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THE WORLD OF GRACE PALEY'S SHORT STORIES:
TRADITIONAL WOMEN IN A CHANGING AMERICA

by

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I: Introduction

As a short story writer, Grace Paley is not widely known. She has achieved, however, a "reputation as a writer's writer," because she writes "fiction of consequence" (Harris). Although she has been working at writing stories for approximately thirty years, she has produced only three volumes of published short stories--The Little Disturbances of Man (1959), Enormous Changes at the Last Minute (1974), and Later the Same Day (1985).[1] Critics and friends alike regret Paley's limited amount of publication, but as she explains, "life keeps distracting me" (Blake). Being married and raising two children, campaigning for neighborhood as well as city-wide improvements, protesting the war in Vietnam, and most recently, speaking out on nuclear disarmament are other heartfelt concerns that have engaged her time and energy.

A look at Grace Paley's life illuminates much of what is going on in her short stories. Both her upbringing and her current home base are firmly rooted in the city

[1] I will refer to these three collections in my parenthetical citations using the following abbreviations: LDM, EC, and LSD.

environment, specifically New York City. She was born in 1922 and raised in the Bronx by Russian Jewish immigrant parents who had fled czarist Russia for political reasons. Her father taught himself English by reading Dickens and eventually became a doctor. Paley remembers him as "a very good talker" (Lidoff 4). She grew up hearing three languages spoken in her home--Russian, Yiddish, and English. She recalls listening to her parents and relatives reminisce about their younger days of socialist activism, and hearing stories told around the kitchen table by her mother, aunts, sister, and grandmother. Storytelling became an integral part of Paley's growing up years. "'When I was little I loved to listen to my parents' stories, all the talk that went on. I loved to listen and soon I loved to talk and tell'" (Remnick C14). Both her family life and the street life of her neighborhood were filled with verbalization, with people talking about each other, their families, their lives. Conversation and storytelling colored Paley's childhood and were to her "terribly interesting"; they seemed to hold for her the key to life's mysteries. As she has said, "That's what you listen for and what you expect when you are a kid: the next conversation will tell you what it's all about, if you only listen to it" (Lidoff 5).

Learning about life by listening to others, by being what she calls a "story hearer," has continued in Paley's adult years. She is currently on the creative writing

faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, where she has taught for nearly twenty years. She began her teaching career simply to make money, but "says she found that she also liked to teach--and that teaching enriched her work by putting her in touch with another generation." As a writer, Paley appreciates this communication between generations, and considers her teaching "'a gift,'" since as she says, "'Young people read different books and think about different things.'" She feels this exposure to experience and points of view separate from her own is important "'because as a writer one of your jobs is to bring news of the world to the world'" (Darnton 65).

You have two ears, she reminds her students. "'One is the ear that listens to [your] own ordinary life, [your] family and the street [you] live on, and the other is the tradition of English literature'" (Wilner). It is possible to write about anything in the world, she tells them, "but the slightest story ought to contain the facts of money and blood in order to be interesting to adults." Paley's own stories work according to this principle; her characters generally live at a middle- or lower middle-class economic level, and are primarily involved with family ties--"the way people live as families or outside families or in the creation of family . . . the bloody ties" (Paley, "Some Notes on Teaching," 203).

Paley's interest in how people live provides the impetus for her writing of short stories. Unable to

express the troubles she saw among her women friends and neighbors through poetry, Paley turned to short story writing. In the 1950's, when she was writing the stories in her first collection, The Little Disturbances of Man, she "became terribly interested in the life of women and children, how they were living apart from men" (Lidoff 6). "You have to write about what really bugs or disturbs you--," she declares, "you write from distress, usually" (Wilner). Paley recognizes this period in her life as the beginning of "a certain female or feminine or woman's consciousness," though she "won't say feminist consciousness, because I didn't know enough" at that time. Her motivation for writing about women came not only from her concern for them, but because "you also write about things that you haven't read, things that you want to read yourself" (Lidoff 6; 13). In the "heavy, strong masculine literature" that was prevalent after the Second World War, as well as "all throughout literature," Paley feels the kinds of everyday women's lives that she is interested in are not addressed (Marchant and Ingersoll 209; Lidoff 13). Her desire to explore everyday life in her writing, to tell her friends' stories in order to "speak for them in some way," points to the purpose she sees in writing: "what's hidden is what we want to illuminate" (Lidoff 12).

Paley describes the awakening of her female consciousness, the raising of her "woman's political consciousness," as a "sudden" occurrence and a "breaking

through" point in her writing (Marchant and Ingersoll 611; Lidoff 7). Among Paley's concerns when her children were young was municipal politics--"the schools where my kids were, the street, the parks, the city in general" (Marchant and Ingersoll 610). Her early activism included "joining with other PTA mothers . . . in demonstrating against civil defense and with area residents in opposing the building of a road through Washington Square" in her Greenwich Village neighborhood ("Paley, Grace" 421). The characters in her stories show similar interest and involvement in community life. Though not intending to write political stories, Paley claims that art and politics are inextricably linked, and that her "interest in ordinary life and how people live is a very political one." She admits that in her own life "three pulls of politics, family life, and writing" have made claims on her time and energy over the years (Marchant and Ingersoll 610; 611).

Paley, the political activist, was pulled by the war in Vietnam and the suppression of dissent in Russia. As her children grew, and family life demanded less of her attention, Paley's interests evolved from neighborhood and city oriented activities to world-wide politics. She traveled to Hanoi in 1969 with other American pacifists to escort three prisoners of war back to the United States; then, in 1972, she wrote a newspaper article, "The Man in the Sky is a Killer," in which she described the jobs of American pilots in the bombing of North Vietnam (Paley,

"Man in Sky"). Her controversial attempts at stirring American domestic awareness of international issues have also extended to the subject of Soviet dissidents. In 1973, she attended the World Peace Congress in Moscow as a member of the American delegation, which presented a statement condemning the Soviets' lack of "'free speech or of the freedom to write and openly distribute and discuss what has been written'" (Wren). On her return from Russia, Paley wrote an article calling for greater concern for the plight of dissenters everywhere, including all those who have "been powerless to live free lives in their own countries" (Paley, "Nor Iron").

Paley's active involvement in and support of humanitarian causes did not cease with the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. When feminist leaders joined the anti-pornography campaign in 1977, she was among those feminists who met "to discuss, analyze and organize against the dehumanization of women" (Ivins). The importance of both politics and women's rights in her life, as well as in her writing, leads Paley to say that "feminism is strongly connected to my anti-militarism" (Marchant and Ingersoll 610). She was instrumental in the organizing of the Women's Pentagon Action, and her alignment with the War Resisters League led to her arrest in 1978 for protesting on the White House lawn with other League members against the use of nuclear power and nuclear weapons. In defending

her political protesting, the writer, E.L. Doctorow, says, "'Her politics are those of simple decency'" (McMurran 22).

Paley's activism, combining anti-war, feminist, and anti-nuclear concerns, relates closely to her focus on women in her writing. Her stories concentrate on the lives of ordinary women, on friendships and support networks between them, and on their commitments to both the ideas and the welfare of other people. Interweaving politics with her characters' everyday interests and activities, because "'That's the way a lot of politics gets in, as part of ordinary people's lives,'" reflects Paley's own regular participation in attempting to change attitudes (Smith 72). She feels that women can be very effective in such consequential issues as stopping the arms race, since their understanding of the buildup of nuclear weapons includes a concern for the future of all men, women, and children (Cevoli 107). Traditional female values--caring, nurturing, preserving life, and maintaining a spirit of cooperation--underline women's need to become involved. The urgency behind this need is that action sustains hope. Paley's statement, "Once you get involved, you move away from despair," is echoed by the common belief of her women characters in the Later the Same Day story, "Ruthy and Edie": "They were all, even Edie, ideologically, spiritually, and on puritanical principle against despair" (Cevoli 107; LSD 123). Paley especially emphasizes women working together toward common goals, insisting that "what

we need now is to bond" (Smith 72). She demonstrated her commitment to this ideal by joining other women at the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment in 1983. "What we talked and acted about was Peace and Justice," Paley explained, "and the way we went about it spoke to the word 'Future'" (Paley, Ms. 62).

Faith, Paley's recurring fictional character in her short fiction, also has faith in the future and in her ability to effect change. Paley has described Faith as a "collective" woman character because she was originally based on one of Paley's neighbors, but "she began to just take on characteristics of at least four friends." "She became an invented person who lived in circumstances similar to most of the women I knew," Paley adds (Lidoff 10). But the lives of Faith and her author have much in common, too: a Jewish immigrant background; motherhood, two children; political activism, and an urban environment.

Paley's stories are set in New York City, with her women living in apartments and neighborhoods similar to where she has lived her own life. The friendships between women that are necessary to the cohesiveness of life in Paley's stories are, she feels, unique to the urban environment. She describes suburban life as "a certain kind of life but it's not general female life," preferring instead the kind of supportive life she has known of being surrounded by women, both family and friends (Lidoff 14).

Paley's women characters for the most part are "traditional" women: their major priorities revolve around being mothers; they are usually oriented toward a family life, and they derive much satisfaction from their relationships with their children and from their friendships with other women. Those who are young mothers in the 1950's and early 1960's, those of Faith's generation, view life with "more open possibility" than do their parents (Lidoff 19). These traditional young women discover a changing postwar world; with few exceptions, they are portrayed as strong, family oriented and, increasingly as time goes by, politically and culturally aware, and vaguely restless and discontent.

II: The Dominant Women

Women dominate the short stories of Grace Paley. Qualities of determination and perseverance are evident in the realism with which they view life. Since most of the stories are told from the point of view of one of the women, it is through women's eyes that we see and experience the world. Although men are often important parts of these women's lives, they do not dominate either

the time or the energies of the women. Instead the women gain from each other the strength and support necessary to carry on their day-to-day living. They are often opinionated and outspoken in their interactions. They share continuously with each other, discussing everyday events and concerns as well as helping one another cope with problems or difficult situations. A sense of humor often allows the individual woman to view herself and her life less harshly and thereby maintain her perspective at a realistic level.

Almost all of Paley's women live in economic and social conditions which force them into proximity with each other on a regular basis. They are not suburban housewives, each with her own home and yard. They live in New York City apartments, the majority of which reflect middle-class standards, and they must congregate in the city's parks for recreation. They know many of the details of one another's lives from sharing the same block or building, or even from having grown up together. In "Faith in a Tree," Faith admits to this familiarity by saying, "Mrs. Finn knows my problems because I do not keep them to myself," Mrs. Finn being Faith's "up-the-block neighbor and evening stoop companion" (EC 85; 78). This communicative tendency is common among the women; they talk constantly with one another. In this particular story, the activitiea of the various women and children inhabiting the park on a Saturday afternoon are described through Faith's eyes. She

is an inquisitive, intelligent, and opinionated woman, who recognizes both the flaws and the virtues in the women she knows. Her opinions and knowledge of what she sees around her are expressed through conversation or a storytelling monologue, or, when she is silent, via articulate introspection. Her outlook and observances are rooted in reality; her own self-portrait shows that Faith harbors no illusions about herself: "but me--quick--what am I? Not bad if you're a basement shopper. On my face are a dozen messages, easy to read, strictly for friends, Bargains Galore!" (EC 79). She considers hers an ordinary life, while viewing it from a perspective lightened by understated humor.

Faith's life, that of an ordinary woman raising children among other women and children in an ordinary city environment, is not glorified, or even particularly notable, in any measurable way; yet, Paley's treatment of Faith refrains from undermining her either. Faith is a character who is extraordinary in her ability to perceive and experience reality, whether dull, difficult, adverse, or positive, with an honest and straightforward attitude. Her approach to life mixes earthy realism with humor, allowing Faith to recognize both the joy and the seriousness in living with a consciousness that is unclouded by sentiment or bitterness.

Despite Faith's claim that she and three other of the tenants in her building are "doomed to stand culturally

still," she is a hopeful character, spotting qualities in herself and others that contribute to beauty, practicality, and survival. "Anna's character is terrible," Faith observes in "Faith in a Tree," "but she's beautiful." She continues, "We love her because she's beautiful" (EC 86; 96-97). Her optimism flourishes in her characterization of Kitty: "There is no one like Kitty Skazka. Unlike other people who have similar flaws that doom, she is tolerant and loving. I wish Kitty could live forever, bearing daughters and sons to open the heart of man." Faith calls her a "wholehearted mother," and a "co-worker in the mother trade--a topnotch craftsman" (EC 87; 78). We are told that Kitty has several children, each fathered by a different man, none of whom Kitty married. Faith does not criticize Kitty for remaining unmarried; she instead credits her with being a "wholehearted" and "topnotch" mother, thereby demonstrating the dominant priority of Paley's women--motherhood. Faith concentrates on the qualities that have made survivors of her women friends: "I have always listened carefully to my friend Kitty's recommendations, for she has made one mistake after another. Her experience is invaluable" (EC 94). Faith respects her friends for their strengths and does not dwell on their shortcomings.

Faith's own best qualities are associated with getting a job done, with handling the practical realities of life, and with understanding other people's true natures. In "Faith in a Tree," she says that "although I'm very shy, I

tend to persevere," as she probes a male acquaintance to tell Kitty and herself more about his occupation. Her awareness of the transparent and sometimes devious quality of personalities is clear in her unspoken remark, "I often see through the appearance of things right to the apparition itself." Faith is not easily fooled by exteriors; experience has taught her that things are not always as they seem, since she, for instance, is married, but has no husband at home. She is a realist, proclaiming to her son, "You have to go after your own things in this life. I'm not going to be around forever." Her practical instincts surface when she witnesses an action and automatically thinks in terms of the result, as when her son "began to grind his teeth," and she thought to herself, "which would lead, I knew, to great expense" (EC 95; 86; 93; 99). Faith's mind in constantly active, collecting information about the world around her and forming opinions and attitudes on that world. In an earlier story, "The Used-Boy Raisers," she seems to sell herself short: "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). Her comment masks a keen sense of oppression in which she sees herself as a mere commodity with an "expiration date," "the servant of man." And yet, Faith perceives this job of servant "laughingly," not seriously or honorably, but just as a sort of unbelievable joke. Being able to poke fun at

her own position in this way has the reverse effect of ridiculing the men she is "destined" to serve. No matter what circumstances she lives under, Faith is a woman who dominates the situation she is in, even if only through her attitude.

"I have always required a man to be dependent on," Faith says in "Faith in a Tree," "even when it appeared that I had one already." Faith, however, like many of Paley's other women, manages without one. Her son's statement, "mostly nobody has fathers," applies to the kids he knows, since because of divorce, desertion, or the women not marrying in the first place, men are significantly absent from the lives of these families (EC 80; 95). Paley's women tend to think they need men, yet, paradoxically, the men in their lives are generally not reliable. Faith, as Paley writes in "Faith in the Afternoon," was "raised up like everyone else to the true assumption of happiness"; but when her husband left her, "she began to understand that because of Ricardo she would have to be unhappy for a while." This "willful unhappiness" derives from Faith's broken expectations (EC 33; 34). The dream of marriage, home, and family which Paley's women have traditionally grown up to expect becomes in reality merely an illusion. Husbands flee the familial setting for various reasons born out of restlessness. Almost all of Paley's men are sketched as adventure-loving free spirits, who seem unwilling to accept responsibility.

When Virginia's husband leaves her in "An Interest in Life," she blames herself for her predicament. Her friend, John Raftery, tries to cheer her up by reminding her she can be thankful for good-looking children, to which she answers, "'I don't have to thank anything but my own foolishness for four children when I'm twenty-six years old, deserted, and poverty-struck, regardless of looks." Eventually, after making a list of her troubles, Virginia's bitterness subsides, and her spirits and confidence are buoyed by the realization that "All that is really necessary for survival of the fittest, it seems, is an interest in life, good, bad, or peculiar" (LDM 88; 98). The depressing knowledge that she alone is responsible for overcoming such obstacles as paying the grocer, applying for welfare, contending with nosy neighbors, and facing sexual loneliness transforms into optimism when the strength of her own resourcefulness is tapped.

Paley's women generally hold attitudes toward men that fluctuate between need and disgust, or between fantasy and reality. Their need for men arises from physical and psychological desire, an obsessive longing to have men in their lives. Faith names this fixation, "him-itis, the dread disease of females" (LSD 79). Sex is perceived as a luxurious, momentary pleasure, in which "happy overindulgence" leads to pregnancy (EC 35). The marriages which result often do not last, and the responsibility for the babies falls on the women. In "An Interest in Life,"

Ginny is, after having four children, a victim of the "noisy signs of life that are so much trouble to a man." Despite the fact that her husband became desperate and left because he felt hemmed in by the family, she imagines his return, although he has been gone two and one-half years: "Sometimes, stumbling over a blockbuster of a dream at midnight, I wake up to vision his soft arrival" (LDM 100). In her fantasy, happiness and sex merge to create a state of bliss that temporarily obliterates reason: "the truth is, we were so happy, we forgot the precautions" (LDM 101).

This physical weakness for men is common to Paley's women. Both Ginny and Faith are drawn to their husbands' physical attractiveness. Ginny states, "Once I met my husband with his winking looks, he was my only interest" (LDM 93). Paley's description of Faith's relationship with Ricardo relies heavily on visual definition. After she becomes pregnant and they are "securely married by the state," "he resigned himself to her love--a medium-sized, beefy-shouldered man, Indian-black hair, straight and coarse to the fingers, lavender eyes--Faith is perfectly willing to say it herself, to any good listener: she loved Ricardo" (EC 35). Paley's emphasis on the physical underscores the interconnectedness in Faith's mind of sex and love. The passage continues:

> She began indeed to love herself, to love the properties which, for a couple of years anyway, extracted such heart-warming activity from him.

> Well, Faith argues whenever someone says, "Oh really, Faithy, what do you mean--love?" She must have loved Ricardo. She had two boys with him. She had them to honor him and his way of loving when sober. (EC 35)

No mention is made of intellect, wit, patience, skill, or other qualities a woman might find attractive or admirable in a man. But, because she had children by him, Faith "must have loved Ricardo." This justification of her feelings to coincide with her situation reflects the attitude, ingrained in most of Paley's women by their upbringings and by society, that love and sex are synonymous. The irony in the sexual union is that the women are drawn further into the family environment with the advent of children, while the men feel compelled to move completely out of it. This withdrawal from the home on the part of the husband is demonstrated also in "A Woman, Young and Old," in which the narrator tells us that her parents "were deeply and irrevocably in love till Joanna and I revoked everything for them." The father sums up his point of view in this way, "'. . . a wife,' he said, 'is a beloved mistress until the children come and then . . .'," making clear the importance he places on a spontaneous sexual relationship (LDM 26). His lack of tolerance for the changes in the household brought about by children becomes apparent when he subsequently leaves the family. Nevertheless, when told by her thirteen-year-old

daughter, Josephine, "'You've been conned, Mother,'" Marvine, the wife and mother in this story, responds: "'Conned?' she muttered. 'You speak a different language than me. You don't know a thing yet, you weren't even born. You know perfectly well, misfortune aside, I'd take another Frenchman,'" which, in fact, she does at the end of the story (LDM 26-27). Marvine speaks of her abandonment as merely "misfortune," and believes that the answer to her problems is to find another man.

Filling the loneliness in their lives with involvements with men does not always result in "misfortune" or failure for Paley's women. In "Goodbye and Good Luck," Rosie Lieber builds a genuine friendship with a man, which, after a period of about thirty years, culminates in marriage. In the first months of their relationship, Rosie discovers that her friend, Vlashkin, is married, and after seeing his wife at a social occasion, tells him, "'No more. This isn't for me. I am sick from it all. I am no home breaker.'" Paley's description, through Rosie's eyes, of Vlashkin's wife, "a woman with black hair in a low bun, straight and too proud," "speaking in a deep voice to whoever stopped a moment to converse," and how she "noticed me like she noticed everybody, cold like Christmas morning," clarifies the formality and lack of warmth Rosie sees. Rosie feels the comfortable intimacy and companionship that she and Vlashkin share is a threat to Mrs. Vlashkin in her role as wife, and thinks, "Poor woman,

she did not know I was on the same stage with her. The poison I was to her role, she did not know" (LDM 15). Rosie now realizes how significant the role she has played in Vlashkin's life has been. The heartfelt meaning in his earlier statements, "Here I come to your innocent shelter to refresh myself in the midst of an agonized life," and "I entrust you, dear, with my soul," takes on new level of sincerity in Rosie's perception of the situation (LDM 14; 15). Years later, after Vlashkin has retired from his career in the theater and his wife divorces him, he contacts Rosie:

> '. . . we are old friends. I have money to burn. What your heart desires. Others are like grass, the north wind of time has cut out their heart. Of you, Rosie, I recreate only kindness. What a woman should be to a man, you were to me. Do you think, Rosie, a couple of old pals like us could have a few good times among the material things of this world?' (LDM 21)

She agrees to have dinner with him, and "that night and every night in the week, we talked of his long life." Talking is a vital component of friendships in Paley's stories. When told that Mrs. Vlashkin is divorcing him for adultery, Rosie cannot believe it: "'But, Vlashkin, you should excuse me, don't be insulted, but you got maybe seventeen, eighteen years on me, and even me, all this

nonsense--this daydreams and nightmares--is mostly for the pleasure of conversation alone'" (LDM 21; 20). She downplays the communicative aspect of their relationship; yet, this is the particular quality that makes it possible for them to renew their relationship at this later date. Being able to talk easily with each other and to express caring and enjoyment of each other's company defines the kinds of lasting friendships found in Paley's stories.

Rosie Lieber is the dominant exception among Paley's women. Paley's emphasis lies in female friendships and in the support and comfort women give one another. Both crises and celebrations are shared by women. In "Friends," three of Selena's women friends visit her for what they believe may be the last time, as she is dying of cancer. But it is Selena who does the comforting, as Faith narrates, "To put us at our ease, to quiet our hearts as she lay dying, our dear friend Selena said, life, after all, has not been an unrelieved horror--you know, I did have many wonderful years with her" (LSD 71). Selena is referring to her daughter, Abby, who died of a drug overdose, and throughout the story, Selena's remembrances of people and events are intent on the positive. Even when her friends mention people who they feel have wronged Selena during her life--particularly her family, who did not tell her until she was forty-two years old "that her mother had not died in childbirthing her,"--Selena simply

says, "Forget it. They did a lot of nice things for me too. Me and Abby. Forget it. Who has the time?" (LSD 73). She faces her cancer and her impending death with humor: "Nothing they can do about it. All the chemotherapy. No more chemistry left in me to therapeut. Ha!" (LSD 74). Her optimism and humor mask the fact of her illness at first, as when, a couple of years earlier, one of her friends asked her about the hormones she was taking: "Oh, they're mostly vitamins, Selena said. Besides, I want to be young and beautiful. She made a joking pirouette" (LSD 83). Selena recalls each of the women's children and finds snapshots in her collection of the various kids together, insisting her friends take the pictures with them. Talking and remembering are vitally important to Selena. When the women ask, "each in her own way, How are you feeling, Selena? She said, O.K., first things first. Let's talk about important things. How's Richard? How's Tonto? How's John? How's Chrissy? How's Judy? How's Mickey?," naming each of the three women's children. Selena's belief that life is worth talking about and remembering is emphasized in her insistent demand, "Let's all think before it's too late" (LSD 85).

The strength with which Selena faces life and death deeply affects the other women. Ann, the pessimistic one of the group, resists discussing her son, Mickey, but when Selena speaks of him, she is nonetheless comforted: "She wouldn't lean too far into Selena's softness, but listening

to Selena speak Mickey's name, she could sit in her chair more easily. . . . Ann breathed deeply in and out the way we've learned in our Thursday-night yoga class. She was able to rest her body a little bit" (LSD 85-86). The three women have ridden the train for five hours to visit Selena, and yet, when it comes time to leave, they hesitate. "We didn't move. We had a long journey ahead of us and had expected a little more comforting before we set off" (LSD 77). Selena's approaching death signals for these women a need for reassurance, whereas for her it is a time to reflect on shared memories with her friends gathered around her. She celebrates life, while the other three women worry over, mourn, or seem to be afraid of death. Their dependence upon Selena's strength in alleviating their own anxieties is obvious in Susan's explanation of their reaction to the situation:

> We're angry with our friend Selena for dying. The reason is, we want her to be present when we're dying. We all require a mother or mother-surrogate to fix our pillows on that final occasion, and we were counting on her to be that person. (LSD 87)

In another story, a woman seeks an outlet for her fears simply by telephoning another woman friend. The story, aptly titled "Living," begins as follows: "Two weeks before Christmas, Ellen called me and said, 'Faith,

I'm dying'" (EC 59). Faith offers consolation to her friend in the form of a realistic assessment of their lives. Her words are devoid of sentiment and self-pity:

> "Life isn't that great Ellen. We've had nothing but crummy days and crummy guys and no money and broke all the time and cockroaches and nothing to do on Sunday but take the kids to Central Park and row on that lousy lake. What's so great, Ellen? What's the big loss? Live a couple more years. See the kids and the whole cruddy thing, every cheese hole in the world go up in heat blast firewaves . . ." (EC 60)

Ellen answers that she wants to see it all, but death closes her eyes a few weeks later. When Ellen needed someone to turn to for friendship and support, she called Faith, who, in her own way, gave to her friend and supported her. In retrospect, Faith misses her friend: ". . . I often long to talk to Ellen, with whom, after all, I have done a million things in these scary, private years" (EC 61). What is significant to Faith, and to most of Paley's women, is the quality of sharing that she experiences with other women, through doing and talking, which gives meaning and companionship to their lives.

In Paley's stories, women's friendships truly sustain and encourage the women and are valued parts of their lives. In the story, "A Woman, Young and Old," a

comparison is made between women and men, stressing their differences:

> "Women," said Grandma in appreciation, "have been the pleasure and consolation of my entire life. From the beginning I cherished all the little girls with their clean faces and their listening ears. . . ."
>
> "Men are different than women," said Joanna. . . .
>
> "That's true," said Grandma, "it's the men that've always troubled me. Men and boys . . . I suppose I don't understand them." (LDM 28)

These lines are paramount to the development of the attitudes Paley's women hold towards men. The differentness between the sexes creates, in many cases, tension and confusion in a male/female relationship. Friendships between women, however, are portrayed as supportive and complementary, rather than dichotomous. Discussing a male/female relationship with another woman seems to give it depth and substance. When talking to her friend, Ruth, in the story, "The Expensive Moment," about why she does not see a particular man anymore, Faith tells her, "Also, I couldn't talk to you about it, so it never got thick enough. I mean woofed and warped" (LSD 190). Women's opinions and feedback are vital to other women, not only as aids to understanding their lives, but also as a

means whereby individual choices are justified. Paley's women often want men in their lives, yet do not necessarily need them. Most of these independent women financially support themselves and their children and gain emotional support from each other. The continuity of what Faith calls "our lifelong attachments" provides a framework within which children are raised, problems and ideas are discussed, and the changes brought by birth and death and growing older are shared (LSD 89).

III: Traditional Family Life

For Paley's women the most fulfilling aspect of their lives is motherhood. Despite the economic hardships of women like Ginny and Faith, and the circumstances which have left them singly responsible for their families, they do not express resentment at the burden of children in their lives. These women are truly proud and devoted mothers. When Ginny's son in "An Interest in Life" voices dismay over his looks, saying, "'How come I have such an ugly face? My nose is funny. Mostly people don't like me,'" Ginny describes her quite different perception of him:

> He was a liar too. Girard has a face like his father's. His eyes are the color of those little blue plums in August. He looks like an advertisement in a magazine. He could be a child model and make a lot of money. He is my first child, and if he thinks he is ugly, I think I am ugly. (LDM 91)

This belief in the beauty of one's children, especially as it is a reflection of oneself, reveals not only the intrinsic connection between mother and child, but also the important role being a mother plays in the woman's own sense of identity. She sees much of herself in her children. She is, because of the existence of her children, a member of what Faith has referred to as "the mother trade." Motherhood is, to Paley's women, a position of priority and esteem.

Faith, in particular, takes her business of mothering very seriously:

> I own two small boys [she muses in "Faith in a Tree"] whose dependence on me takes up my lumpen time and my bourgeois feelings. I'm not the least bit ashamed to say that I tie their shoes and I have wiped their backsides well beyond the recommendations of my friends, Ellen and George Hellesbraun, who are psychiatric social workers and appalled. I kiss those kids forty times a

day. I punch them just like a father should. When I have a date and come home late at night, I wake them with a couple of good hard shakes to complain about the miserable entertainment. When I'm not furiously exhausted from my low-level job and that bedraggled soot-slimy house, I praise God for them. One Sunday morning, my neighbor, Mrs. Raftery, called the cops because it was 3 a.m. and I was vengefully singing a praising song. (EC 80)

Her children are the main focus of her life. They are the reason she spends Saturday afternoons in the park, and her motivation for maintaining her position of employment in her "low-level job." What this job consists of is not mentioned, since it is merely a means of providing a living, and not a gratifying part of her life as are her children. Faith's boys are sources of pride for her as well as companions who familiarly call her by her first name. "Who could match me for pride or you for brilliance?" she asks her oldest son, Richard, in "Faith in a Tree." In a moment of motherly pride, Faith takes an afternoon off work to show Richard's teacher a poem he wrote, which Faith thought "was awfully good, rhyme and meter and all." And Richard, though only nine years old, speaks up after one of his mother's soliloquies: "'Faith, will you quit with your all-the-time philosophies,' says

Richard, my first- and disapproving-born'" (EC 84; 91; 89). He is, like his mother, obviously outspoken and opinionated.

In a later story, "Friends," her boys are grown and Richard is living in Europe. Anthony, Faith's youngest son, is now eighteen, and when she returns home from visiting Selena, "he saw my sad face and made one of the herb teas used by his peer group to calm their overwrought natures. He does want to improve my pretty good health and spirits" (LSD 87-88). Both sons are close to and communicative with their mother. Even though Richard is away in Europe, Faith is able to say,

> I knew exactly where he was. He writes. In fact, he found a broken phone and was able to call every day for a week--mostly to give orders to his brother but also to say, Are you O.K., Ma? How's your new boyfriend, did he smile yet? (LSD 75)

The boys' attitudes of caring and concern demonstrate the special kind of mutual friendship they enjoy with their mother.

Paley's stories follow Faith and her children through years of growth and life changes, whereas some of the other women characters and their offspring appear only in isolated episodes. As a result, Faith's family life is much more clearly defined than the lives of her friends.

Nevertheless, it is clear that most of Paley's women are like Faith--oriented toward a traditional family lifestyle, which includes hopes of marriage and children. There is not generally encouragement by family members for women to pursue careers or other ambitions. Instead, getting married and raising children is the example set by mothers, aunts, and older sisters, and becomes the direction most of the women follow. The strong influence of women in one another's lives serves to reinforce the importance of being a mother; this role provides individual women with an identity that links them vitally to other women. The act of mothering reaches beyond an individual's own children to the traditional notion of women as the nurturers, caregivers and consciences of society.

Traditionally, a woman's sphere has been her home, and the needs of its inhabitants, the husband and children, consume her time and energy. Paley's stories emphasize this lifestyle from the woman's point of view, although the reality of many of her characters' lives does not uphold the ideal. The absence of a reliable man in the home shatters the traditional assumption of the dependence of the woman on the man for financial and emotional support. Many of Paley's major women characters are single parents, as a result of divorce or desertion or, as in a minority of instances, choice. Even though they capably raise their children without the aid of men, women like Faith and Ginny are inclined to believe in the intrinsic importance of the

children's father as a member of the family unit. "It's stupid to let a kid talk badly about his father in front of another man," Faith thinks in "Faith in a Tree" (EC 96). When Ginny's husband leaves her in "An Interest in Life," and she realizes he will most likely not return, she is reluctant to divulge this information to her children. She thinks, "I didn't want the children to know the facts. Present or past, a child should have a father." Ginny also feels that the details of a failed relationship should not be discussed with other men: "I think it makes a woman look too bad to tell on how another man has treated her. He begins to see her through the other man's eyes, a sitting duck, a skinful of flaws" (LDM 84; 96). These comments reveal the influence a strong family orientation has had on the women. Preserving a sense of stability within the family has traditionally been seen as the woman's responsibility. When that stability is shaken, as is common in the world of Paley's women, the women are left feeling vulnerable, like "sitting ducks." Their acceptance of traditional norms has led them to believe that happiness comes from maintaining a marriage and a family. Both Ginny and Faith embrace this notion. When the ideal fails them, then, it is with a sense of shame, as if it is their fault that their lives have not successfully fulfilled the traditional dream.

This expected pattern of living that Paley's women anticipate is learned from the examples of women around

them. The stories show that marriage is the goal for the traditional woman, and that mothers are an especially strong influence in the formation of this expectation in their daughters. Mothers try to instill guilt in daughters who have not married or whose marriages have failed. In "Faith in the Afternoon," Faith's mother reprimands her daughter and tries to school her in how to win her husband back when Faith informs her that "'Ricardo and I aren't going to be together so much any more'":

> "Faithy!" said her mother. "You have a terrible temper. No, no, listen to me. I happens to many people in their lives. He'll be back in a couple of days. After all, the children . . . just say you're sorry. It isn't even a hill of beans. Nonsense. I thought he was much improved when he was here a couple of months ago. Don't give it a thought. Clean up the house, put in a steak. Tell the children be a little quiet, send them next door for the television. He'll be home before you know it. Don't pay attention. Do up your hair something special. Papa would be more than glad to give you a little cash. We're not poverty-stricken, you know. You only have to tell us you want help. Don't worry. He'll walk in the door tomorrow. When you get home, he'll be turning on the hi-fi." (EC 36)

Faith's simple, realistic reply, "'Oh, Mama, Mama, he's tone deaf,'" reflects her recognition of the uselessness of her mother's advice. Mrs. Darwin's disappointment in her daughter is clearly expressed: "'Ai, Faithy, you have to do your life a little better than this'" (EC 36).

The traditional belief that a woman's success depends upon her marriage is also addressed in the very short story, "In This Country, But in Another Language, My Aunt Refuses to Marry the Men Everyone Wants Her To." The aunt, Sonia, is told by her mother, "Sonia. One reason I don't close my eyes at night is I think about you. You know it. What will be? You have no life." This statement, "You have no life," can be explained by the story's title. Sonia has not married; she has not created a life for herself in the mold expected of her. She has, therefore, no life, since becoming a wife and mother constitutes a woman's traditional life role. Sonia, though, remains unaffected by her family's view of her nonconformity. When pressed by her young niece's curiosity--"Sonia, tell me no or yes. Do you have a life?"--Sonia replies, "Ha! . . . If you really want to know, read Dostoevsky" (LSD 108). She may, perhaps, be referring to Dostoevsky's character, Sonia, in Crime and Punishment, whose life and the choices she made also differed from what would normally be socially accepted and approved of. Paley's Sonia does not seem to feel that it is necessary to marry in order to satisfy her

family, although the pressure to do so is strong and clearly expressed.

The ultimate need or desire for a woman to be married is an underlying theme of many of Paley's stories. Her first collection, The Little Disturbances of Man, particularly stresses marriage as a woman's aim. In "Goodbye and Good Luck," Rosie Lieber finally has the chance to resume openly the relationship she and Vlashkin began thirty years before when he phones her and explains he is now "a free man" (LDM 20). She overrides his doubts about marrying, by saying:

> "Volodya Vlashkin . . . when I was young I warmed your cold back many a night, no questions asked. You admit it, I didn't make no demands. I was softhearted. I didn't want to be called Rosie Lieber, a breaker up of homes. But now, Vlashkin, you are a free man. How could you ask me to go with you on trains to stay in strange hotels, among Americans, not your wife? Be ashamed." (LSD 21)

Respectability plays an important role for Paley's women in the decision to marry. Rosie's final word on the subject succinctly states the objective traditionally ingrained in women: "after all I'll have a husband, which, as everybody knows, a woman should have at least one before the end of the story" (LDM 21-22).

The women in "A Woman, Young and Old" also subscribe to the belief that a woman should have a husband. Josephine, the thirteen-year-old daughter in the story, convinces herself, and tries to convince her mother that she is ready to marry, on the grounds that she knows how to keep house and how to have a baby. Although the daughter's plan does not succeed, Marvine, the mother, does re-marry by the end of the story in order to fill the void left in her life by the permanent absence of her deserter husband. Finding a man to replace one who has left is also a suggestion given to Ginny, in "An Interest in Life." Ginny's neighbor, Mrs. Raftery, tells her to "look around for comfort, dear," and points to all of the truckers and longshoremen in the street (LDM 84). Being alone is not a generally acceptable way of life for the women in Paley's earlier stories. Neighbors and family members disapprove of and pity the woman who is without a man, regardless of the circumstances.

As a reflection of the times in which they were written, the stories of Paley's first collection emphasize the prevalent 1950's attitude that a woman's primary role was that of being wife and mother. Although a preference for this traditional lifestyle dominates the characters' attitudes in these stories, not all of the women marry. In "The Contest," a woman's decision as to whether to continue a relationship seems based on certain criteria she has established to determine a man's worth as a marriage

partner. Dotty, a selfishly ambitious young woman, does not specifically address the subject of marriage, yet, she forthrightly chooses to end her relationship with Fred because of his impulsive and noncommittal approach to life. She frankly tells him, "'. . . you're very barbaric. You live at your nerve ends. If you're near a radio, you listen to music; if you're near an open icebox, you stuff yourself; if a girl is within ten feet of you, you have her stripped and on the spit.'" Dotty does not approve of Fred's carefree lifestyle, perceiving in his behavior an inability to take himself, a job, or a relationship "seriously." She is not interested in a long-term relationship with a man unless he shows signs of holding a job and living according to her standards of reliability and practicality. Telling the story from Fred's point of view accentuates his perception of Dotty as a woman seeking a husband: "My impression of women is that they mean well but are driven to an obsessive end by greedy tradition" (LDM 69). His comment not only stresses the strong influence of "tradition" in the formation of a woman's priorities, but also portrays marriage as a situation that will one-sidedly and selfishly serve the woman's purposes. The male character's perspective of the creation of the structured, predictable environment traditionally preferred by the female--"a happy daddy-and-mommy home"--is that it is a goal which becomes an obsession with women, "motivated by the hideous examples of your mother and all the mothers

before her" (LDM 77). Blaming a long line of mothers, a line constituting a tradition, for Dotty's behavior, Fred perceives Dotty as a victim of her upbringing. It is not particularly her fault that she would prefer to see Fred commit himself to a course of action and pursue it responsibly, as she feels a man ought to do. Fred implies that because she is a woman, this expectation is an inherent part of her conditioned response to the world.

IV: Political and Cultural Awareness

In Paley's next collection, Enormous Changes at the Last Minute, published fifteen years later, the emphasis shifts from specific family relationships to a more general inclusion of the world outside the home. Although the women are still very much involved in their children's lives, their involvement is no longer limited to kitchen duty and changing diapers. The children have grown and are now in school; few of the women are married or seeking husbands, and the settings in this second collection move out of apartments and into the broader public arena. We see women in parks, playgrounds, schools, a nursing home, the hospital, and City Hall. They show interest in, and

are affected by, events in their neighborhood and city, as well as in the world beyond. Being actively aware of the problems and changes in the world around them reflects the growing social and political consciousness of Americans in the 1960's and early 1970's.

Acting on their awareness and on their beliefs takes various forms for the women in the stories of Enormous Changes at the Last Minute. Concern for their children's safety prompts a group of women to address the Board of Estimate in City Hall in order to obtain better playground facilities. As the story's title, "Politics," indicates, the attempt to bring about positive change in their neighborhood requires political action. These women, though, draw upon their traditional female background in the presentation of their petition. Instead of standing before the city officials and making a speech, they sing a "lament" which clarifies the need for a high fence to keep the negative influences of "bums," junkies," and "Commies" out of the children's playground (EC 140). Although some of the language used is bluntly vulgar in an effort to portray realistically the dangers currently lurking in the city's park, the appeal is traditionally feminine--a woman's emotional appeal sung "according to some sad melody learned in her mother's kitchen" (EC 139). Courtesy, modesty, and even embarrassment at speaking up in public mark the traditional woman's approach to making her concerns known. Indicative of the historical exclusion of

women from politics and their consequent inexperience with the process, this group of women voices its request upon the recommendation of a man. (The women "had contributed the facts and the tunes, but the idea for that kind of political action came from the clever head of a media man. . ." [EC 139].) Although their presentation is unorthodox, the women succeed in convincing the officials that the fence they ask for is urgently needed. In the spirit of cooperation and caring for the welfare of others, particularly children, that is characteristically associated with women, this group of mothers effectively works toward the improvement of conditions in their neighborhood for the benefit of their children.

The title story to Paley's second collection, "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute," describes a woman whose profession involves helping other people. As a social worker, Alexandra works with troubled children and teenagers, handling adoptions, foster home placements, probations, and drug problems. She is a woman who is keenly aware of cultural differences and the insurmountable obstacles they sometimes place between people. Alexandra is educated, practical-minded, dedicated to her work, and well-informed on the political issues of the day. The narrator calls her "an enemy of generalization," thereby emphasizing her adherence to accuracy, specificity, and individual differences (EC 126). When a fellow patient in her father's hospital room mentions his fear of leprosy

coming to New York City, her immediate reaction, "Leprosy! for God's sakes! . . . Upset yourself with reality for once!" is supported by fact, as "she read aloud from the Times about the bombed, burned lepers' colonies in North Vietnam" (EC 122). Alexandra's pragmatic approach to life is juxtaposed with the dreamy, idealistic delusions of Dennis, the taxicab driver with whom she becomes involved. Their lifestyles and viewpoints are clearly antithetical. He speaks in language which is often obscure, answering Alexandra with cryptic, spontaneous bits of poetry. He lives in a commune and claims he drives a cab merely "to keep on top of the world of illusion" (EC 125). The importance Alexandra places on dealing realistically with the world is evident in her conversations with Dennis. She questions him about his ability to make a living, about the usefulness of his knowledge and where he gets his ideas, and about why certain topics interest him. Although Alexandra "had always had a progressive if sometimes reformist disposition," her base in everyday practicalities prevents her from sharing Dennis' utopian views. Even their sexual relationship is to her a lapse from real life: "in the morning she became interested in reality again. . . " (EC 126; 124). Alexandra's awareness of the vast cultural difference between herself and Dennis necessitates an end to her contact with him when she becomes pregnant. Because productivity and the continuity of her work are foremost in her mind, she uses her

pregnancy as a means of furthering social work by inviting three of her pregnant teenage clients to live with her. By assuming responsibility for her actions and thereby maintaining sole control of her life, Alexandra represents the beginning of the 1970's shift in women's priorities away from dependence upon men and toward a more complete sense of independence.

This pattern of increasing political and cultural awareness in Paley's women is clearly demonstrated by her strongest, most fully developed character, Faith. Faith's cultural education begins with her family. Her parents' Jewish heritage continually reveals itself in their speech and its influence on Faith enriches her attitudes and opinions. References to Jewishness and family history abound in stories such as "Faith in the Afternoon." Where the parents choose to live, what language they speak, and how they feel about the world are affected by the weight of past generations. Faith, for example, was raised in Coney Island, where the family moved because "there was not enough air in Yorkville, where the grandmother had been planted among German Nazis and Irish bums by Faith's grandfather"; years later, Faith's parents persist in their preference for Jewish neighbors by choosing to live in the Children of Judea, a Jewish home for the elderly. Her mother is particularly opinionated in regard to Jewish tradition. Because Faith's grandmother "pretended she was German," Faith's mother, "once safely among her own kind in

Coney Island, learned real Yiddish," and "took an oath to expostulate in Yiddish and grieve only in Yiddish" from then on (EC 33). The narrator captures the essence of the Children of Judea's Jewish atmosphere by describing how two women rolling wool into balls "looked as dedicated as a kibbutz," while "old bearded men . . . the leftover army of the Lord" passed by in the hall (EC 38). Religious references also infiltrate Faith's thinking. She compares a poem her father has written to a "Japanese Psalm of David," and when reminded of her father's lack of good looks, we are told that she "has often thanked the Germ God and the Gene Goddess and The Great Lords of All Nucleic Acid that none of them look like him" (EC 46; 45). Although being Jewish does not seem to be as vital a component of Faith's life as it is of her parents', the religious language, teaching, and issues she has been exposed to penetrate her consciousness and contribute to her perception of the world.

Faith's awareness of politics and a tendency to act on her beliefs also have antecedents in her upbringing. In her short fiction Paley mentions the activism of Faith's parents in the past. They distributed leaflets which "cried out in Yiddish: 'Parents! A little child's voice calls to you, "Papa, Mama, what does it mean to be a Jew in the world today?"'" and others which were intended "to halt the tides of cruel American enterprise with simple socialist sense" (EC 40; 181). Faith has grown up in a

family whose "minds are on matters. Severed Jerusalem; the Second World War still occupies their arguments; peaceful uses of atomic energy (is it necessary altogether?); new little waves of anti-Semitism lap the quiet beaches of their accomplishment" (EC 33-34). Opinions are openly expressed on issues both present and past. As an adult, Faith remembers incidents from her childhood in terms of her parents' politics. She recalls being "a Coney Island Girl Scout against my mother's socialist will," and ponders her mother's motives when, as a baby, Faith was sent on a plane trip alone: "What was my mother trying to prove? That I was independent? That she wasn't the sort to hang on? That in the sensible, socialist, Zionist world of the future, she wouldn't cry at my wedding? 'You're an American child. Free. Independent'" (EC 81; 80).

Being an American is an important concept to Faith's parents. To Faith, life in America means cultural diversity and the opportunity to mingle with people of various nationalities and backgrounds. She particularly appreciates living in New York City for the chance it gives her children to meet kids they might not be in proximity with elsewhere. Faith's political and cultural awareness blends in her description of the scene in the neighborhood park in "Faith in a Tree": "What a place in democratic time! One God, who was King of the Jews, who unravels the stars to this day with little hydrogen explosions, He can look down from His Holy Headquarters and see us all." She

recognizes herself as "the creation of His soft second thought," but also as a product of the materialistic, middle-class American culture in which she is immersed; "owning" two small boys satisfies her "bourgeois feelings" (EC 77; 78; 80). Observing two men listening to classical music spurs Faith to utter a soliloquy of her values and opinions incorporating her knowledge of cultural history:

> Well, I must say when darkness covers the earth and great darkness the people, I will think of you: two men with smart ears. I don't believe civilization can do a lot more than educate a person's senses. If it's truth and honor you want to refine, I think the Jews have some insight. Make no images, imitate no God. After all, in His field, the graphic arts, He is pre-eminent. Then let that One who made the tan deserts and the blue Van Allen Belt and the green mountains of New England be in charge of Beauty, which He obviously understands, and let man, who was full of forgiveness at Jerusalem, and full of survival at Troy, let man be in charge of Good. (EC 89)

Faith finds wonder and beauty in both the man-made and the natural worlds, yet is also cognizant of the dangers present in society. "ROBBING, MURDER, and PUTTING HEROIN IN YOUR BLOOD" are labeled "bad" by her reasoning mind (EC

85). Faith's intelligent and absorbing character keeps her informed of current issues and of the impact of the past on the present, as well as repercussions of both on the future, but she is not yet moved beyond verbal remarks to action. A peaceful demonstration regarding the war in Vietnam begins to elicit a response from her, however, when her oldest son, Richard, becomes involved. His anger at the inert quality of Faith and her friends in standing up to authority provides the catalyst for Faith's re-examination of her priorities:

> And I think that is exactly when events turned me around, changing my hairdo, my job uptown, my style of living and telling. Then I met women and men in different lines of work, whose minds were made up and directed out of that sexy playground by my children's heartfelt brains, I thought more and more and every day about the world. (EC 99-100)

This thoughtfulness uncovers a sense of purpose and a seriousness about the direction of her life, as Faith's attention is drawn by her "children's heartfelt brains" out of her immediate and habitual surroundings and toward an increased participation in the world.

"The Long-Distance Runner," the last story in Enormous Changes at the Last Minute, is a prime example of Faith's widening experience with thinking "more and more and every

day about the world." Her desire to visit "the old neighborhood streets . . . before old age and urban renewal ended them and me," pushes Faith into action (EC 179). She claims, "I had already spent a lot of life lying down or standing and staring. I had decided to run." Returning to the scene of her childhood, Faith encounters culture shock, finding her former neighborhood inhabited by blacks who refer to the past as "the white old days" (EC 181). Throughout the story, Faith is made aware of changes that have taken place since her youth. People used to live in one place until they got married, the work force was more divided along ethnic lines, and, she observes, "there may have been less plastic in the world at that time" (EC 189). Her assumption that "mostly young people these days have traveled in many countries" does not apply to the uneducated black youths she meets on the street who, as one of them tells her, "ain't been nowhere" (EC 183). Reading in the newspaper the achievements of a man, whose wife was once Faith's girlhood best friend, but now is only a woman she no longer knows, causes Faith to consider the separate paths lives can take: "It made me think: a different life" (EC 185).

Differentness and change seem to be emphasized in "The Long-Distance Runner" as Faith is reminded of what was and compares the past to what now is, but basic similarities between women are apparent in her conversations with Mrs. Luddy, the black woman who now occupies the apartment which

Faith used to call home. Both women value the memory of their mothers, reminiscing on the ways they, the mothers, expressed themselves through embroidery and storytelling. Faith and Mrs. Luddy share views on men, too, and on a woman's need for a man. Even after staying about three weeks with Mrs. Luddy in the apartment, Faith is reluctant to leave this site of her growing up years. The concepts of safety and home are synonymous to her and she admits, "Despite my wide geographical love of mankind, I would be attacked by local fears . . ." at the thought of stepping outside the door. Venturing into her old neighborhood not only renews Faith's acquaintance with the location of her past but also deepens her understanding of the significance of memories: "I felt a strong obligation as though remembering was in charge of the existence of the past. This is not so" (EC 188;186). She realizes that change is a cultural inevitability and that her obligatory feelings may be more sentimental than realistic. Summarizing her experience in third person shows Faith's objectivity toward what has happened:

> It isn't usually so simple. Have you known it to happen much nowadays? 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. (EC 198)

Faith's rediscovery of her past teaches and humbles her, sharpening her awareness of the interrelatedness of the past, present and future.

In Later the Same Day, published in 1985, Faith's awareness of societal issues and problems expands into activism. She, as well as the other major women characters in this third collection, is concerned about political and cultural issues in both the United States and other countries, and takes an active role in pursuing her interests. In "Listening" she attends peace meetings and distributes leaflets which "cried out, U.S. Honor the Geneva Agreements," with the feeling that if these agreements are not kept, "Well, then, sadness, Southeast Asian Sadness, U.S. sadness, all-nation sadness." Faith's convictions regarding war are strong. Knowing "that 'soldier' is what a million boys have been forced to be in every single one of a hundred generations" stirs Faith's consciousness, and causes her to refer to a young man in uniform as an "innocent instrument of evil" (LSD 199; 200). From her perspective of age and experience, Faith believes that she, and other adults like her, have a duty "to encourage the young whom we have, after all, brought into the world--they must not be abandoned." Her work promoting peace, and her interest in environmental problems-- ("because of this planet, which is slipping away from us in poisonous disgust, I'm hardly ever home," she says after a

meeting)--coincide with Faith's fervent and optimistic goal of providing help and encouragement to young people. She insists on the value of "pointing out simple and worthwhile sights" of nature and appreciating the variations in color and type of people populating "our own beloved city," as ways of emphasizing "what is good or beautiful so as not to have a gloomy face when you meet some youngster who has begun to guess" (LSD 204; 209; 204). In "The Expensive Moment" she remembers "half a generation ago" when "she and her friends had walked round and round the draft boards with signs that read, 'I COUNSEL DRAFT REFUSAL.'" As a mother, her apprehension of "the expensive moment," "a moment in history . . . when everyone his age is called but just a few are chosen," poignantly underlines her concern for children, particularly her own sons, in this problematic world. Faith realizes that the young, ("wild with a dream of wildness"), are particularly susceptible to impetuosity, confusion, rebelliousness, and disillusionment in their response to society (LSD 186; 187; 182). Wanting to instill hope in the young and to provide a safer world for their futures motivates Faith to act on her awareness of current issues.

Faith assumes a much more active role in society in the stories in Later the Same Day. In earlier stories, Faith's time was spent raising her children, visiting her aging parents, and pondering the events going on around her. She was an observer of the outside world, involved in

and kept busy with the lives of her family and friends. Now, immediate family concerns are no longer urgent. Serious problems and issues that affect not only herself and her grown children, but also the entire human family, gain her attention. Faith's intellectual awareness transforms into action, as she directs her energy toward changing minds and attempting to improve living conditions in society. Becoming a participant in the process of change expands the limits of her former life, yet a close alignment can be seen between Faith's past and present priorities. Traditional areas of female concern--caring, preserving, encouraging, healing, and appreciating beauty--form the backdrop for Faith's modern activism. Because of the strong influence of her traditional background, which has infused Faith with values stressing the preservation and enhancement of life, the causes she supports also promote quality of life. Her work endorsing peace, with particular concern for peace in Southeast Asia, and her mention of protesting the draft "half a generation ago" distinctly indicate that Faith is referring to the Vietnam War. Paley's third collection of stories clearly reflects events and changes occurring during the time frame of the 1970's and early 1980's. The activities of her women characters, represented especially by Faith, combine the influential traditional female heritage of the past with an assertiveness that leads the women to become increasingly involved in their changing society.

Faith's new social awareness is not limited to the political arena. In the later stories she also explores topics ranging from boycotts and demonstrations to the use of language, Chinese culture, aging, and racism. In a variety of ordinary, everyday settings, and with friends and acquaintances both male and female, Faith openly expresses her opinions, guided by self-confidence and an informed intelligence. "The Story Hearer" contains a number of instances in which Faith's everyday encounters stimulate critical thinking and discussion. Striking up a conversation in the grocer's, she talks about the lettuce boycott, "the silk-stocking boycott which coincided with the Japanese devastation of Manchuria and the disappearance of the Sixth Avenue El into Japanese factory furnaces," and complains to her friend, Jim, of his handling of a recent demonstration in which she was involved. "I do not believe in the effectiveness of the way that you had the Vietnamese screaming at our last demonstration. I don't think the meaning of our struggle has anything to do with all that racket" (LSD 135; 136). Although Paley does not detail the exact nature of this "struggle," Faith's avid devotion to it is clear. Becoming involved in cultural issues is a direct result of Faith's increasing concern for problems that affect her, and is not merely involvement for the sake of involvement.

Simply acting on one's beliefs is not enough for Faith; the way in which action is taken must effectively

and accurately relate to the intended purpose. Being a stickler for accuracy is also obvious in Faith's alertness to the use of language. When Jim refers to Artaud in connection with the demonstration, saying, "I believe that the theater is the handmaiden of the revolution," she corrects his terminology by substituting "valet" for "handmaiden." She objects to the butcher addressing her as "young lady," explaining to her friend, Jack, "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?" Faith's semantic corrections reveal a heightened sense of the meaning of femaleness. Aging and an acute awareness of the differences between the young and the old permeate Faith's consciousness. Her sensitivity to inappropriate or sexist language usage marks her commitment to cultural individuality, as well as underlining the importance Faith places on language as a potentially accurate means of expression. Creating euphemisms for Defense Department operations, the job of another man she speaks to in the grocery store, contrasts ironically with Faith's emphasis on using language in its proper context. She perceives this phenomenon of finding words to mask reality--instead of to clarify or to reveal the truth--as "the disease" (LSD 136; 136-7; 139).

Faith's curiosity about the ideas of people from other countries compels her in "The Expensive Moment" to seek information from friends who have attended a cultural event featuring Chinese artists and writers. She shows no interest in Nick's superficial accounts of what the Chinese people looked like, but instead, repeatedly asks him to tell her what they said. Finally, Faith implores her friend, Ruthy, "please tell me what they said." An opportunity to discover firsthand what someone from another culture thinks arises when Faith encounters a Chinese woman who shares her desire to know how other people live. Regardless of their different backgrounds and the fact that the Chinese woman had "lived a life beyond foreignness and had experienced extreme history," the two women transcend cultural differences in their discussion of topics that are of universal concern to women (LSD 191; 192). They agree on the way their feelings for men and children shift over time, and although both women's children are "nearly grown," they continue to express concern for the way children are raised. The Chinese woman's question, "What is the best way to help them in the real world?" and her desire for children "to take care of themselves wisely," mirror Faith's belief in providing help, encouragement, and hope to young people (LSD 195).

In the story, "Zagrowsky Tells," racial differences within her own culture highlight Faith's conversation with Iz Zagrowsky, the man who used to own the local pharmacy.

Faith remembers Zagrowsky's behavior and remarks toward certain customers of his in the past as racially biased, but he, being white and Jewish, considers his feelings about blacks and mixed races as merely a "matter of taste." Though the story is told from Zagrowsky's point of view, the dialogue and descriptions of Faith's reactions present a clear picture of her assertive personality. She remains adamant in her conviction that she and her friends were right to have picketed outside his place of business with signs that read "ZAGROWSKY IS A RACIST. YEARS AFTER ROSA PARKS, ZAGROWSKY REFUSES TO SERVE BLACKS." It is, therefore, a surprise to her to see him sitting with a black child when she approaches him in the park. Suspending disbelief, Faith, nonetheless, perseveres in learning the story of this child, Zagrowsky's grandson. As is characteristic of the traditional woman, she shows compassion for the plight of Zagrowsky's mentally ill daughter; but also, in her realistic approach to a changing society, Faith expresses concern for the black child growing up in a predominantly white world. She feels, "he should have friends his own color, he shouldn't have the burden of being the only one in school" (LSD 165; 157; 172). Caring about the welfare of others, especially children, typifies the traditionally female sense of responsibility for the quality of human life that Paley's women exhibit.

Faith's firm belief in treating people with fairness and respect applies not only to race, but also to sex. She objects to sexist or derogatory comments made by Zagrowsky toward women, and explains why the women tolerated his behavior in the past by saying, "They only put up with it because it wasn't time yet in history to holler." Zagrowsky is critical of the new attitude of women. In the old days, he recalls, "the women always answered you in a pleasant way, not afraid to smile" (LSD 165; 156). He now sees Faith as representative of the modern woman. He refers to "her bossy face," calls her "this lady Queen of Right," and figures "she must be a woman's libber," judging from her reaction to his remarks (LSD 156; 164; 160). "Zagrowsky Tells" not only discloses Faith's aversion to racism and sexism but also reveals male reaction to the increasingly more active and outspoken role undertaken by Paley's women in her later stories.

V: Restlessness and Discontent

Throughout Paley's stories an undercurrent of restlessness and discontent permeates the lives of her women characters. Dissatisfaction with current conditions in the world around them is manifest in the women's organized attempts at instigating change. But, even when they are not working for one cause or another, a deep and pervasive sense of discontent constantly affects the women's conversations, thoughts and views toward life. They question life as they know it, express hope and concern for their children's futures, and regret the passing of time and the loss of youth that it brings. Paley's women recognize as injustices many of the realities of their everyday lives. Tending not to accept the status quo, they instead envision more desirable alternatives by continuing to remember the past and by reminding themselves of their ideals and hopes for the future.

Based on their personal experiences, some of Paley's women are troubled by the search for reasons to explain life's happenings and why people do the things they do. In "Distance," Dolly's reflections on the past conclude with her questioning the meaning behind what she has known and observed: "What the devil is it all about, the noisiness and the speediness, when it's no distance at all?" Making

sense of her son's, her husband's, and her former boyfriend's behavior and motives seems to baffle her as she contemplates them in retrospect. Having temporarily forgotten her own restless nature when young, ("Why I'd put my wildness up against any wildness of present day," she later declares), and contrary to her normally matter-of-fact, "live and let live" attitude, Dolly has discouraged her son from marrying Ginny years ago; now, aware of his continuing attraction for, and habit of visiting, Ginny, she wonders "how come John had to put all them courtesy calls into Margaret on his lifelong trip to Ginny?" (EC 26; 19; 17; 26). Dolly's perplexity in trying to understand life leaves her ultimately with unanswered questions.

Similarly, Ann has no answers when asked, in "Friends," how her son's problems may have started: "Nobody knows, nobody knows anything. Why? Where? Everybody has an idea, theories, and writes articles. Nobody knows." Unlike Dolly, though, Ann is not puzzled by life's uncertainties; she accepts the inevitability of negative occurrences with an all-encompassing pessimism. Her doomsday outlook is apparent in such remarks as, "in two years we'll all be dead." Faith describes Ann's trait of responding pessimistically to the subjects, ideas, and circumstances of life that are broached in her presence as "these constrictions of her spirit" (LSD 85; 84; 82). A lack of answers, as well as an overwhelming sense of

unfairness, fosters in Ann an attitude toward life that is grounded in negativity.

Cassie in "Listening" is another discontented Paley character. She accuses Faith of telling "everybody's story but mine." Cassie recognizes the differentness of her lesbian lifestyle from Faith's usual emphasis on, and interest in, relationships between men and women. Nevertheless, she demands acknowledgement of her existence as an individual and as one of Faith's friends: "Where is my life? . . . where the hell is my woman and woman, woman-loving life in all this? . . . why have you left me out of everybody's life?" (LSD 210). In expressing her vehement disapproval of Faith's definition of "everyday life," Cassie seeks and will accept no apology from her friend; she instead issues a warning to underline the gravity of what she considers an unjust and intolerable offense--that of defining ordinary life from only one perspective.

Cassie's anger hints at the importance of personal satisfaction in the lives of Paley's women. Glamour, excitement, or power do not exist in the women's daily lives. Being stuck in the reality of ordinariness, but faithful to their ideals of the possibility of change and amelioration, Paley's women dream of, wish for, explore, or strive for improvements in the patterns of their lives. In several stories Faith's desire for something different in her life is clearly indicated. In "The Story Hearer" she hypothetically ponders, "Don't you wish you could rise

powerfully above your time and name?" but is well aware of the reality that "I am stuck here among my own ripples and tides" (LSD 140). In "The Expensive Moment" she wishes for travel as a means of escape from everyday life: "it was travel she longed for--somewhere else--the sexiness of the unknown parts of far imaginable places" (LSD 190). Even making love with someone different presents a way of altering the sameness of her daily routine, though "its difference lay only in difference." Faith rationalizes her need for this change by saying, "Of course, if one is living a whole life in passionate affection with another, this differentness on occasional afternoons is often enough" (LSD 184). Believing in the possibility of a better life, and claiming to be an idealist, Faith tells her father, in "Dreamer in a Dead Language," "Somewhere for me perfection is flowering" (LSD 31). This idealistic vision is echoed by the unnamed main character of Paley's story "Wants":

> I want, for instance, to be a different person. I want to be the woman who brings these two books back in two weeks. I want to be the effective citizen who changes the school system and addresses the Board of Estimate on the troubles of this dear urban center.
>
> I had promised my children to end the war before they grew up.

> I wanted to have been married forever to one person, my ex-husband or my present one. (EC 5)

Drawing from both hindsight and foresight in the compilation of her list, this woman's "wants" reflect her good intentions for the future, as well as the hopes she had in the past. Not settling for being content with themselves or with their lives as they are, Paley's women continually express the desire for something better or different to enrich, or simply to instill variety in, their ordinary days.

An acute sense of dissatisfaction with the traditional roles of women in society provides cause for concern and restlessness for several of Paley's women. In "Dreamer in a Dead Language" Faith feels trapped by responsibility when her son suggests she should get her parents out of the nursing home; to her question "Why is everything my responsibility?" his simple reply, "It just is," makes her want to scream (LSD 36). In "Lavinia: An Old Story," Lavinia's mother knows that the traditional lot of women, that of raising children, is a heavy and inescapable burden: "She got that responsibility on her soul forever" (LSD 63). As a young girl, she had decided against following that path for her own life, after witnessing how her mother was defiled "by leaning on every will and whim of Pa's." Instead she created goals for herself: "Now I aim high. To be a teacher and purchase my own grits and not depend on any man" (LSD 65). Though her dream of

living independently dissolves with the reality of marriage and childbearing, Mrs. Grimble maintains her ideals by hoping for a better life for her daughter, Lavinia. Believing in the promise and potential Lavinia shows to be "something great and have a name," this mother expresses bitter disappointment when she ultimately sees that her daughter's life has turned out just like hers, "busy and broad" with children and chores: "I cry out loud as my throat was made to do, Damn you Lavinia--for my heart is busted in a minute--damn you, Lavinia, ain't nothing gonna come of you neither" (LSD 67; 68). Discontent with women's roles applies not only to their traditional position within the family, but also to the status of women within societal institutions. In "The Expensive Moment," Ruth and Faith discuss the meaninglessness of the presence of a few token women in government as effective representation for all women. Faith points out that if you mention the lack of women in positions of authority, "or if you say the word 'patriarchy,' someone always says, Yeah? look at Margaret Thatcher, or look at Golda Meir" in defense (LSD 189). Faith's tone implies discontent with this form of undercompensation. In "Ruthy and Edie," Ruth understands, even as a young girl, that there are limited opportunities for women in "the real world of boys." She prefers the active play of boys and the stories of bravery that involve men, showing little interest in a traditional female lifestyle at her young age. Years later, when friends

gather for Ruth's fiftieth birthday, we see a woman who has apparently lived her life immersed in home and family, yet, wears "a look of worry beyond household affairs" (LSD 115; 119). This sign of discontent indicates a general sense of dissatisfaction with life as it is, that is common to Paley's women.

One of the main reasons for their discontent centers on their concern for children. When Faith complains in "Ruthy and Edie" about the city because it "looks like a toxic waste dump," Edie focuses on the streets, where she says kids are "dumped, plain dumped" (LSD 122). Though unmarried and with no children of her own, Edie's experience as a schoolteacher puts her in daily contact with children she perceives as victims of the urban environment. In "Friends," Faith recalls a time when she participated in efforts to help some of the kids in school: "Our P.T.A. had decided to offer some one-to-one tutorial help for the Spanish kids, who were stuck in crowded classrooms with exhausted teachers among little middle-class achievers" (LSD 77). Wanting to give children a fairer chance in the world motivates Paley's women to take an active role in seeing changes or improvements made in the educational process.

Learning to accept their own loss of youth as they age proves to be a challenge for Paley's women. Dolly in "Distance" remembers her younger days with nostalgia: "I was the lady who appreciated youth. Yes, all that happy

time, I was not like some. It did not go by me like a flitting dream" (EC 15). As an older woman, she now looks back on, and describes, the past as if she regrets having left it, and her younger self, behind:

> Still, it is like a long hopeless homesickness my missing those young days. To me, they're like my own place that I have gone away from forever, and I have lived all the time since among great pleasures but in a foreign town. Well, O.K. Farewell, certain years. (EC 15)

Dolly's question, "Is there satisfaction anywhere in getting old?" also reflects Faith's difficulty in contending with age (EC 24). In both "The Story Hearer" and "Listening," Faith explores the possibility of having another child, even though she is past her childbearing years. Not content with accepting the physical reality, she consults the Old Testament "to read the story of Abraham and Sarah with interlinear intelligence" (LSD 144). Faith's search for corroboration in the story of a miracle reveals her determined, though wishful, desire to find hope in the midst of unrelenting facts. Suggesting that "perhaps you only wish that you were young again," Jack identifies the probable source of Faith's, and Paley's other women's, dissatisfaction in growing old (LSD 203). Faith is aware of the general assumption that "People do want to be young and beautiful," as she states in

"Friends." She refers to aging as "our coming eviction, first from liveliness, then from life," and to the typical response to aging as "that deep well of melancholy." Instead of succumbing to the sadness and self-pity associated with growing old, Faith prescribes a solution to counteract the tendency to dwell negatively on one's mortality: "You grab at roots of the littlest future, sometimes just stubs of conversation" (LSD 83). Despite, or because of, their discontent with the way things are in the world and in their lives, Paley's women look to the future for possibilities of hope and change. Not being satisfied with their own lives, with traditional life patterns, or with the world as it affects the next generation, they are inspired to think of, and to work toward, creating a better world.

VI: Conclusion

> If only a topographer in a helicopter
> would pass over my shadow
> I might be imposed forever
> on the maps of this city
>
> Grace Paley[2]

Grace Paley's "great gift," writes Granville Hicks, "is for making something remarkable out of the commonplace" (29). Hick's remark is representative of the favorable critical reception that has been given to Paley's short fiction. Walter Clemons describes her fictional world as "Solid and vital . . . and dense with life." William Logan praises Paley "as one of the premier auditors of city life, a sympathetic and sane observer of a milieu other writers often treat as alienated or deranged" (44). She is "urban to an unusual degree," writes Anne Tyler, "cataloguing both the horrors and the surprising pockets of green in her native New York City" (38). The stories in Paley's last collection, Later the Same Day, have been characterized by Clara Park as "heirlooms of our moment, beautiful, permanently made things." She is "better than anybody

[2] Grace Paley's only collection of poems, Leaning Forward, was published in 1985. This epigraph is from her poem entitled "At the Battery."

we've got," declares Park. "She has been for years and years. . ." (488).

There are voices of critical dissent, too, mainly protesting Paley's inclusion of her political concerns in the stories. Adam Mars-Jones takes Paley to task for having Faith pursue "incompatible interests" which are not successfully reconciled. And Carol Iannone believes that "the influence her politics has had on her work . . . shows how a writer of some ability can founder on the shoals of ideology" (57). The result, Iannone declares, is that "Paley exhibits a grim determinism about life that is the opposite of hope" (58).

The dissenters, however, are in the minority and their views are contradicted by other critics. Laura Shapiro, for example, believes Paley is "most successful when . . . her politics emerge through her characters." And Burton Bendow finds Paley taking "a firm stand against gloom," calling her "a butterfly in winter, a dispenser of sweetness and light in an age that has little use for these commodities" (597). Other critics are struck by the emphasis that she places on the family and women's values. Robert Towers links Paley's success as a short story writer to "her oblique and humorous approach to tumultuous family dramas," and her "tough-minded and compassionate" portrayal of urban women (27). Clara Park finds Paley unique in that she "writes so centrally about friendship" (484). Park particularly mentions Paley's emphasis on "the untidy world

of women" and the sense of community that "the web . . . of women's values" creates (486). "She possesses, among female writers," declares Isa Kapp, "perhaps the strongest sense of fraternity with her own gender" (17). Paley adds something new and unusual to literature, Kathleen Hulley believes, by viewing "'ordinary life'" from the perspective of the "vision of the mother" (6).

What is remarkable in Grace Paley's fiction, I believe, is her focus on the lives of ordinary women. Her fascination with the ordinary is succinctly expressed in Paley's own words: "how daily life is lived is a mystery to me" (Lidoff 13). Her short stories may be read as various attempts to solve the daily and ordinary mystery of life. Moreover, her treatment of the lives of ordinary women is essentially positive and optimistic. Concentrating on the "open possibilities" of life, Paley shows women who, in spite of numerous problems and dissatisfactions, have not lost hope or their belief that they can produce change. Her characters resist succumbing to despair, even when the circumstances of their lives prove adverse or discouraging. Finding support in each other, Paley's women value their friendships and their common bonds as mothers. Though oriented toward a traditional family life, these women, more often than not, are raising their children alone, coping with the realities of city life, and increasingly focusing their attentions and energies on issues outside their own homes and

families. They seldom express regrets, resentment, or feelings of oppression in their roles as women; instead, their primary concern is for their children and for societal improvements and changes of attitude that can positively affect future generations. Little wonder, then, that Paley's stories are typically open-ended. Her "belief in the possibilities of change," declares one critic, "clashes with the literary convention of closure" (Gelfant 280).

Unlike the women in the writings of Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing, Paley's women do not seek greater individuality or solitude for themselves. They do feel the constraints and responsibilities of motherhood, but not as undesirable burdens, as illustrated by Faith in "A Subject of Childhood":

> I held him so and rocked him. I cradled him. I closed my eyes and leaned on his dark head. But the sun in its course emerged from among the water towers of downtown office buildings and suddenly shone white and bright on me. Then through the short fat fingers of my son, interred forever, like a black and white barred king in Alcatraz, my heart lit up in stripes. (LDM 145)

Faith's appreciation of, and closeness to, her children reveals her pride in being a mother, as well as the importance of this role in her life. Paley, herself

married and with young children in the 1950's, remembers her mother as having "great hopes" for her and being "disgusted" with her desire at the time to be married and have kids (Smith 71). Like the women in her stories, she expresses no regrets for having chosen motherhood, rather than a career: "I just feel lucky," she declares, "that I didn't grow up in a generation where it was stylish not to" (Lidoff 19).

"American women writers," observes Anne Mickelson, "have always been concerned with the life of women":

> There are Sarah Orne Jewett's penetrating studies not only of provincial life, but of a woman physician; Kate Chopin's and Willa Cather's sexual women; Anne Douglas Sedgwick's probing into the animosity between mother and daughter; Mary Wilkins Freeman's compassionate treatment of the poor woman who accepts her ugly destiny with dignity; Gertrude Stein's portrayal of three women, notably "Melanctha," and many, many others. (3)

But Paley's emphasis on telling the stories of ordinary women's lives relates more closely, I believe, to the work of some of her contemporaries. Tillie Olsen and Alice Walker, for instance, like Paley, write about women and the significance of motherhood in their lives. Their stories describe everyday events and female concerns, using the

idiomatic language appropriate to their characters' lives and backgrounds. They, too, seem to be seeking to "illuminate what is hidden," as Paley has phrased her own purpose in writing. Like Grace Paley, they, too, are discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary lives of women.

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THE WORLD OF GRACE PALEY'S SHORT STORIES: TRADITIONAL WOMEN IN A CHANGING AMERICA

by

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Grace Paley's three collections of short stories, The Little Disturbances of Man (1959), Enormous Changes at the Last Minute (1974), and Later the Same Day (1985), reflect her interest in the ordinary lives of women. Commonalities between Paley's life and her writing abound in the subject matter and in the emphases of her stories. Her women characters are for the most part "traditional" women. Living in New York City, an urban environment conducive to daily interaction between women, they find their identity through motherhood and through the bonds of friendship formed with other women. The emphasis in their upbringing on a traditional family life, which creates expectations of marriage and children, influences them to pursue this traditional pattern for their lives. Often the ideal fails them, and they must cope with raising their children alone. Paley's women, however, generally resist succumbing to despair. They are, with few exceptions, portrayed as strong, resourceful, independent women who maintain their hopes for the future and rely on the continuity of their female friendships for support. They take pride in motherhood and are devoted to their children. Paley's women discover a changing postwar world, and show an increasing awareness of political and cultural issues as the stories progress through time. Their involvements in societal issues often emanate from a concern for children. Faith, a dominant, recurring character in Paley's short fiction, represents Paley's optimistic viewpoint that women

can be effective in working toward positive change. All of Paley's women, however, exhibit some feelings of restlessness and discontent with the world as it is; they wonder about, discuss, and protest community and world-wide events, and express dissatisfaction with the everyday processes of their lives. Reflective of the times in which they were written, Grace Paley's earlier stories emphasize the prevalent 1950's attitude that a woman's primary role is that of wife and mother, while her later stories stress the growing social and political consciousness of Americans in the 1960's and 1970's.