

Women writers and the family romance

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Abstract

The life and work of nine women authors were analyzed to test the hypothesis that fictional plot and character elements are correlated with a writer's private life thus providing insight to the psychology of the writer. That the need to tell a story is a function of the creative urge is obvious; what is not always obvious, however, is how fiction may function as an avenue for a writer to work through personal psychological conflicts. Grounded within object-relations theory, this preliminary investigation explores the way in which elements of a woman novelist's experience of the family romance becomes interwoven into her fiction, influencing character portrayal, significant plot elements, and consistent themes.

Peopled with monomythic characters, important novels have plots that explicate universal themes of human experience. In many character-driven stories the plot represents the protagonist's struggle between impulse and inhibition, between ego and id, and the push-pull clash between the omnipotent- and social-self (Bodkin, 1948; Johnson, 1984; Lesser, 1957 Sachs, 1942). The path of development of major characters in fiction resembles that of a relatively emotionally secure person: a movement toward greater flexibility and maturity. Similarly a successful plot is one where the protagonist works to resolve conflicts, those involving external events, impulse-control, and/or self-image, in a realistic nature.

An added plus for understanding the artistic process occurs when a clear link can be drawn between a fictional plot element and a novelist's life, a kind of autobiographical road map revealing a writer's personal daemons (Bandlamudi, 1999; Holland, 1998). As Bakhtin (1990, p. 6) has suggested, "the artist's struggle to achieve a . . . stable image of the hero is . . . a struggle within himself." It is likely, therefore, that the truth of a novel, as well as its continued popularity, lies in the degree to which plot and characters resonate with a reader; that is, the degree to which plot reveals common intra-psychic conflicts (Nash, 1987).

One crucial, ubiquitous struggle in early ego development occurs when a child realizes that his/her parents are not the all-powerful, infallible giants that s/he once imagined them to be. Although patently untrue, this childhood fantasy is useful because

it provides the powerless child with vital psychological security. To cope with the inevitable disenchantment, a new fantasy may develop, a fantasy in which the child imagines that he or she was once stolen by gypsies, or adopted, or abandoned by royal parents (Freud, 1909/1959). With this “hopeful” biography in mind, the child waits to be rescued by her or his “real” parents (Robert, 1972).

In fiction, the protagonist’s parentage fantasies frequently provide the major theme. In one schema the hero may be motivated to escape the dominance of and dependence upon parent figures, a plot keystone that has been used for centuries (Lesser, 1957; Robert, 1972). In a second schema, when the parentage fantasy merges with the pursuit of self-identity, fictional characters may search for the absent parents. For example, Oedipus goes on a quest to find the noble parents who had abandoned him and a contemporary example occurs in Faye Kellerman’s novels, where Detective Peter Decker, an adoptee, searches for his birth parents and during this quest comes to understand, and embrace, his Jewish ancestry.

Radway (1984), whose work is based in reader-response theory, argues that in literature written by women the heroine’s search is most often for a mother substitute, a position posited over forty years earlier by Otto Rank (1941/1952). Zwinger (1991), describing the father-daughter-relationship in more orthodox Freudian terms, reaches a contradictory conclusion, that is, that the heroine’s pursuit is for a father. And Robert (1972), adding another twist, suggests that the quest is for a father/lover.

Plot and Character Development

That a writer's fictional creation provides an opportunity for that artist to share her or his creative imagination is obvious. And the advice to student writers, to "write what you know," suggests that the primary source for plot and character development comes from a writer's experiences (Holland, 1998; Lesser, 1957; Mauron, 1963).

For example, Sigmund Freud (1928/1959) speculated that Fyodor Dostoevski's unconscious wish to murder his cruel, autocratic father was revitalized when he learned of the actual murder of his father, whereupon Dostoevski developed neurotic symptoms, including epileptiform seizures (a symbolic death sentence?). Later, when Dostoevski described the death of the fictional father in the *Brothers Karamazov*, the protagonist, who is not the murderer, develops the same symptoms. In the case of Dostoevski's "parricide" theme, Freud suggested a direct link between the author's unconscious wish and the portrayed plot element. Agreeing with Freud's notion, Berman (1990) has added the idea that novelists are more in touch with unconscious elements within their personality than are other artists or "normal" people, an awareness that allows them to introject these elements into their stories.

However, because psychoanalytic theorists often liken the creation of a novel to the formation of a dream, they expect that censoring, systematic distorting, and other ego-defensive maneuvers conceal the "true meaning" of the fictional characters intentions and motives, even from the novelist her- or himself. These defenses lead to disconnects between fictional experiences and the autobiographical events that inspired them. Another complication in discovering the exact connection between life and art is that writing a novel may function as a form of therapy, allowing a novelist the opportunity to

work through his or her own set of complex psychological, family romance issues, or represent a novelist's wish-fulfilling fantasies (Bonaparte, 1933; Freud, 1929; Greenacre, 1955; Gorer, 1941; Jones, 1910/1949).

While a woman writer's fictional heroines may possess characteristics similar to her own, or those she wishes were hers, the traits of a fictional male protagonist are more likely to be based on person(s) known to the author. Specifically, in the creation of a fictional father or older brother, it is likely that elements of the author's own family romance fantasies will weave their way into the character's personality and his relationship with the female protagonist. Complicating the transition of a woman author's intra-psychic fantasies into a "flesh and blood" fictional character, however, is the intensification of early adolescence narcissism.

There arises in the woman a certain self-sufficiency (especially when there is a ripening into beauty) which compensates her for the social restrictions upon her object-choice. Strictly speaking, such women love only themselves with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them. Nor does their need lie in the direction of loving, but of being loved; and that the man finds favor with them who fulfills this condition (Freud, 1914/1959, p. 46).

Specifically in the portrayal of fathers and their relationships with daughters, female novelists have a number of options. In stories where the father may be depicted as cold, distant, rejecting, and/or absent, the protagonist could react with anger or resentment or go on a quest to find a substitute; or she might displace the anger to her mother or a sibling, blaming the other for her father's abandonment; or be motivated to

win an idolized father's love or please him with her success; or she could become independent, autonomous and competent and compete with the father. In other scenarios, where the father might be portrayed as loving, accepting, nurturing, and/or supportive, the novelist might have the protagonist identify with the competent father and, for example, enter the same or similar profession; seek out a lover that has many of the same characteristics as the father; become eminently successful and powerful, sometimes manipulating men who get in her way, or maintain satisfactory relations with older men; become a sex goddess that has relations with numerous fawning suitors; or be hostile and competitive toward women.

The purpose of this preliminary investigation was to evaluate whether it is possible to connect the fictional plot elements specific women authors have created to their own to life histories. The hypotheses were that enduring stories contain significant family romance elements; that a woman writer's fiction parallels her own intra-psychic conflicts; and that plot elements can be either directly linked to events in the novelist's life or can be understood as subtle and unwitting distortions of real events from the author's past.

Methodology

This preliminary investigation is limited to women authors and the following criteria were set down for their selection. Each writer must be Caucasian and have written in English. To understand how elements of the family romance have been incorporated into novels it is essential that these writers have written at least one novel with a female protagonist and a secondary protagonist who stands as a father figure. In

addition, in order to relate fictional elements to a writer's life experiences biographical or autobiographical information must be available; fortunately, more is known about women writers now, as compared to 1993 when Kavalier-Adler first reported on the dearth of information relative to that of male authors.

When Freud invented the concept of the "family romance," he limited it to the Oedipal conflict and its ramifications (Davis, 1998). In this investigation, a more inclusive definition, one consistent with object-relations theory, has been employed: in addition to Oedipal strivings, other emotionally-charged fantasies and interactions that occur in the context of the family, most of which appear before the Oedipal triangle emerges, have been included.

Nine women who met these criteria were selected: Jane Austen (1775-1817), Catherine Maria Sedgwick (1789-1867), Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), Emily Brontë (1818-1848), George Eliot (1819-1880), Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), Pearl Buck (1892-1973), Judith Krantz (1929-), and Mary Higgins Clark (1928-).

Data

Family romance plot elements are clearest in novels written by women from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when a female protagonist's interactions in her family of origin were particularly cogent and causative. While the heroines in these novels strive to free themselves from parental control and influence, their attempts to resolve Oedipal conflicts are transparent, and the search for "true love" is offered as an appropriate life's goal. While a number of these stories have a "happy ending," it was

not infrequent for an author to leave the heroine in the throes of guilt, depression, or worse (Robert, 1972).

In more modern novels the action is less often restricted to family settings. A female protagonist's life is no longer limited to filling roles such as wife, caretaker, teacher, or observer of events; she has a career and experiences life in the world outside the family. Interestingly, however, family romance plots continue to emerge, albeit they are often subtle and are presented as a secondary theme. For example, witness the story about an orphan, who, while on a quest to find her true love, succeeds by marrying a father-substitute: Rebecca, in the novel of the same name by Daphne du Maurier, is the heroine of this plot. Or a story in which a woman who by "emulating Daddy to the fullest" (p. 16) seeks his approval as does Nicki in Barbara Taylor Bradford's novel *Remember*. Family romance themes, of course, are the "meat and potatoes," of any of Belva Plain's family sagas as well as Nora Robert's romances.

While the family romance may not be a prime element in the suspense genre, the protagonist often finds herself dealing with family issues there also. For example, Sharon McCone, Marcia Muller's private investigator, matures across several novels, coming to terms with her commitment issues; Kinsey Millhone, Sue Grafton's private detective in her alphabetically titled series of novels, deals with abandonment issues and an extended family that had rejected the detective. And Eve Dallas, in Nora Robert's futuristic series of detective novels (written under the pseudonym J. D. Robb), not only has commitment issues, she must continually confront the memory of an abusive father whom she killed.

Because biographical information is sketchier for the last three women chosen for this preliminary investigation, Buck, Krantz, and Clark, in particular information

concerning the characteristics of the novelist's father and the nature of his relationship with his writer-daughter, certain inferences had to be made in establishing the connections between attributes of "real" fathers and the fathers of fictional characters. This procedure is defended by Westervelt (1979, p. 271) who asserts, concerning the connection between Pearl Buck's life and work: "One must look to her . . . novels and stories for the truth as she saw it . . . since . . . she exposed many of her feelings and frustrations in autobiographical characters and events in her novels. . . . [thus giving] unmistakable clues to her thoughts."

Jane Austen

That Jane Austen's life paralleled that of her heroines has been well documented (Brownstein, 1982; Bukovinsky, 1994; Myer, 1997). For example, like Austen, Anne Elliot, the heroine in *Persuasion* (1818), who is unmarried and has no independent income, is frustrated when she is forced to leave her home and move to Bath, where her father has decided to retire. Biographers have suggested that *Persuasion*, a story about second chance at love, is Austen's most autobiographical work; during the period, Austen was supposedly expecting a proposal of marriage (Myer, 1997).

The Bennett sisters in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) are also dependent, but this time upon the benevolence of their half brother, a rather selfish and obnoxious man. Unlike Austen who never married and who is reported to have good relationships with her six brothers, the Bennett sisters do marry and thus escape penury.

Austen is reported to have spoken kindly about her father (Myer, 1997), which makes her treatment of fictional fathers more interesting. When fathers are not already

dead at the beginning of a story, they are frequently portrayed as uncaring men or dithering asses; mothers don't fare much better, frequently being shown as powerless, ineffective individuals who either cannot or will not protect their daughters.

Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) resolves her oedipal conflict by being contemptuous of her mother and forming a conspiratorial alliance with her father, who reluctantly agrees to her marriage because he is intimidated by her suitor, behavior indicating a rather cowardly character. Although the father in *Emma* dotes on his daughter, he is a laughing stock in the community and Anne Elliott's father in *Persuasion* is a vain, rank-proud, extravagant Baronet who prefers Anne's elder sister, a cold and selfish woman. The two father figures in *Northanger Abbey* (1817) are a study in contrast. The father of the heroine, Catherine Morland, is a clergyman as was Austen's father. The hero's father, on the other hand, General Tilney, is an evil, materialistic, rude, and inconsiderate man, who puts his own desires above the best interests of his children.

Adoption of a child by another family was not unusual during Austen's lifetime. Her brother, Edward, was adopted by her father's wealthy patron, Thomas Knight II, a circumstance replicated in *Emma* (1816), when Mr. Weston, a "man of unexceptional character, easy fortune, suitable age and pleasant manner" (Austen, 1815/1985, p. 38), allows his wealthy relative, Mr. Churchill, to adopt his only son, Frank. Although Weston's son is of questionable character, Jane's real-life brother, Edward, was not. For example, in 1808, after the death of his wife, Edward moved his widowed mother (the father had died in 1805) and two sisters into a cottage on his estate.

But what about these fathers who sell their children? What does Austen want us to think about them? That they are weak? Selfish? Over-stressed? Even though her brother's experience appears to have been positive, Austen must have had significant reservations about this practice because her fictional recreations are negative. In *Emma*, Frank Churchill is a worry to his biological father and stepmother, and in *Mansfield Park* (1814), Fanny's adopted family fails to meet her expectations; her surrogate father, Uncle Bertram, is a man of little or no integrity.

Austen, who loathed being poor and having to salvage linen or borrow from others, wrote in her diary that her rich relatives should give her family some of what she called their extra money (Myer, 1997). Could Austen, playing out family romance themes as described by Robert (1992), have wished that she, instead of her brother, had been the child adopted by rich relatives?

Catherine Marie Sedgwick

Although relatively unknown today, in the nineteenth century Catherine Marie Sedgwick was considered as great an architect of American literature as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and William Cullen Bryant (Karcher, 1998; Kelly, 1993); Nathaniel Hawthorn called her "our most truthful novelist" (Macdonald, 1992, p. 19). One reason for Sedgwick's relative obscurity today, may be, that unlike other early women novelists, for example, Austin or Eliot, who focused on character development, personal understanding, and the elucidation of universal human motives, Sedgwick strove to shape political reform (Dewey, 1872).

Sedgwick's father was a devote Calvinist with strong Federalist political beliefs, who as a career politician spent considerable time away from home. In spite of it being reported that Sedgwick "loved and revered her father," (Peel, 1998, p. 44), she resented his absences, blaming him for her mother's increasing frailty and ill health (Macdonald, 1992). That these absences and her mother's death probably contributed to Sedgwick's unresolved Oedipal conflicts is clear in all her work but especially in *A New England Tale* (1822) and *Clarence* (1830).

After converting from Calvinism to Unitarianism, or secular humanism, as did George Eliot, in *A New-England Tale* Sedgwick publicly disagrees with her father's religious views. And in *Clarence*, she argues against her father's political philosophy, suggesting Federalism is morally corrupt when compared to Jacksonian Democracy.

Hope Leslie (1827) Sedgwick's best known work, is also her most complex story. Although the novel has been compared to J. F. Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (Bardes and Gossett, 2005), it is unlikely that Sedgwick's father would have agreed. The heroine, Hope Leslie, an orphan when the reader meets her, is a psychologically independent young woman who never compromises her integrity (Macdonald, 1992). Motivated by her own sense of right and wrong, Hope often acts in opposition to the ideal of Victorian womanhood, engaging in behavior that Sedgwick's father would not have approved. Furthermore, Sedgwick's presentation of the interracial marriage plot (Hope's sister marries an Indian chief's son), reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*, was also in direct opposition to her father's viewpoint.

Sedgwick's antipathy toward her father is evident in the depiction of three of the four fathers in *Hope Leslie*. Hope's grandfather was a mean, tyrannical man who sent his

daughter into a bad marriage because he disagreed with her chosen fiancé's (Hope's eventual guardian) political and religious philosophy. The Governor of Massachusetts, who is the model of the patriarchal government, puts Hope in jail because she continually disobeys him. Hopes' guardian, her future husband's father, is uninterested in family matters and ineffective; when his family is killed and his son and foster daughter (Hope's sister) are kidnapped by Indians, he wallows in depression rather than rescuing them. Interestingly, the only "good" father is the Pequot Chief, Mononotto, a complex man who loves his children, but who also wages war against the "White Man."

With her father's continued absences from the home, Sedgwick sought comfort and guidance from her three older brothers, who acted as father substitutes and to whom, it has been reported, she gave affection similar to that others reserve for husbands (Kelly, 1993). It is likely that this affection was the inspiration for the incest fantasy in *Hope Leslie* where Hope and Everell, the two major characters, live as brother and sister before marrying. How typical for a father-neglected little girl to transfer her Oedipal feelings to her elder brothers. How revealing to create a wish-fulfillment story where a young woman outwits all the men.

Charlotte Brontë

Unlike Austen or Sedgwick, Charlotte Brontë challenged the status quo of her era by creating novels of passion, frustration, and female desire. Her best-known work, *Jane Eyre* (1847), has been called the "most erotic English novel written in the nineteenth century" (Fraser, 1988: Mitchell, 1988). By the time Charlotte was fourteen, she had written a twenty-two volume work, *Glass Town* (Moglan, 1976); by her death, in addition

to *Jane Eyre*, she had published: *The Professor* (1857), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853).

Grounded within the object-relations school of psychoanalytic thought, Keefe (1979) suggests that abandonment is the primary theme in all Charlotte Brontë's work. This is not unexpected; by the time Charlotte was nine-years-old her mother and two older sisters were dead and Charlotte, the third daughter of six children, was left to act as the "mistress of the family." It is likely that Charlotte, the third daughter born before the wished-for son appeared, not only felt rejected by her father (he clearly preferred his only son, Branwell) but also felt displaced within the family unit (Gaskell, 1857/1975; Wise and Symington, 1932). That Branwell was a dissipated, ne'er-do-well, who squandered his abilities yet continued to bask under his father's dotting approval, had to have contributed to her feelings of abandonment.

Mitchell (1994, p. 29), on the other hand, working from a more Adlerian perspective, argues that what is key to Charlotte Brontë's novels is the movement from the "domination of self and others . . . to conventional male/female erotic domination . . . to a questioning of this fantasy . . . to a qualified, negotiated emotional equality."

Both Keefe and Mitchell, however, seem to ignore the transparent oedipal fantasies that fill Charlotte Brontë's stories. Her mother's death at the exact age when Charlotte should have been resolving her oedipal conflict, and her father preference for her younger brother, had to have contributed to her emotional insecurity and need for paternal acceptance and recognition. It has been reported that, typical of her father's rebuff, when Charlotte revealed her literary success to him, handing him a copy of *Jane Eyre*, instead of lavishing praise, he merely observed that her book was better than he had

expected (Wise and Symington, 1932). The father also developed what some have claimed to be hysterical blindness the day before he was to walk down the aisle with Charlotte at her wedding.

In spite of sibling rivalry, writing was an activity of all the Brontë children, and Branwell, as well as her sisters, contributed to the *Glass Town* saga. Friedlander (1943) suggests that writing with Branwell allowed Charlotte to develop the fantasy that she was a man (all the sisters used male pseudonyms). Furthermore, Friedlander suggests that this identification with her brother allowed Charlotte to deal with both her sibling rivalry and Oedipal conflicts. It is interesting, however, that in most of her work, fictional brothers are treated with contempt, sharp irony, and sarcasm; perhaps a more accurate representation of her true feelings for Branwell.

Charlotte Brontë's work closely follows what Robert (1972) theorized to be the developmental nature of family romance stories. The initial plot, the fairy tale, derives from the child's daydreams, and is relatively consistent from story to story; that is, the foundling goes on a quest where she encounters numerous unforeseen obstacles, which she overcomes, eventually finding success, and true love.

Critics have debated Brontë's motives for creating disturbing characters, such as those that appear in *The Professor*, a book whose structure is very different from her later novels (Glen, 1989; Mitchell, 1994). Employing Robert's theory, however, it is possible to conjecture that *The Professor* is the first step in Charlotte Brontë's working through her juvenile thoughts about romance. The female protagonist yearns for sexual submission to a sadistic father/lover (Moglen, 1979) while the male protagonist, a transitional hero, an orphan who has no social status, dreams of success.

In contrast to *The Professor*, *Villette*, even without its happy ending, is a more mature story. As in all of Charlotte Brontë's work, *Villette* is filled with unresolved Oedipal feelings, abandonment issues, and the need for attachment. For example, in *Villette*, a transparent retelling of Charlotte's real-life experiences in Brussels, the heroine is infatuated with her teacher who is a thinly disguised substitute for Constantin Romain Heger, Charlotte's mentor in Brussels, a man as old as her father (Fraser, 1988). Eventually the neurotic heroine falls in love with a Byronic hero, a more humanized version of Brontë's earlier male characters (Moglen, 1979).

Perhaps *Jane Eyre*, unlike Charlotte Brontë's other works, endures because, in the best Greek tradition, it functions as both fairy tale and mythic saga (Mitchell, 1994). The Oedipal victory at the end is especially compelling: after months of soul searching and personal success, the heroine marries her father-figure replacement with whom she has a child.

Emily Brontë

Miles away from the nearest village, isolated in the middle of the eerily lovely yet bleak and lonely moors of the Yorkshire hills Emily Brontë spent her life in a relatively closed family system (Bump, 2002) in a house imbued with the religiosity of her father, a religiosity based in hell, fire, damnation, and personal salvation. The fifth child and fourth daughter, Emily's experiences with loss and sibling rivalry differed from those of Charlotte: Branwell was an accepted presence and Emily was not as close to her two older sisters who died in 1825 (Fraser, 1988). Yet it is clear from her one novel that

Emily shared feelings of paternal rejection and of abandonment similar to those of Charlotte.

Wuthering Heights (1848) is a story about the child's wish never to grow up: Cathy and Heathcliff, the protagonists, remain id-driven, impulsive children long after they should have matured. Predating James Barrie's *Peter Pan, or The boy who wouldn't grow up* (1904), a story about parent-less boys of Never Never Land, but evocative of Mary Shelly's classic horror story *Frankenstein* (1818), *Wuthering Heights* details what happens when children fail to develop a superego. Emily's views of basic human nature and the development of a personal moral ethic are similar to those of Sigmund Freud: persons are born with uninhibited drives for pleasure-gratification and develop restraint and moral values through early interactions with parental figures.

In *Wuthering Heights*, shortly after rescuing Heathcliff, an orphan, from the streets of London, Mr. Earnshaw dies. Following this death, the children (Cathy, Hindley, and Heathcliff), who are now parentless, must learn to fend for themselves, a situation similar to that in the Brontë household after the mother died (Fraser, 1988).

Although Heathcliff may have wished for a happy home, no happy family awaited him. His foster brother rejects him for being uncouth and primitive. Cathy, his foster sister with whom he falls in love, rejects him (even though she loves him) to marry Edgar Linton, a neighbor. Heathcliff runs away; when he returns he is rich. Out of spite against Cathy, he marries Edgar's sister, Isabella; the two grow to hate one another. Much later, still functioning on an id-level, Heathcliff tricks Cathy's daughter, Catherine, into marrying his son, Linton; both despise Heathcliff.

Emily Brontë's personal religious philosophy, filled with mysticism (Winnifrith, 1973) and death (Fraser, 1988), permeates *Wuthering Heights*. When the story opens Catherine and Hindley's mother is dead; a brother is dead; and their father dies shortly after bringing Heathcliff home. Hindley's wife dies after giving birth to their son, Hareton, and Isabella, Heathcliff's wife, dies when their son, Linton, is twelve.

While most of the fictional characters die from a legitimate disease, some deaths might also be construed as suicides. Hindley drinks himself to death (as did Emily's brother Branwell). Heathcliff's son Linton, a physically fragile person, dies from inattention and neglect. Edgar Linton, Catherine Linton's father and Cathy Earnshaw's husband, dies from a broken heart (this occurs after Heathcliff kidnaps Catherine and forces her to marry his son).

Although ostensibly suffering from complications of pregnancy and anorexia nervosa, Cathy dies from unrequited love and feelings of abandonment. She states, "If I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend, if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own." And when Heathcliff marries, Cathy punishes both of the men in her life by starving herself. How like a child to think, "I'll kill myself and then they'll all be sorry." At the end of the story, Heathcliff succumbs to a broken heart—"I have to remind myself to breathe—almost to remind my heart to beat" (E. Brontë, 1848/1972, p. 255).

That Emily Brontë placed the blame for the lack of family structure and her brother's eventual decline squarely on the shoulders of her father is obvious from the negative portrayal of fathers in *Wuthering Heights*. Mr. Earnshaw is not a responsible parent; what kind of father brings home a stranger off the streets? Edgar Linton, while

perhaps the best father, is overprotective. Hindley despises his son Hareton and when Heathcliff buys Wuthering Heights, Hareton becomes a servant in his own house. Heathcliff, who neglects, bullies, torments, and threatens his son Linton, is somewhat kind to Hareton, his nephew. Hareton, who can neither read nor write, is depressed and acts in an immature manner because of lack of parental attention. Interestingly, at the end *Wuthering Heights*, instead of the fictional brother taking care of the sister, it is Catherine who takes care of Hareton, teaching him to read and write and thus earning his love and affection.

George Eliot

Unlike Austen, either of the Brontë sisters, or Sedgwick, Mary Anne Evans, better known as George Eliot, scandalized her family and defied social convention. She also created stories of deep psychological conflict, which often focused on unresolved Oedipal conflict and brother-sister incest. In spite of herself being a social rebel, however, Eliot's plot resolutions were often extremely conservative.

Eliot's separation anxiety began at age five when she was sent to boarding school and her feelings of rejection resulted in both a deep need for independence and a profound fear of rejection, two prominent themes in her work. Complicating Eliot's separation anxiety was that her brother, Isaac, acted as a surrogate father thus resulting in her Oedipal struggle being split between father and brother. Like Sedgwick, Eliot was clearly enamored of her brother. She has written that "the one deep strong love I have ever known," was the love for her brother and her brother and sister sonnets recall how she followed Isaac about everywhere, "puppy-like" (Haight, 1954-55, p. 284).

Eliot's conflicted relationship with her brother Isaac—he didn't speak to his sister until her lover of over twenty years died (Emery, 1976; Karl, 1995)—is clear from the many brother-sister relationships she created: Dorothea and Lydgate and Fred and Rosamond in *Middlemarch* (1871-72); Daniel and Gwendolen and Mordecai and Mariah in *Daniel Deronda* (1876); and Maggie and Tom in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). While many of her fictional brothers are mean-spirited and rejecting, perhaps the worst is Tom Tulliver, who only forgives his sister her sins as they drown entwined in each other's arms (is that how Eliot thought her brother and she would resolve the rift in their relationship?).

Maggie, the heroine in *The Mill on the Floss*, suffering from parental rejection, acts out in childish rage; she pushes her cousin into the mud, slashes off her hair, and runs away to join the gypsies (Johnstone, 1990). However Maggie's rage is most clearly manifested in adulthood as a "misuse of sexual power in her relationships" with men (Johnstone, 1990, p. 90). Kohut (1973, p. 386), in explaining the ramification of a narcissistic rage, states that "the maintenance of self esteem . . . depends on the unconditional availability of the approving mirroring functions of an admiring self-object, or on the every present opportunity for a merger with an idealized one."

In spite of Eliot's actual father's threatening to disown her when she rejected his strict Calvinism and his leaving her out of his will, she often referred to him in a loving, deferential way. However, except for Mr. Garth in *Middlemarch*, few of Eliot's fictional fathers deserve praise. The father in *Adam Bede* (1859) is a drunkard; Squire Cass in *Silas Marner* (1861) is a self-centered man who ignores his sons; Dorothea's guardian,

her uncle, in *Middlemarch*, is a ridiculous man and in the same novel, Rosamond's father allows business matters to distract him from paternal duties.

Of the several father figures in *Daniel Deronda*, that Gwendolen's stepfather is less caring than is Daniel's may reflect Eliot's belief that fathers prefer sons. The worst of Eliot's fictional fathers, Mariah's father, also appears in *Daniel Deronda*. After telling his daughter that her mother is dead, Mariah's father takes her to New York where he puts her to work. Daniel rescues Mariah, a young Jewish woman, from drowning and fulfills the role of brother until he reunites her with her "real" brother. At the end of the story Daniel, who finds his birth parents, acknowledges his Jewish heritage, immigrates to Israel, and marries Mariah, who would only marry a Jewish man.

Louisa May Alcott

Unlike the women mentioned above, Louisa May Alcott had no brother with whom to compete; she did, however, share a similar level of paternal rejection. Branson Alcott preferred his first-born daughter, thinking Louisa too wild and too emotional (Saxton, 1977). Getting even, perhaps, when Alcott wrote *Little Women* (1868-69), her best-known work, one she did for the money, the father figure plays only a minor role. One of the main themes of *Little Women*, is how Jo, the main protagonist, struggles to do what is right so that when her father comes home, he will be proud of her. Unlike Jo, however, Louisa never gained her father's admiration.

Little Women and the other family stories Alcott wrote brought in needed monies—Alcott's father was never financially successful. On several occasions, however, when the family needed money, Louisa May Alcott went out to service,

working as a housekeeper and governess, teacher, laundress, and seamstress—she preferred writing gothic stories (Stern, 1975), stories which even more clearly contain elements of the family romance. For example, in *Pauline's Passion and Punishment* (1863), *Behind the Mask* (1866), *The Abbot's Ghost* (1867), *The Mysterious Key* (1867) and *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (1868) the female protagonists are angry young women, *femme fatales*, who strive to thwart convention, overcome patriarchy, and become successful and independent (Stern, 1975).

Jean Muir, the heroine in *Behind the Mask*, a somewhat autobiographical story (Stern, 1975), is the epitome of a *femme fatale*. Appearing to be about fifteen years younger than she is, Jean is a temptress; every man she meets falls desperately in love with her (it is reported that Alcott wished she were prettier and that she would have liked to have been married [Stern, 1975; Saxton, 1977]). The bastard of a well-to-do family, Jean must work, accepting positions of housekeeper or governess, to avoid starvation. *Behind the Mask* ends happily: motivated by her need for security and love, Jean tricks a titled, middle-aged man into marrying her before his nephews reveal her to be an imposter.

The heroine in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, Rosamond Vivian, is not so lucky. An orphan, raised by her unloving grandfather since the age of ten, is “sold” by her grandfather to a handsome, but evil man. When Rosamond realizes that this man, whom she has come to love, has lied to her (he has a wife and son), she flees. As she crisscrosses Europe, she meets a count and a priest both of whom fall in love with her. Her bigamist husband relentlessly tracks her, ultimately chasing her to her death.

Pearl Buck

Born in the United States to missionary parents and raised in China, Pearl Buck, the second child but first daughter, wrote over seventy novels and short stories and was the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

While elements of Buck's childhood differed significantly from those of the other women writers—for example, during the Boxer Rebellion, Buck (eight at the time) had to flee her home in Chinkiang for Shanghai and she was one of the “white devils” the Chinese wanted to throw out of their country—in some ways her childhood was quite similar. Her father—a minister—was absent from the home for long periods of time and even when he was home, he was more involved with spiritual issues than family demands. In addition, her mother, an ardent feminist, felt trapped in the role of “traditional housewife” (Westervelt, 1970) and permanent exile (Buck, 1954; Conn, 1994). Reminiscent of Charlotte Brontë's experience, when Buck gave her father a copy of the *Good Earth* (1931), her best-known work, he was relatively unimpressed, maintaining that he did not have time to read a novel.

Many of Buck's novels are set in China. Many of her fictional characters are Chinese. And several of her plots focus on issues of interracial relationships and the Chinese caste system. In spite of the restrictive nature of Chinese society toward women, however, one can find elements of the family romance in Buck's plots: women struggling for independence, resolving oedipal conflicts, or searching for their heritage.

In spite of the fact that the reader never acquires any background knowledge about the female protagonist in the *Good Earth* and that the story focuses on the peasant Wang Lung and his struggle to make a life for himself and his family, there are some

similarities between the story and Buck's life: O-lan is a long suffering wife, as was Buck's mother, and her daughter was retarded, as was Buck's only child.

Unlike O-lan, who never rejects her husband, even when he bring a young concubine into the house, Madame Wu, the main character if the *Pavilion of Women* (1946), does. Suffering from what some might think of as a mid-life crisis, when Madame Wu turns forty, she ejects her husband from the marriage bed and insists he take a concubine. (When Buck was approximately the same age, she struggled to decide whether or not to divorce her first husband.)

Later, Madame Wu invites a Catholic missionary to instruct her youngest son. Unable to ignore her need for a spiritual and intellectual enlightenment, she talks Brother Andre, a man with whom she falls in love, into giving her lessons also. It is at the end of this story, however, where Buck's oedipal feelings are most clear. Instead of creating Brother Andre as a model missionary, like her father, Buck makes him into a heretic, a man whom the church has cast out as a renegade. His sin; "he thought it was men and women who were the divine."

Judith Krantz

In her autobiography, Judith Krantz notes that it was not until she wrote her own life's story that she finally understood how her plots and fictional characters had been influenced by her own experiences (Krantz, 2000, p. 123). For example, in "compensation for the reality of my own life" (she was coerced into having sex the first time), her protagonists consciously choose when and with whom they will have sex. (The one exception is the novel *Princess Daisy* (1980), where the main character, Daisy,

is raped by her half-brother.) It is also clear that her work has been shaped by her feelings of parental abandonment and her lack of family history.

The first daughter and eldest of three children, Krantz reports that neither parent was as loving, caring, or nurturing, as she needed them to be. “It is fascinating for me, as a writer, to see how strongly my relationship with my own mother affected my work” (Krantz, 2000, p. 238). Despite never forgiving her father for his emotional coldness, she has, she says, “managed to write any number of caring fathers” (Krantz, 2000, p. 238). Krantz further notes that her antipathy for her mother, whom she expected to be nurturing, but who apparently was more interested in her own career than her children, has led to most of her fictional mothers’ being killed off fairly early in the plot.

An objective analysis of Krantz’s fictional fathers and mothers, however, reveals something slightly different. Her fathers, while handsome and successful (in *Princess Daisy*, the father is an exiled Russian prince; in *Till We Meet Again*, the father is a diplomat) are not universally caring and loving nor are her mothers always cold and distant.

For example, the fathers in both *Princess Daisy* and *Mistral’s Daughter* (1982) are complex, conflicted men, but they are not sympathetic figures. In *Mistral’s Daughter*, when we meet Maggie, the matriarch of the Lunal family, she is an orphan. After running away to Paris, Maggie becomes an artist’s model and has an affair with Mistral, the male protagonist, who puts his career ahead of their relationship. Disillusioned, Maggie leaves him and has an affair with Perry Kilkullen, an American, who promises to marry her. Although Perry says he loves Maggie and their daughter, he is unable to obtain a divorce; he dies intestate leaving his mistress and daughter

penniless. When the daughter, Teddy, a successful model, is an adult, she has an affair with Mistral, who is married at the time and cannot divorce. They have a child, Fauve, whom Mistral adores; he ignores his legitimate daughter. When Teddy dies in a freak accident, Maggie rears her granddaughter, letting her visit Mistral in France during summers. But when Fauve discovers that Mistral is so self-absorbed that he ignored the pleas of his Jewish friends, who sought shelter during the Second World War, she rejects him.

In contrast, three of the mothers in *Mistral's Daughter* are mostly sympathetic. Maggie is a devoted mother and grandmother; Teddy and Mistral's wife, Kate, are good mothers. Kate's disdain for Mistral, however, leads their daughter to turn against her father, Mistral, when he is sick; she ignores his pleas for help, thus letting him die.

The two fathers in *Till We Meet Again* (1988) are impotent. Eve's father, a physician, has a rather *laissez-faire* attitude toward his daughter and is distant. Eve, a stubborn child who yearns for adventure, runs away from home with a music hall singer when she's in her late teens (similar to Maggie in *Mistral's Daughter*). Later Eve's husband, an aristocratic diplomat, rejects one of their daughters when she disobeys him, admitting that he does not know how to handle daughters. Although Eve's mother, a conventional woman who is motivated to avoid scandal—this part of the novel takes place at the turn of the last century—she does care about her daughter. Eve, herself, is an understanding and loving mother, empathizing with both her daughters as they search to find their identity.

Supporting Krantz' argument for the kind of mothers she writes, the two mothers in *Dazzle* (1990) are not likable. Mike Kilkullen's (he is the cousin of Perry Kilkullen of

Mistral's Daughter) first wife, a mean-spirited, evil, frigid woman, who, in addition to having a lengthy if odd sexual relationship with a homosexual man, turns Mike's daughters against him. Mike's second wife, the mother of the heroine, Jazz, loves her daughter, but as an actress, she puts her career ahead of her child's needs, goes on location, and dies. Mike Kilkullen is a caring, concerned father to whom Jazz turns for emotional support, especially when the older man with whom she has had an affair leaves her at the altar. However, Krantz kills Mike off on the eve of his third marriage.

Perhaps making up for her lack of information about her own heritage, Krantz provides all her characters with extensive family histories. She provides a global, extended family in *Dazzle*, linking characters from other books: Jazz, for example, is cousin to characters in *Mistral's Daughter* and is a friend to Daisy from *Princess Daisy*.

Other common themes in Krantz's novels include parental abandonment; a girl's acting out in opposition to parental authority; the *femme fatale* heroine who is unaware of her beauty; and falling in love with a father substitute, an older man who eventually abandons the heroine because of commitment phobia (this plot element occurs in *Dazzle* and *Mistral's Daughter* and *Till We Meet Again*). This failure in consummating an oedipal "victory" through the ultimate rejection of the fictional father figure provides a unique plot in Krantz's novels.

Sibling rivalry also finds its way into Krantz's work. In *Mistral's Daughter*, for example, Nadine, Mistral's legitimate daughter, is jealous of her father's love for his illegitimate daughter, Fauve. Also, until the very end of *Dazzle*, her two half-sisters, self-absorbed women, hate Jazz. But while in Krantz's novels sisters are frustrated, or feel neglected, or hate, or envy their female sibling, relationships with brothers are depicted as

much more ambiguous, having elements of warm feelings for somewhat bizarre men. In both *Till We Meet Again* and *Princess Daisy*, the half-brother, the product of the father's earlier marriage, has a strained relationship with the father and feels hostility toward the father-doted-on half sisters. The half brother in *Till We Meet Again* participates in perverted sexual practices and collaborates with Nazis; in *Princess Daisy*, Ram, rapes his half sister; when he realizes that he'll never possess her, he kills himself.

Most fascinating, perhaps, in terms of oedipal issues is that both *Princess Daisy* and *Till We Meet Again* contain scenes where older women seduce younger men who turn on the women, becoming the sexual aggressor and punishing her.

Homosexual characters are also not portrayed in a positive light. Quite frequently they are described as perverted liars who use their sexual orientation to manipulate others.

The men Krantz's heroines select for their mate are kin to earlier heroes like Rochester from *Jane Eyre* and Mr. Knightly from *Emma*, caring men who understand the heroine, accept her flaws, and encourage her success. In short, they are an amalgam of the perfect nurturing mother and supportive father.

Mary Higgins Clark

Unlike the Krantz's heroines, Mary Higgins Clark's fictional women are not extraordinarily beautiful or internationally famous. Instead, they are everyday women who possess incredible fortitude and courage, often thwarting killers and ferreting out criminals.

In her formative years Clark was surrounded by interesting people, all of whom had stories to tell: her mother's sisters, who filled her head with family history; the patrons of her father's Irish Pub, who regaled her with anecdotes of immigrant Irish life; the boarders in her mother's boarding house (the mother opened their home to boarders after Clark's father's death); a neighbor was the model for the recurring character Alvira (cf. *All Through the Night*, 1998 [Clark, 2002]).

Although Clark was the only daughter sandwiched between two brothers and, therefore, did not experience competition or hostility with sisters, when her fictional heroines have sisters, there is rivalry. The heroine in *Pretend You Don't See Her* (1997) is envious of her sister's children and husband, even though she does not like her brother-in-law. In *You Belong to Me* (1998), one sister, a model and recent widow, envies her celebrity sister, Susan Chandler, and steals her boyfriends. Susan, the heroine, is a one-time assistant district attorney who goes back to school (as did Clark), to become a clinical psychologist; she acts as an amateur sleuth and hosts a radio talk show.

It is perhaps not unexpected, given that Clark's father died when she was eleven, that several of her female characters are fatherless. In spite of this, however, a central theme in many of her stories is the close relationship between fathers and daughters. Each heroine in both *Pretend You Don't See Her* and *Remember Me* (1994) had a positive relationship with her father before he died. Lacey, in *Pretend You Don't See Her*, still "talks" to her deceased father and considers his opinion before making decisions. And in *Remember Me* the heroine, Menley, a travel writer, discovers that among old Cape Cod families, that "special love" between a father and his baby daughter had been acknowledged and even named; the daughter was her father's *tortience* (p.134).

However, in spite of this natural affection between fathers and daughters that is frequent in many of her novels, a minor character in *All Through the Night*, an eight year old girl, runs away from the only father she has known. This man was not the child's biological father; in fact, he was a criminal who accidentally "stole" the infant from in front of a Catholic Church rectory where she had been abandoned by her mother. Is Clark suggesting that the child "knew" that this man who posed as her father actually was not even related?

A more interesting, recurring theme in Clark's work is that men are not to be trusted. The husband in *Pretend You Don't See Her* is an unsympathetic character who does not trust or believe his wife, preferring to think she is going crazy. He also betrays her confidences, with an old girlfriend, who turns out to be a killer. In addition, Clark's "heroes" often hide information from heroines, sometimes turning out to be the killer: In *You Belong to Me* the killer is a potential suitor; in *Pretend You Don't See Her*, a male colleague; and in *Nighttime Is My Time*, a classmate. Distrust of men may not be too surprising, given that in addition to her father's early death, both Mary's brothers died when she was a teenager, and after fifteen years of marriage, her husband died, leaving her alone, to raise their five children.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although employing a psychoanalytic perspective to analyze fiction as an attempt to understand the writer's personality has been criticized (Berman, 1990; Holland, 1998), the data presented above clearly support the hypotheses for this investigation. That is, the depiction of parental figures and siblings and the portrayal of familial interactions in

novels do appear to be influenced by a writer's real-life relationships and adjustments with her family of origin.

That the father-daughter bond is critical for psychological development of women is well established (Mahler, 1975; Spieler, 1984). As Kavalier-Adler (1993) notes, "the father-daughter bond galvanizes certain functions . . . [which] include . . . reflecting, and confirming . . . his daughter's self-image, as well as . . . serving as an identification figure." Fathers not only affect the young girl's belief that she is pretty, thus deserving, but also that she is competent, an especially important component for the development of a writer.

That all nine women discussed above had a disordered relationship with their father is undisputed. Austin was beholden first to her father and then her brothers for her very sustenance; both Bronte sisters were discounted by their father in favor of their bother; Sedgwick's father chose politics over family, leaving Catherine to transfer her oedipal feelings to her brothers; Elliot was "disowned" by her father when she became a Unitarian and then held in mute contempt by her brother until her lover died; Alcott's father preferred her older sister, the quiet, well-behavior daughter; Buck's father chose to "save the heathens" rather than protect his family in a hostile, foreign country; Krantz's father was cold and unaffectionate; and Clark's father died, as did her brothers and her husband.

Historically, some theoreticians have suggested that writers are pathological. Freud (1914/1959), in fact, suggests that artists are introverts who have a need to find admiration; art for him was a way for the individual to escape illness. Supporting the anecdotal hypothesis that art equal mental illness, Andreasen (1981) reported that writers

have a higher incidence of psychiatric treatment than a matched control group, but one that was not higher than other members of the artist's family. Similarly in 1986, Jamison (cited in Goldstein, Baker & Jamison, 1986, p. 222) reported a 38% rate of treatment for affective illness in a sample of 47 British artists and writers. And Pickering (1974; p. 19), who coined the term creative malady, suggests that "illness [is] an essential part of the act of creation."

There are no similar data sets for non-artists, however, so it is difficult to know to what degree intra-psychic conflict is a causative factor in the creative process. An alternative hypothesis may be that that writers have greater access to their unconscious (cf. Berman, 1993), thus allowing them to tap into their intra-psychic conflicts. Through the use of the written word, writers may then be able to create alternative universes for themselves where they can experiment with different endings to life's problems.

Another, alternative hypotheses, one considerably less psychological, is that writers merely are astute enough to know what sells and include family romance elements into their stories because that's what readers want.

It may not be possible to directly correlate all fictional family romance conflicts and their resolutions to the concrete experiences of an author. In many cases the fictional work is the writer's attempt to "undo" through the use of repetition compulsion the actual trauma she has experienced. By revisiting the same conflict over a series of novels, the writer gives herself the opportunity to explore different endings, slowly working through personal conflicts. For example, where a writer felt rejected, abandoned, and/or unappreciated by her father, she may write a story where a fictional father adores,

supports, and favors his daughter or one where the daughter finds a substitute figure who provides gratification of unmet needs.

This initial survey reveals that connection between biographical data and the character portrayals and repetitive plot elements of novels do, in fact, exist and can be analyzed. No attempt was made, however, to determine how specific conflicts and resolution inspire particular content. The next phase of the research project will tackle this element and will also move the analysis to more contemporary authors and their work.

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