sensible, because we are friends, we work
together, you even care about me as least as much as you
do Ruthy and Louise and Ann. You let them in all the
time; it's really strange, why have you left me out of
everybody's life? (LSD, 210)

This speech--a readily substantiated, obviously
accurate accusation in Grace's own work--may be as startling
to the reader as it is to Faith. Grace Paley has worked
toward our acceptance of this narrator on her own terms for
years--or even just for pages--and we are taken by surprise,
as we are when Zagrowsky makes racism less than crystal
clear, and Faith's role as a conscience in the community
less than pure. By naming Faith a writer here,23 Grace has
brought autobiography to the fore, and made it an issue.
Whether such an event or conversation ever "really" occurred
is irrelevant;24 what has happened, what is being documented

23. As she has elsewhere--i.e. "Debts," "The Long­
Distance Runner," Dreamer in a Dead Language," and "Love."

24. The depth and extent of her friendship with
specific women who are lesbians is not the point here. Her
increasing sensitivity to, and rising consciousness of,
lesbian and gay issues are manifest in her other writings as
well. See, for instance, the essay "Thinking About Barbara
Deming."
here as story, is the calling to account of the writer. She is responsible, as Grace Paley always explains, for the truth of the words she puts out into the world. Though she cannot be held accountable for all of what readers make of her texts, she is always answerable for her own choices—as Grace Paley said to William Gass some years ago.

Cassie holds Faith accountable. Faith's immediate emotional response is realistic shock, lasting fully twenty minutes, as the two women sit in a silence broken only by Faith's occasionally blurted "My God!" or "Christ Almighty!" (210) They are sitting in Faith's car, which she has pulled to the curb, unable to drive, stunned by her friend's accusation. She tries, for about five seconds, to blame Cassie—or "them"—as well as herself, to make this sin of omission mutual. And then, of course, she wants to be forgiven.

Forgive you? She laughed. But she reached across the clutch. With her hand she turned my face to her so my eyes would look into her eyes. You are my friend, I know that, Faith, but I promise you, I won't forgive you, she said. From now on, I'll watch you like a hawk. I do not forgive you. (211)

We'll all be watching now—because we've all been told what Faith and Grace must do. By publishing this story, Grace Paley has publicly committed herself to the struggle against heterosexism and homophobia in fiction.
As Bob Nichols hoped, she is no longer reluctant to allow her people their politics, nor to allow herself the depiction of deliberately political people in her stories. In fact, even in a story like "Love" (as well as in such obvious cases as "Somewhere Else," "Listening," "Zagrowsky Tells" and "The Expensive Moment"), the hinge upon which the narrator's realization—about the nature of loving and "the lover"—turns is the friendship broken in disagreement over the Soviet Union, and Faith and Jack "talk over the way the SALT treaty looked more like a floor than a ceiling" before they read a poem, watch tv and make love (LSD, 7).

Moreover, women in the later stories no longer design their lives around arrangements with men, and loving friendships among women are central.

So Ruth and Faith—and their guest Xie Feng—who talk about their men and their children in "The Expensive Moment," recognize the flaws in male political pronouncements and personal habits; they fear governmental retribution for the radical acts of impassioned youths; they know that an assessment of political correctness on the left always includes ecology "nowadays" (LSD, 188). They are the sort of women, for instance, who climbed the fence at Seneca Falls in the summer of 1983. Grace visited there that summer for five days, took part in their actions and deliberations, and climbed the fence with them. Seneca, New York, is a place where nuclear weapons are assembled and
prepared for shipment to Greenham Common, where English women have camped for several years in protest. North American women have created a Women's Peace Encampment beside the army depot there; they set up their tents and wooden walkways, made policy, and took action to support the women of Great Britain in their protest against the import of US military poison to England's green and pleasant land.

Saying, typically, that the experience of "Seneca was stories," Grace wrote an essay describing her visit (Ms., December, '83). She tells how, like the women of the Pentagon actions, Seneca women brought an infusion of ancient magic to their siege; on August 1, 1983, more than 2500 women marched to the arms depot at Seneca, hung the fence with quilts, posters and banners, feathers, beads, pictures and flowers. They chanted and hummed, they sang and laughed, and then they climbed the fence. Grace says that she knew this would probably be her last shot at such an action—though certainly not very old, she thinks she may be too old for this sort of thing now. But at the age of sixty-one, she wasn't, so she went over the top, with a little help from her friends, to take the presence of women right up into the faces of the men—and their recruited boys—who'd fenced themselves off with their bombs.25

25. There are, as always in a country where women are the figureheads of the anti-ERA forces, some women opposed to the Seneca camp and demonstration(s). But, as Grace wrote, they were not impervious to the work of their sisters. One local woman, a counter-picket of sorts who'd been wearing a t-shirt that said "Nuke the bitches 'til they
Not all of Grace's political actions are in women-only groups these days; she's taken part in anti-apartheid demonstrations, marched to demonstrate solidarity with the besieged peoples of Central and South America, and, since the intifadeh began at the end of 1987, worked with American and Israeli Jews in coalition with Palestinians toward radical change in Israeli government policies on the left bank and in Gaza. Here is yet another example of her continuing development and growth: the woman whose autobiographical speaker idealistically disdained nationhood for Israel in the mid-fifties26 now seeks a two-state solution to the desperate problem of sovereignty in Palestine and Israel. She has maintained her relationship with the War Resisters League, and continues to support resistance to selective service registration, appearing, for instance, in 1981 with young Matt Meyer at a press conference called to explain his refusal to register for selective service.

But in these times of continuing gender wars, even apparently non-gendered issues often require action and organization specifically by and for women and children. When Grace traveled to Nicaragua and El Salvador in 1985,
she went with a group from MADRE, a friendship organization between North and Central American women; when she visited Israel for the first time in the spring of 1987, she went as a delegate to an International Conference of Women Writers, and much of her work here in the states is done with Jewish American and Arab American women who support the peace coalitions of Arab and Jewish women in the Middle East. The result of this always determined and increasingly conscious identification with women, and its resultant advocacy position, has been for Grace the same grief, fear, anxiety, anger, and trouble with (even beloved) men that all other feminist women face.

After years of excusing them, she still makes no demands of men, fictional or non-fictional, that she doesn't make of women, especially herself. She is determined to be responsible for her own consciousness, and in her autobiographical mode, her characters reflect that struggle; what she has learned is also learned by them, male and female. Her most recent work contains such surprises as Faith and Xie Feng's conversation about loving in "The Expensive Moment":

Ah, [Xie Feng] said, do you notice that in time you love the children more and the man less? Faith said Yes! but as soon as she said it, she wanted to run home and find Jack and kiss his pink ears and his last 243 hairs, to
call out, Old friend, don't worry, you are loved. (LSD, 194)²⁷

What is amazing is that she can pull it off: men still love Grace. Maybe this is a response to textual nurturance, male readers taking the large embrace of her maternal world view for personal mothering. Maybe they believe that she will continue to excuse or forgive them—as she did in the past. Maybe they simply do not perceive the evolution of her world view as it appears in the stories. Her brother Victor's judgment suggests one reason male readers and critics have rarely become defensive about her fiction; saying that he has never considered her a feminist, and perhaps focusing on the first and even second story collections, he labels her women "sad sacks," who aren't "getting anyplace. They're getting kicked around by men. They seem to be making the same mistakes over and over again. One man leaves them and they move in with another man."

Jess Paley still does not consider Grace a feminist; saying that "she herself denies it," he notes the media-reported party line and observes that "she splits off from the movement" on specific issues; that independence is of

²⁷. This new perspective—conflicted as it is—is also reflected in Faith's pointed description of men's assessments of women on the street in "Midrash" (Gibbons), and the selfish pride of the young father in "Anxiety" (LSD).
course typical of her, and the women's movement itself is by no means definable in one way, but Jess may be speaking of the past in the present tense, judging Grace by the period when he saw and spoke to her daily. She would hardly proffer a denial of feminism these days.  

Her daughter Nora and her daughter-in-law Debbie, thoughtful active women themselves, definitely consider Grace a feminist, though Debbie says that if she had been asked "five years ago [which would have been the early eighties], I might have said no, Grace wouldn't use that word" to define herself."

Sybil Claiborne believes that feminism has wrought the biggest change in Grace's political development, because it influences her "in the way she wants to work, the people she wants to work with, the kind of work she wants to do. It's very hard to go back into the old hierarchical, bureaucratic way" of working once you've worked "in a feminist way, and that's colored her [own] way of operating."

In one of her most recently written short prose pieces, published in 365 reasons not to have another war, the 1989 War Resisters League Peace Calendar, the first

28. But his comment suggests something about her response to the women's movement as it gathered into the strength of this second wave twenty years ago. Some feminists, who judge her still by her older work, insist that Grace is not a feminist; similarly, some Jews, who've read no more than her earliest story collection, consider her "merely" a diasporist.

29. Called "Conversations" and printed on the page opposite the second week of March.
person narrator accepts her dying mother-in-law's assumption that she "might know something about" what the older woman calls "Women's Lib." That Grace-like narrator takes up easily the position of spokeswoman for the movement, explaining the motives and purpose of feminists with enthusiasm. Her mother-in-law is so moved by their dialogue that she stays "up all night thinking" and in the morning announces her realization that "there isn't a thing I've done in my life that I haven't done for some man. Dress up or go out or take a job or quit or go home or leave. Or even be quiet or say something nice, things like that." The dying woman, who is of the same generation as Grace Paley's mother and aunts, gives her blessing to the autobiographical feminist narrator when she says, "You know I was up all night thinking about you and especially those young women. I couldn't stop thinking about what wonderful lives they're going to have."

After The Little Disturbances of Man was published in 1959, male writers and critics had been delighted with Grace Paley. Saul Bellow included "Goodbye and Good Luck" in his collection called Great Jewish Stories; it is the only work by a woman he deemed "great." This acceptance was no doubt based in her loving portrayal of men—including the ones she calls "rotten"—in those stories, as well as in her

occasional willingness to hold women, even young girls, responsible for their treatment at the hands of those men. "Listen, some men love those stories," Grace acknowledges, although "I wrote them thinking, 'These guys are such shits.'" Even if this is not retrospective consciousness, and she did indeed think ill of her early fictional men, there is likewise a subtext of tender affection discernible in the stories.\footnote{See, for instance, Ginny's runaway husband in "An Interest in Life," and the self-centered Peter in "The Pale Pink Roast," both in Little Disturbances.} That affection is what renders them complex, realistic—"true to life"—even as it makes male readers like and identify with them. "But I was very truthful about the way that they were, and the men heard themselves truthfully. They liked it; the men heard themselves truthfully and they thought it was all right."

So it seems.

But having sharpened her analysis of relations between women and men over the past thirty years, and grown older all the while, Grace has come to suspect that men—or at least older men—"probably don't like me so much any more." Some of that disaffection, she knows, is generic. "You know, for men, older women don't exist....We can really just not be present at all. Women understand this. Women are beginning to understand it later than we used to,
because people are younger longer now. And because things are better—that is to say—probably in a certain century men wouldn't look at a woman over eighteen. And then maybe one hundred years later, over twenty-five. In many novels you read that a woman 'was past her bloom,' and then it turns out she's twenty-two! It certainly is true that all young things are blooming; yes, that's true. But people flower for years."

Grace thinks that the current level of consciousness in men in the United States is in flux. She credits young men for making efforts to change, and is sympathetic; "It's very hard for them, very very hard—for the best of them, it's very hard not to feel attacked." Older men, though, are "so defensive, [even when] they give in in certain areas. They think of themselves, and their own hardships, and they think, well, I have had a hard time too. But they know that a woman has a more difficult time of it. They know that about women, but they don't know how to deal with what they know, and they are upset if you make all these connections [showing how the oppression of women is neither separate nor separable from their own behavior]."

32. She talks about a conversation she had with her friend Vera B. Williams, the artist with whom she collaborated on the 1989 WRL Peace Calendar. Grace and Vera arranged and analyzed the same kinds of experiences that are described in Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*, in which women deliberately alter their appearance and posture/gesture to manipulate male response.
This analysis, and its effect on both her texts and actions, have not had the power to shut Grace Paley out of the mainstreams of fiction writing or activist politics, as they might well have done twenty and more years ago. Like so many other female artists and workers, Grace has benefited from the power and influence of the women's movement. Enormously increased recognition and exceptional rewards have come to her in this past decade, and she understands well that she has risen on the crest of a wave of women. Speaking her gratitude, Grace insists that the difference—in audience response—is so great that she says women artists can't even begin to "calculate the power and the happiness of having a constituency...having people who will read you and will make you feel that you are speaking to somebody."33

In 1980, Grace Paley was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, of which honor the editors of Poets and Writers have written, "Election to the [Academy] is considered the highest formal recognition of artistic merit in the country." In 1982, Delta, a vanguard French journal of contemporary literature and scholarship, devoted an entire issue to Grace Paley, publishing "Lavinia," a Paley bibliography, and an interview of the writer by

33. From her speech in acceptance of the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit, the State Authorship of New York.
Kathleen Noda Hulley--guest editor for that number--as well as a collection of critical articles.

In 1985, Grace published her third story collection and her first book of poems. In spring of the following year, Later the Same Day was awarded a PEN/Faulkner Prize for fiction\(^\ref{34}\); in winter she received the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit from the New York State Writers Institute, thus becoming the first State Author of New York\(^\ref{35}\) She was selected by a committee of authors and critics: Raymond Carver, Mary Gordon, Alfred Kazin, Robert Towers, and William Kennedy, who, along with New York Governor Mario Cuomo, made the presentation in the state capital on December 10, 1986. Mr. Kennedy, announcing the group's choice for the Wharton Citation, described Grace Paley's luminous, evocative narrative voice as "absolutely singular" among the many in twentieth century fiction.

Then, in 1987, Grace Paley was awarded the prestigious Senior Fellowship of the Literature Program of the National Endowment for the Arts. The NEA award\(^\ref{36}\) was designed to "support and honor those who have made a major contribution to American literature over a lifetime of

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\(^{34}\) Which carries a $1000 stipend.

\(^{35}\) And receiving $10,000 as honorarium for those two years of service to her home state. Her term of office ended in December of 1988.

\(^{36}\) $40,000, great esteem, honor and fame.
creative endeavor," and is given to "writers, poets, editors and other literary professionals who have expanded the boundaries of this nation's literary heritage." Though Grace is indeed among those who have "expanded the boundaries" of literature in this country, her "lifetime" is--at most--only two-thirds used up, and she was somewhat distressed and embarrassed at the sound of all those past tense verbs. She was also "really embarrassed to get all of that money. I wish I'd gotten the Senior Fellowship later, when I'm older." She was surprised too at this sudden run on Grace Paley, uncomfortable at becoming a growth stock on the literary market while so many others are still unrecognized. She does not mention, in her discomfort, all the years she was overlooked, or touted as "an underground success"--because she was a woman writing about women and children, speaking in their voices about what mattered in their days and lives.37

And she was honored yet again in 1987; in mid-December at a dinner party in the basement of Manhattan's Village Gate, the War Resisters League celebrated Grace Paley's sixty-fifth birthday and its own history with music, dancing, laughing, storytelling and eating. The fifty-

37. On the other hand, she is grateful for "all of that money," which will be very useful because, having lived a financially marginal life as an unpaid mother, and part-time office worker and teacher with consistently small salaries, "I'm not gonna have a big pension."
dollar-a-plate dinner, a benefit for the League, had a Russian menu, from sliced pumpernickel and beets to tea with jam cake. These dishes recalled Grace Paley's parents, who fled the Czar's prisons, and honored the League's ongoing work toward US-Soviet friendship.

The last "act" of the evening was Grace herself, called onstage to accept a scroll of honor, inscribed with love and gratitude: "To Grace, who made getting arrested a creative act, and going to jail an education." The audience responded to her appearance in the bright nightclub spotlight with a standing ovation. There were cheers, applause and table pounding--like the crowd in a high school gym, they were rhythmically chanting her name: "Grace, Grace, Grace." She stood and listened to that outrageous noise for only about twenty seconds, maybe twenty-five, before she yelled into the mike--"Okay! That's enough!"

There was some laughter, but then quiet listening from the audience of three hundred. These were people who had stood with her on the White House lawn and in the Seabrook parking lot, who had climbed the fence with her at Seneca Falls, and picketed local draft boards, who linked arms with her and marched against mounted police in neighborhood streets: a coalition of political factions and generations representing the old and new left, liberal,
radical, and socialist feminists, gay and lesbian activists, civil rights workers, and members of park and school groups.

She pointed to a child in the audience, and said, "There's a person here named Miranda with the same birthday, who's two years old"—and then quickly named others, including her granddaughter Laura, who would soon be eight. She needs to share the honor, or rather, to shed it, to put herself back among the people again. And she always needs to talk about the children. She said that earlier in the month, in Boston, where she had spoken to a coalition of activist groups, she was criticized for talking about children so often, for emphasizing women as caretakers, for accepting that role. "That's right, I do talk a lot about that. They're right. Well, men should do it too. We should all take care of the children."

Then she told the birthday crowd that just lately, "in a cynical or clinical way," she'd been thinking about the US-Soviet arms pact. Those amiable Gorbachev/Reagan meetings "released within people a longing for a world without terror....something was punctured in the American people, something opened up. People were allowed to think without hatred for three or four days," despite the fact that only small gains were made. (After all, she pointed

38. When Debbie gave birth to Laura, Grace was thrilled. "It's just like falling in love," she told Sybil Claiborne. "It's amazing! I never thought I'd feel this way again."
out, within a week Secretary Schultz was talking about a United States build-up of conventional weapons.) She spoke directly into faces in the audience, waving her arm to include all the tables in the room, "So, just when you think you can have a nice supper and sit down for twenty minutes, you know, you have to remember, the world still has to be saved--every day."

And then, in the moment of silence she had just created, she abruptly changed direction: "So thanks everybody, and then right away, we're gonna have dancing." Like Emma Goldman, Grace Paley rejects a revolution that won't dance. In a few minutes, even while the musicians were tuning up, she linked arms with a friend, and the two women swung around square dance style. Her silvery white hair was a hazy cloud in the dim basement, her purple shawl swirled out as she improvised a small buck-and-wing. Photographs of Grace as a young woman remind us that she's been lovely for more than fifty years--the bright eyes and bold smile leap out of her family album. Like the title of her poetry collection, her own natural posture is "leaning forward," an ardent, eager presence.

In the late spring of 1988, Grace Paley retired from teaching at Sarah Lawrence College. Laura Paley might get to see her grandma more often now, and maybe collections of stories and poems will appear more often than every ten or
fifteen years. But Grace will continue to shuttle back and forth from country to city, working; she will teach at other schools, taking on single terms as a visiting professor and writer. She will travel to speak and teach in other countries. She will work in committees at PEN, and keep her place in the weekly vigil of Jewish women who stand in solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli women in coalition.

Her plan, obviously, is not to retire in the usual sense, or even to spend a great deal more time than usual in writing. Essentially, Grace has "retired" to free herself to work. Long a proponent of hope, always an enemy of despair, Grace Paley is hardly oblivious to the constant and ever more rapid encroachment of disaster in this world. How does she feel about the struggle, in these times? How does she feel about impending disaster? "Well, of course I feel gloomy about the end of the world," says the famous optimist, with a smile. One continues to work in the face of the end of the world, she says, "because otherwise you kill yourself." But, "You either live every day as though the world will last, or you just quit. If the world isn't going to last, it's not interesting. So you have to live every day as if the world will last."

The value of teaching, then, of organizing? "Well, I don't know; who knows?" If people "believe what they're learning, then it changes them--and if it changes the people, it can change other things. I actually believe that
one group of farmers getting together and having an agreement with, let's say, feed providers—I believe that does change things; I believe that that does make a difference. Lots of people out here [in Vermont] keep saying that farming is over and yes, it's true in a way; cattle farming, dairy farming, is going out. But truck farming, vegetable farming, is coming in. It's not done on a California scale, but they're all making a living at it; they're actually selling the vegetables. It's working—it's beginning to work—selling to restaurants and local places. And those vegetable farmers may have [a lot] to do with developing self-reliance again in the upper valley of Vermont."

Grace Paley believes that lives may be held, preserved, contained in stories, that literature can change the world—maybe even save it—that one's writing "can change things, even if you don't always believe that it will. There's this great thing that Paul Jacobs said when he was dying—well, he didn't really say it first, it comes from Hillel or Herschel, from one of the great rabbis, one of our smart boys—he said: 'Because you never see the end of your task, neither is it given you to abandon it.' And since Grace Paley knows that we all "have to remember, the world still has to be saved—every day," there is little chance that she will abandon her task.

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4/3/89

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