

ATTACHMENT, ABANDONMENT,
AND RECONCILIATION:

A Psychoanalytic Review of
Susan Mailer's Memoir as *Bildungsroman*

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In Another Place With and Without My Father, Norman Mailer

By Susan Mailer

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The first requisite for the use of a theory is proper conditions for observation. The most important of these is psycho-analysis of the observer to ensure that he [or she] has reduced to a minimum his [or her] own inner tensions and resistances which otherwise obstruct his [or her] view of facts by making correlation by conscious and unconscious impossible.

—W. R. Bion, *Learning from Experience* (86)

I

The first line of Susan Mailer's memoir *In Another Place With and Without My Father*, Norman Mailer reads, "MY EARLIEST MEMORY IS IN MY BELLY" (3). This concise, aptly capitalized, one-line paragraph brings together memory and belly. This association casts a psychosomatic light on the author's entire memoir, in which the enigma of the psychosomatic phenomena prevails. The exceptional coherence and intelligibility of the line

owes much to author's eleven years of being in psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic training at Psychanalytic Institute in Santiago, Chile, and finally her experiences as a practicing psychoanalyst.

Accordingly, I would state this single one-line sentence gives birth to a theoretically open-ended and probing ensemble of arrangements of words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters as the author's memoir. From my perspective, in due course this extraordinary initial sentence will make manifest the capacity of growing and intuitively recreating narrative of vestiges of remembrance of things past. Then at a certain point in the narrative, lo and behold, it offers the reader formidable dialectical syntheses of the emotional and intuitive on the one hand and the theoretical and conceptual on the other.

Susan Mailer rightly foresees that her initial one-line paragraph's brevity and acuity compel the reader to respond to it by a sort of penetrating *explication de text* (textual clarification), as the French Formalist literary criticism refers to it. In this case, a textual clarification is even more germane because she has a psychoanalytic background. From her specialized viewpoint, the paragraph legitimately demands a psychoanalytic textual explication. Thus, in an understated, succinct, and yet plurisignificant line, the author produces her own concise textual clarification. She discloses the first essential element at the heart of her memoir and leaves the rest to interpretive reader response activities. All the same, after the reader absorbs the hidden import of the sparse first line, more pivotal, informative details burst forth. The author writes:

While I was growing up, I loved to look at our family albums. Among the many photos was a small square, black and white image of me, at not quite two years old, with my mother. Every time I saw it, I got a fluttering, butterflies-in-my-belly sensation which made me turn the page as fast as I could. Sometimes, I'd even skip that page, anxiously trying to avoid the butterfly effect. (*In Another Place* 3)

The above paragraph makes available to the reader a particular diagnosis of various psychological, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the narrative of entire life. Without any undue drama, she deftly makes statements of foundational import of a specific picture, or better, a snapshot taken when

she was an infant. This snapshot uncannily snatches, records, and integrates infantile experiences of attachment and abandonment, union and separation, and eventually unavoidable and dreadful anxiety. Yet, mysteriously, for me it consists of what one might call a psychological situation report.

As the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Perhaps in this case, one might say thousands of words, because of its mnemonic overtones and connotations in a long memoir. This picture simultaneously evokes an early traumatic event and its attendant psychosomatic lived experiences as *visceral* emotional responses—persisting ones at that. The author chooses the noun “belly” and “memory” intentionally and adroitly. The reference anticipates and receives an immediate comprehension and empathetic reader responses.

To put it somewhat differently, this visceral retention of a psychic trauma becomes a stress-inducing psychosomatic problem for Susan Mailer. The ordeal affects her belly with distressing sensations. As we know, in demotic language, belly is a plurisignificant word. It implies guts, stomach, bowels, viscera, inner recesses, core, and depths—just to mention a few references. Viewed as a whole, that accumulation of significations has a claim on its own ontology, metaphysics and psychosomatics as the Ur seat of mind-body associations and sensations.

One can be certain that the author is acutely aware of the symbolic and metaphoric implications of “belly” as a substantive, which her father Norman Mailer also recognized as noteworthy and wrote about at some length in his essay “The Metaphysics of the Belly.” So belly incorporates a well-integrated *corpus* of intuitive, instinctual, and primal matters. Consequently, every time the author looks at this snapshot of herself with her mother, it induces anew the psychosomatic butterfly sensations in her belly.

Hence, the reader fully recognizes the seriousness of this specific picture, which serves as *aides-mémoires* (recollection aids) in the narrative of remembrances that ensue. This ordinary snapshot in plain black and white is a visually simple and plain photographic image. Just the same, it documents an event in its precise immediate fleeting spacetime dimensions. For the author, however, it would prove to be an intricate traumatic moment in her ultrasensitive infantile stage of life. This moment holds its own prominent psycho-ontological implications in and by extension her memoir. Only partially repressed and tangentially brushing against her unconscious, the harsh

experience of abandonment registers itself in her psyche as an ineradicable separation as early sorrow.

By capturing a fleeting troublesome moment in her life as an infant, the snapshot marks the original site of the author's generalized lifelong apprehension of human reality—in the triple significations of the substantive as anxiety, grasping, and latent realization. Her affective response to the snapshot experience leaves her with an irreducible quotient of unease in her early relationship with her mother, Bea (Beatrice Silverman) and inevitably with her father. She writes, "What had my mother been thinking when she left me for three months with my [paternal] Grandma Fanny? Why hadn't my father prevented her departure, or at least mine?" (*In Another Place* 228). Consequently, all such questions initiate intuitive generative narratives of their own, which the author deftly develops them into her exceedingly readable memoir of learning experiences. The German language uses the term *Bildungsroman* for such a narrative of a person's overall educational lived experiences.

Another consequential snapshot juxtaposes itself on the troublesome one that I have already discussed. This one proceeds the other on the same page and shows the author as an infant with her Grandma Fanny (*In Another Place* 6). It appears on the same page and precedes the one associated with the author's distressing memory, both in the memoir and in its spacetime actuality. In contrast to the other snapshot, this discloses a moment of veritable happiness in the eighteen-month-old Susan's life.

The two radically divergent snapshots sketch out the author's primal discovery of happiness as wellbeing in attachment, proximity and its antithesis as the problematics of abandonment and separation. Subsequently, her memoir unfolds as a dialectical series of syntheses between disappointments and fulfilments, separations and attachments. From this dialectical perspective, I would propose to take a closer analytical look still at these two originary opposing snapshots. Juxtaposed, I find that these antithetical snapshots put in motion the author's intriguing voyage of self-discovery as a constellation of intentional, subjective-objective lived experiences. Her analysis later makes this journey amply conscious. This internal-external voyage contributes veritable insights to the author's memoir. It provides her and the reader with sensitivities required for appreciation of radical changes and challenges, which a gutsy life of adventures necessitate.

As I have already indicated, the first snapshot discloses a glimpse of the

author's surrogate mother and primary care-giver, her Grandma Fanny, Norman Mailer's mother. She impresses the reader as a caring substitute mother holding her granddaughter with a captivated smile. She affectionately holds Susan aloft in her arms without restricting her in anyway. Susan also seems to be equally in a kind of infantile bliss. She appears to be nearly a natural part of her grandmother's body. Fanny has that primordial luminous maternal smile on her face, naturally exuding love, care, and concern. Thus, the snapshot impresses the reader that Fanny's body as a substitute mother personifies the body of the mother of infancy in total attunement. Her body is replete with the primeval role Freudian psychoanalysis assigns to it as the enraptured and enrapturing center of the infant's extraordinary universe.

One can say that Fanny's body mediates between Susan and the surrounding world they both inhabit, whole and entire. She does so through recreation of unconscious intimations of transcendent consciousness as subjectivity whose object will cover all modes of future human relationships. It is so since the body of the mother of infancy is not merely another body among others. From the moment of conception on, there is an ineradicable oneness between the infant and the biological mother of infancy, whose traces outlast life's vicissitudes. Yet under certain disruptive circumstances, the infant also possesses a natural flexibility to transfer this original corporeal and affective emotion to a surrogate mother or father.

A bright ambient familial light permeates this snapshot of infant Susan Mailer and her "Grandma," where all appears idyllic and ideal, a transitory moment in the "Land of Milk and Honey," the Abrahamic, "Promised Land." Their image hints at an early narrative of veritable prenatal and infantile union, demarcating a safe and stress free psychosocial zone of human oneness—a good place to be even for an evanescent moment of a clicking of the camera's shutter. Accordingly, everything in this image conspires to communicate to the reader-viewer a profound experience of childhood euphoria. The snapshot fully depicts an early but profound affective learning experience of attachment, bonding, and union. I would also suggest that is what the author also intends the snapshot will communicate to do reader. It does so, properly and well.

Thus, for infant Susan her Grandma Fanny's body as substitute mother of infancy characterizes the embodiment of primal lifelong desire for unifying and fulfilling affective negotiations with others and the enviroing world. I would suggest that Fanny is the first educator in her granddaugh-

ter's lifetime patterns of affective, spiritual, and even political and professional education. I will go even as far as saying that her relationship with her Granma Fanny offers her a vibrant model of love of learning from lived experience. Love of experiential knowledge or epistemophilia emerges from intimate infantile discovery of the mother's body. In my opinion, such love of knowledge precedes sexual awareness and later joins with it as other corporeal discoveries. As such, I would say that it gains an authentic place in the author's *Weltanschauung*, a worldview with all of its unending epistemological and heuristic intimations. In due course, the mnemonic associations of her grandmother literally holding Susan on her bosom on a bright sunny summer day serves as a psychological working model for the author who unconditionally loves each of her two daughters and son. Her embodied childhood memories preserved by a snapshot serve as the avatar of all that is meaningful, unifying, and cheering in her memoir.

Later on the same day, however, the second snapshot offers a glimpse of Susan with her biological mother, Bea. She has just arrived to take Susan to live with her in Mexico, where she lives since her divorce from Norman Mailer. At the time, she lives with her Mexican companion and later husband Salvador Sanchez (AKA Chavo). With the passage of time, as mentioned earlier, this snapshot becomes psychosomatically problematic for the author and causes her the "butterfly effect" in her belly, which she describes so effectively in the seminal first paragraph of her memoir.

To the reader's inquisitive eye, what emanates from the photographic image is noticeably a split-second of bewilderment for the infant Susan. The snapshot records for years to come a moment of awkwardness between mother and her infant daughter after three months of separation. Their get-together is unwieldy at best and veritably confusing. Both mother and child give the impression of being ill at ease with one another. It is nearly imperceptible, which makes it at once troubling and signifying.

Unlike the first image, in this second snapshot of the day Susan's cheerful smile is gone. She seems to impart a twinge of infantile incomprehension and confusion, gently pushing her mother away. Bea also appears to be maladroit in managing to hold her daughter in her arms. She lacks the kind of attachment, affection, and intimacy Fanny exhibits so naturally and joyously in the preceding snapshot. The photo records a piercing moment of infantile separation and loss. The butterfly sensations Susan later experiences by looking at this picture are the psychosomatic results.

II

Years later in analysis, despondent about not finding her place in life as the daughter of a well-known writer, Susan confesses, “At times, I’d despaired; thinking I would never find my niche, never excel in anything,” and she goes on to reflect:

Then there were my parents’ multiple marriages and divorces. For more than two decades my father had left one wife, only to quickly to have another appear. Not to mention the nine siblings, all born in rapid succession after I was six years old. I barely had time to get used to one new stepmother and baby before another arrived on the scene. (*In Another Place* 227)

All the same, she also mentions, “In a private crevice of my secret being, I believed I could get by on my own” (*Another Place* 229). Thus, I consider that “crevice” interiorized by her as “being in another place” prominently placed in the title of her memoir as the psychological site of the emergence of a salutary safe harbor. From her initial lived patterns of abandonment, attachment, and separation at a critically early age, the reader recognizes that the author consciously searches for a security zone within her own psyche.

As a result, she settles *in another place* in her psyche, separate from what the vagaries of her circumstances, as a good place to *be*. In another spatio-temporal psychic setting, she can now freely choose how to cope with relative security and comfort. She does so by accepting the responsibility for her choice and *without repressing* her all-pervading “burden of separation and longing” (7). To the contrary, she claims her problems as her own. Largely, she treats them as chosen intuitive and imaginative acts of restructuration and reconfigurations without constraints. She learns the calculus of self-transformation. It gives impetus to thorny undertakings. Simultaneously, it imposes its own psycho-philosophical interpretations, and a whole set of new approaches to deal with the nature of how to think and act.

What makes it possible for her to carry out this demanding regenerative potential is setting up internal working prototypes. She practices modalities of lived experiences and imaginative inner dialogues. These practices permit her not to repress totally her negative emotional responses. She learns how

best to deal with what she finds problematic by minimizing their harmful effects by confronting them rather than suppressing them.

This confrontational attitude saves her from the possibility of the “return of the repressed” as derivatives of her past problems. In the process, she discovers the transcendent agency of human consciousness as the ground of freedom of choice and its ensuing acts and responsibilities. It amounts to engagement in the psychosocial logic of *negation of negation*—mostly through the magic of innermost dialogue with oneself as an intimate category of effecting a “talking cure,” as Bertha Oppenheim (pseudonym of Anna O, one of Joseph Breuer’s patients has reputedly characterized it.

I attribute Susan’s enlightened and enlightening achievements in returning to psychosomatic stability to an atavistic belief in the efficacy of language as an antidote to repressive and depressive tendencies of the human psyche. One might consider it a primordial evolutionary process. She sets up a safe haven for her unsettled mind and, perhaps more significantly, to a launching pad for future adventurous journeys and activities.

This psychological place makes it possible for her to train for practice psychoanalysis and ultimately to writing her memoir. Therefore, she is able to transmute the lead of her the inner void to gold of intellectual and affective operative models. Her efforts such as of acquiring a native’s ability in speaking Spanish, as spoken in Mexico, and using it in Chile in her psychoanalytic practice bear witness to the efficacy of her extraordinary mental agility to affect transformations in her life.

Being in another place inaugurates alchemical processes which offer her remedies for her lack of stable familial relationships and its unavoidable anxieties. Multiple forms of periodical separation from one or the other of her parents, from the country of her birth, and her “mother-tongue,” bring about troubling concerns in her daily life. Still and all, she moves to this remedial *another place* as, an alternative and yet parallel place, where she seeks and finds her independence as a young woman. As a free agent and independent, her personality takes roots in this other place, and she acts accordingly. By “getting-it-together,” as it were, on her own terms she compensates for the infantile sense of *lack* that she feels. She is fortunate not to let that *lack* achieve the status of a dominant state of depersonalization or loss of identity; briefly put, alienation with catastrophic problematics.

As a result, the author sensitively moves through various stages of her life, as daughter, sister, teenager, student, and later wife, mother, and psy-

choanalyst regardless of her distressing infancy. She is strong enough to face her sorrow by not by denying it but rather by refusing to give it the role a predetermined and inalterable force in her life. She astutely and successfully encounters various lived experiences such as drastic changes in her father's marital life, dual national environments, cultures, and languages. She does so by judicious psychological malleability in adapting to racial, religious, and lingual differences in her life in her often radically different environments. She *also* manages living properly and well and in New York City, Mexico, and later in Chile.

III

It would seem to me that the preceding scrutiny of the seminal first chapter of the author's narrative of her life is central to our comprehension of the indispensable psychological matrix of it. The first chapter and its two most intriguing snapshots grip the reader and make evident her primary finding and learning from the two snapshots. They disclose foundational workings of the human psychosoma. A well-integrated primeval and evolutionary phenomenon, psychosomatic theory reveals to her and the reader a profound human reality that now has formed the basis of contemporary neuropsychanalysis. Her lived experiences and their attendant regenerative powers lead her to profound comprehensive dialogic interactions with others and the world we all inhabit. She does so on the plane where language appears in its widest possible dialogical signification; that is to say, as it occurs between a speaker and a responder, who between them engage in dialogical worldmaking.

It comes as no surprise that later in her adult life, as a psychoanalyst, she recognizes the interpretative activities of language linked in psychoanalytic sessions to revelations, which together make up the constitutive elements of psychoanalysis. In this sense, her language bursts out of the primordial silence and engages us in the possibilities of salutary dialogic interactions.

As is now our common knowledge, an open dialogical discourse between two individuals, capable of flowing without prejudgment as prejudice, makes reconciliation and healing between two human beings a viable possibility. For the author, such a discourse permits her to achieve a true if not facile reconciliation and reconnection with her father. The authenticity of the fol-

lowing dialogical give-and-take between father and daughter is maximally revelatory. I consider it worthy of quoting at some length:

When I was old enough to formulate the question, I asked Dad why he'd let me be taken off to Mexico.

'I couldn't have done otherwise,' he said, 'because I had promised your mother that if she decided to move to Mexico you could go with her. I felt bound by my word. And to be honest, I wasn't that committed to being a father. I wanted to have the freedom to live without a daughter or a wife.'

Though eventually Dad came to regret it, at the time he was totally unaware of how this decision would directly shape our lives. Our relationship would always carry a burden of separation and longing. (*In Another Place* 7)

In this passage, Norman Mailer's response to his daughter's question conveys a prodigiously blunt bohemian hedonism and, yes, a full-fledged narcissism to boot. The phrase "to be honest," however, dominates the semantics of their conversation. For the most part, it guides the father-daughter future interactions until his death. It is no mean achievement by any standard. As it was his wont to do, Norman Mailer's answer to his first daughter's question is remarkably unsparing. All the same, it also proves that being *honest* (from Latin *honestus*) connotes honor with it as an onto-ethical intention, which redeems the authoritarian harshness of Norman Mailer's true statement.

One such implication of giving honor where honor is due is the suggestion that a certain psychological healing process begins when little Susan accepts the tough and unvarnished truth as she hears it. She graduates with honors from the proverbial elite "University of Hard Knocks" with a silent dissertation on John Dewey's ethical pragmatism applied to her own circumstances.

This statement will also prove to be true in her father's five other marriages and their consequences. However, there is no messy sentimentality or worse morbid emotional reaction to her father's forthright confession to her. Her dignity is not lost on her father, who later also admires her courage when she loses her baby as a teenager. All indications support the notion

that Norman Mailer readily valued and appreciated that kind of tough-minded dignity in his oldest daughter.

In another instance, eight-year-old Susan is baptized as a Roman Catholic at the behest of Salvador's sister Tia [Aunt] Lupita, without her mother's knowledge. She is eager to receive her First Communion like other Mexican girls her age would be. She attends Sunday school for months to go to confession and she receives the sacrament of reconciliation. When she tells her father of her short-lived conversion, he is clearly not pleased. Indeed, he is "annoyed." Yet he is seriously interested in the sacrament of confession, which one might think of as an intimate lingual sacrament.

Norman Mailer's fervent reliance on the mysterious powers of language is no secret. His fascination then with confession as an obligation is not surprising. As an act of recounting one's life as a succession of trials, tribulations, and often failures, confession is of interest to him. He tells his daughter, "Susie, you know what upsets me? That you confess to another person, a human being just like you. Why not just confess directly to God?" (60). She lets the reader know, nevertheless, that her Grandma, however, was not nearly as philosophical about learning of her conversion. "I can't believe your mother let you to go through with this nonsense!" She adds, "Susie this is ridiculous. You're Jewish, and you are not to go to confession again, you hear me?" (60).

Her Grandma understandably offers a strong traditional defense of her granddaughter's familial religious heritage. However, in spite of being none too happy about it, her father's reaction to her brief conversion to Roman Catholicism and its requirement of sacrament of confession is historically and philosophically more intricate and nuanced. He asks Susan why another human being has to listen to her confession and mediate between her and God. The question arises from the depth of western Gnosticism as a philosophical, theological, and transcendent mode of direct knowledge of the divine acquired by embracing and directly addressing the divine without any intercession or intermediation.

As we know, Gnosticism reaches us from a collection of ancient religious texts provided by various sects in Abrahamic religions of the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). The Gnostics believed and continue to believe in gaining unmediated spiritual salvation by directly engaging in devout personal encounters with the divine. They do so through a series of meditational techniques and spiritual practices.

I would suspect that the author's reference to "philosophy" in her father's reaction to the sacrament of confession shows his awareness of his own more or less Gnostic tendencies. Norman Mailer's reaction to his daughter practicing the Catholic sacrament of reconciliation strikes the reader as a non-nonsense approach to truth as he understands it. Mere *truthfulness* in discussion of such serious matters is not what he pursues. Their conversation in style and substance will become emblematic of the father-daughter approach concerning their future relationship as the author remembers it in her memoir. Subsequently, she hits upon a series of similar archetypal, generative learning configurations. Educative and informative dialogues with others inform the narrative of her memoir as a *Bildungsroman*.

I should think a restatement of our preceding analyses would be appropriate here. As harsh as the author's dialogues with her father appear to be, they permit her to be receptive to accepting reality wherever she finds it, no matter how harsh and unyielding it might be at any given time. Judiciously, she pursues a dialogic discourse in her relationships with others, accepting it as the irreplaceable essence of our humanity, which it is. She finds it to be a solution to the thorny problematics of alienation and the ensuing sinister tendency to repress relational hostilities.

I would say that the author accepts the ubiquitous reality of various complications in the human condition in their different modes and degrees of severity. She comes across as attentively accepting existing situational realities and creatively remaking them. She refuses the false alternative peace of mind by futile attempts at repressing them. Her courage to do so saves her from the horror of the return of the repressed, which might produce a tragic form of arrested development.

She accepts her father as *paterfamilias*. The reader gets a more illuminating glimpse of Norman Mailer's gentler family life as opposed to his stormy public life. His inner life remains a secret to us as perhaps it was to himself, as it is so with the rest of us. There is an unknowable part to our psyche, which English psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion calls "O." As ultimate Truth, it surpasses even the unconscious language of our dreams and remains ineffable.

Therefore, one might say the short, hard-hitting father-daughter dialogue remarkably affects and informs the subjective-objective or phenomenological quality of the different formulations and conceptual patterns of Susan's memoir. Along with her revelations of infantile memories, their dialogue

casts a long, if crepuscular, light on the familial encounters with her father and, by extension, her mother. Her desire to allow reciprocal truthfulness to surface in intimate dialogues about family matters makes them more intelligible to the reader than they might have been otherwise. They come close to a mode of psychoanalytic sessions of various length, where language reigns supreme. In such sessions, the author focuses solely on getting a grip on her past, not as over and done with, but rather for the opposite reason. She shrewdly uses them as a springboard toward future undertakings. For example, still trying to decipher the circumstances of her mother's sudden appearance at Long Branch to take her to Mexico, the author engages in another truth-seeking conversation. Curious about the circumstances arrested in spacetime by that invariantly upsetting second snapshot, she writes, "Years later, I found out from Mom this picture had been taken the day I left Grandma to go to Mexico. And when I heard this, I felt the same uncomfortable sensation in my belly. Only I wanted to cry for that little girl, twice ripped away from her surroundings (*In another Place* 7)."

The above quotation bears out the effectiveness of intimate power of psychological discoveries and their effectiveness by the author. She *sees* through her tears the possibility of receiving enlightenment and relief intermediated by the miracle of lingual communication and communion. She assumes the right of grieving for the helpless little girl abandoned by her mother, who is the center of her infantile universe. On the other hand, those tears show her the way to comprehension of her situation. They psychosomatically empower her to look at her past through a rearview mirror of her psyche to be able to see better the road ahead and appreciate her unique journey as a teenager and in her adult life.

The author clearly learns the cause of her anxiety and the resultant feeling of nausea when she would look at her picture with her mother as an infant. Thus, that exiled little girl eventually is in a position to claim the authority to repatriate herself—psychologically and otherwise. Through tenacious learning processes, she becomes a citizen of the world, by freely choosing to do so. All these dialogical activities bode well for her. They enable her to get along excellently with her extensive family members and her future endeavors with others as a psychoanalyst. Yet, I would stress again, the author cannot and, fortunately, does not repress the effects of her infantile lived experiences. She often cries while listening to her mother plays an oneiric twilit Chopin nocturne, Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," or a

Brahms' lullaby. "I probably ached for that lost period of my childhood when Mommy or Grandma had held me in their arms," she writes (62). That voice of mother of infancy! Which constitutes the instinctive basis of our appreciation of vocal music, indeed all music!

Similarly, the author also takes her mother's marriage to Salvador Sanchez in stride. Indeed, she genuinely cares for her stepfather and her stepbrother. Salvador was a man of the left, as is the man Marco Color, whom the author marries. The author's main challenges, nevertheless, come from the problematics of her father's frequent marriages and divorces, of tumultuous unions and inescapably hurtful partings. They present undeniable realities as lived experiences for the author.

Her father's five marriages, divorces, and numerous affairs, extramarital or otherwise, end in unavoidable familial realities to deal with in the author's teenage age years and to some extent later. Drawing on her shrewdly acquired psychosocial skills already present and active, she seems to get along as well as one reasonably can expect with all five stepmothers, her stepbrothers, and stepsisters.

Undoubtedly, it matters much that all of the author's stepmothers were talented women of accomplishment. With them, the author manages to hold her own quite amiably and properly. The most demanding issue for her appears to have been the relationship with her strikingly attractive stepmother Norris (Barbara Davis) who, as a twenty-five year-old, was her coeval. Once again, the author accepts facts as they are and surpasses them by creating a close bond with Norris, who later would become a gifted writer of fiction and a memoirist.

IV

Finally, what the reader truly appreciates is that the author has not permitted these painful memories to exclude the possibility of a correlative salutary imagination. To the contrary, it prompts her creativity to stimulate the expansion of a clearing for possibilities and potentials. The impressive characteristics, and there are many, of the author's memoir reside in her discovery of the possibility of negating the adverse effects of frequent parental absences. She does so by placing herself *in another place* that we call imagination. Salvation resides for her in this god-like attribute of our human psyche to create a place for the intellectual and imaginative capabilities to de-

velop. Almost in its entirety, her memoir deals with periodic separations in its different modalities and the haunting symbolic legacy of ineffaceable distress. Yet she gradually learns how to transform her life by acts grounded in imaginative freedom and responsibility.

As uncanny as it may sound, the author's early sorrow carries in it its own antidote and intimates to her that salvation may well be attained or, at least, one might approximate it. Not surprisingly, she finds it again in language, not only in the alchemy of the "talking cure," but a decision to become a writer. On the last page of her memoir, she tells us, "I wrote about us, my father and me, and while I wrote he came back to me again. His voice was reassuring, championing my step into new places" (*In another Place* 300).

Acute consciousness of the magical role dialogical language plays in our life effectively assembles and structures the author's instructive memoir as a narrative of various stages of learning of how to cope with the omnipresent vagaries and intricacies of life. She shares with her father the extreme desire to think creatively through the magic of language, and ideate or envisage the narrative field of lived new experiences—embracing a mode of high caliber dialogic epistemophilia. Her memoir is an account of a triumph over adversities, truly. I commend and recommend it to all those who, like myself, declare their solidarity with language as the very essence of our salvation.

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