“SPELLING”:

ALICE MUNRO AND THE CARETAKING DAUGHTER

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Alice Munro, the renowned Canadian short story writer, has written, over the course of her long career, no fewer than seventeen stories that feature an ill mother as the primary or tangential theme in a daughter’s narrative. While some critics focus on uncovering autobiographical elements of the stories (Munro’s mother endured early-onset Parkinson’s disease), and others vaguely complain that Munro is merely re-writing the same story again and again, no critic has investigated the range and depth of affect produced by maternal illness proffered in her stories, a topic that appears to be a major concern of Munro’s creative life. Not only is it important to analyze the stories of daughters and their ill mothers because of the topic’s importance to Munro, it is essential to illuminate the texts’ contributions to the intersecting discourses of illness, death, and daughters and mothers. This thesis serves to initiate this critical discussion.

An analysis of Munro’s story, “Spelling,” provides fruitful material for the discussion of the discourse of caretaking. I track Rose’s caretaking journey by first discussing her entrapment in the gendered norms of caretaking. Then, I argue
that Rose capitulates to the discourse of sacrificial caretaking by desiring to care for Flo in a full-time capacity. I submit that Rose begins to reclaim her subjectivity after she arrives home when she realizes she cannot continue caring for Flo. After Flo moves into the County Home, Rose resists the stereotype of the non-caretaking daughter by deploying certain strategies to justify her role of the non-caretaking daughter, rather than positioning herself as an unselfish non-caretaking daughter. I argue that Rose’s focus on combating the stereotype of the non-caretaking daughter overshadows her subjective response to caretaking. Her thoughts and actions, therefore, re-inscribe the polarized norms of the good daughter/bad daughter binary.

I conclude that Munro’s story illuminates a daughter’s affective difficulty in claiming subjectivity when attempting to legitimate her caretaking position as a result of maternal illness.
A movie is never finished, only abandoned.

~George Lucas
For Rachel, Caleb, and Grace

and

in memory of my mother
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I. INTRODUCTION

The illness and death of a mother is an event at once so ordinary and expected and yet so traumatic for a daughter of any age that few writers can approach the topic without sentimentality. The twin taboo subjects of illness and death, along with the fraught subject of mother-daughter relations, make the prospect daunting. Yet Alice Munro, the renowned Canadian short story writer, has written, over the course of her long career, no fewer than seventeen stories that feature an ill mother as the primary or tangential theme in a daughter’s narrative. While some critics focus on uncovering autobiographical elements of the stories (Munro’s mother endured early-onset Parkinson’s disease), and others vaguely complain that Munro is merely re-writing the same story again and again, no critic has investigated the range and depth of affect produced by maternal illness proffered in her stories, a topic that appears to be a major concern of Munro’s creative life. Not only is it important to analyze the stories of daughters and their ill mothers because of the topic’s importance to Munro, it is essential to illuminate the texts’ contributions to the intersecting discourses of illness, death, and daughters and mothers. This thesis serves to initiate this critical discussion.
One daughter-ill mother concern that seems particularly important to Munro is that of caretaking. In Munro’s ill mother stories, a daughter’s response to maternal illness always revolves around the question of how deep her caretaking involvement should be. Munro’s story, “Spelling,” is a good example of Munro’s explorations because the narrative tracks a stepdaughter’s journey from a caretaking to a non-caretaking position. “Spelling” is the penultimate short story in Munro’s 1978 linked collection of stories, The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose (in Canada, under the title Who Do You Think You Are?). In the story, middle-aged Rose is notified that her stepmother, Flo, appears to be manifesting symptoms of dementia. In consultation with her half-brother Brian, Rose half-volunteers to go home to assist Flo’s move into the County Home. Rose’s agreement is based on her secret notion that she will be transformed into the perfect caretaker. However, upon arriving home, Rose soon realizes the task is beyond her, and she helps Flo move into the County Home.

In this thesis, I argue that certain cultural notions affect the ways in which Rose enacts her caretaking response to her stepmother’s illness. I do not argue that there is a great force which polices her behavior, but that popular norms and practices flow through and around the discourses of daughters, mothers, and caretaking which serve to influence Rose’s thoughts.
and actions. In this, I follow Michel Foucault’s argument of power relations when he suggests that power is not an elite construction to keep society in check, but an effect that is produced by multiple discursive strategies in any given area of any given society:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And ‘Power,’ insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement. One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (93)

Foucault argues that by analyzing the force relations in a particular discourse it is possible to uncover the mechanisms of power (97). In my analysis of “Spelling,” I have discovered that the mechanisms regulating daughterhood and caretaking are directly influenced by the discourse of the sacrificial good mother.
Women are socialized to be nurturers and caretakers, and cultural notions define the ideal woman as one who performs sacrificial caretaking while disavowing subjectivity. Sacrificial caretaking finds its fullest expression in motherhood. Women are expected to bear children, and when they do, mothers are expected to be the children’s primary caretakers. As caretakers, mothers are judged to be ideal good mothers when they unwaveringly privilege their children’s needs over their own. This self-sacrifice produces the paradox of caretaking: women must disavow their subjectivity in order to be venerated. All women are measured against the model of the ideal woman, which reaches its consummate embodiment in idealized sacrificial motherhood.

When women break the social contract of sacrificial motherhood by asserting agency within the role of motherhood, they are categorized as bad mothers. Asserting agency may take various forms, such as performing full-time employment or by becoming non-residential mothers; or when otherwise not properly caring for their children according to the cultural notion of self-sacrifice. The notion of self-sacrificial caretaking determines whether or not a mother is judged a good or bad mother, and ultimately, whether a mother occupies the position of a good or bad woman.
Within the framework of daughterhood, the experience of daughters mirrors that of their mothers’. Daughters are likewise thrust into a similar binary between the positions of good and bad daughter when their mothers require care as a result of illness or aging. Because women are socialized to be caretakers, daughters are expected to fulfill the role of primary caretaker for their ill mothers and are valued, as are mothers, for self-sacrificial caretaking. All daughters are measured against the model of the ideal woman, and in the case of the ill mother, the paradigm of the ideal woman reaches its consummate embodiment in the sacrificial caretaking daughter.

When daughters do not perform the social contract of sacrificial caretaking for their mothers, they are considered bad women and bad daughters for not fulfilling their feminine role as caretakers. For daughters, one way of breaking the social contract of ideal daughterhood may occur when they assert agency by assuming a non-caretaking position, or when they otherwise do not properly care for their mothers according to the cultural notion of self-sacrifice. When a mother is ill, the notion of sacrificial caretaking determines whether or not a daughter is judged a good or bad daughter, and ultimately, whether a daughter occupies the position of a good or bad woman.

In this thesis, I analyze the force relations of caretaking that produce Rose’s multi-faceted response to her stepmother’s

I then argue that women are also socialized to care not only for their children, but for those who are ill. Katie Hogan argues, in her book, *Women Take Care: Gender, Race and the Culture of AIDS,* that women provide important cultural work in the case of epidemic illness (3). Elaine M. Brody provides, in her book, *Women in the Middle: Their Parent Care Years (2nd Edition),* statistical evidence that daughters provide more care for elderly parents than sons (40), and mothers are the parent usually living long enough for which daughters will provide care (8). Caretaking work is glorified for its sacrificial nature, and women are expected to want to be validated for their sacrifice while at the same time ignoring the erasure of their subjectivity as a result of that sacrifice. I argue that Rose’s wish to be a caretaking daughter stems from this paradoxical discourse of caretaking.
In the next section of the thesis, called “Forgetting,” I begin tracking Rose’s journey through the discourse of daughterly caretaking. It is decided that Rose should help her stepmother Flo move to the County Home due to symptoms of dementia. Despite her complicated family history, Rose secretly dreams of taking care of Flo at home for “as long as [is] necessary” (“Spelling” 185). I compare Rose’s acquiescence to the family strategy and her secret self-sacrificial plan to subvert it to similar discursive pressures experienced by lesbian daughters as described by Susan Cayleff in her article, “Feeding the Hand that Bit You: Lesbian Daughters at Mid-Life Negotiating Parental Caretaking.” I argue that, like lesbian daughters, Rose must forget her difficult family history in order to entertain the idea of going back home to provide long-term care for her stepmother. I suggest that this forgetting of the past is already self-sacrifice.

In the “Remembering” section of the thesis, I argue that soon after Rose returns home, she begins to reclaim subjectivity by remembering and acknowledging things that are important to her that cannot be accommodated by caring for Flo. I give examples of several narrative clues to suggest that Rose’s unsuccessful attempt at transformation into a caretaking

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1 Further parenthetical citations will cite “Spelling” as “SP.” See Appendix A for other stories’ abbreviations.
daughter is based on her realization that the caretaking will require too much from her. Within two days, Rose decides she cannot continue to enact her vision of the perfect caretaking daughter. I assert that Rose’s decision to help Flo move into the County Home rather than providing long-term care illustrates Rose’s independence and subjectivity. However, I argue that, as a non-caretaking daughter, Rose now negotiates the indictment of selfishness stemming from the negative connotation assigned to daughters who do not function as caretakers for their ill mothers.

In the next section, “The Discourse of the Non-Caretaking Daughter,” I illustrate the nature of the good daughter/bad daughter discourse through the prism of non-caretaking. After Flo moves into the County Home, Rose faces the negative connotation associated with the position of the bad non-caretaking daughter. For Rose, there are few means by which to recover good daughterhood because social norms require that good daughters take care of their ill mothers.

Feminist theory seeks to endorse a position for women to be able to assume a non-caretaking position. For example, feminists support employment for mothers and viable options for childcare which attempts to ameliorate the designation of bad mother for employed mothers. Likewise, feminist theory works against the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization in
the arena of maternal caretaking to theorize a third space for daughters. I describe the daughter’s third space as a location for daughters to exercise varying combinations of subjectivity and maternal caretaking without cultural condemnation.

However, theorizing this third space proves difficult. The force relations within the binary of daughterhood eliminate the possibility of a third position between the ideal of caretaking and the abominable position of non-caretaking. Daughters caught in the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization cannot simultaneously claim subjectivity and goodness while occupying a non-caretaking position.

I look to Gustafson’s theory of “unbecoming mother” to analyze Rose’s position of non-caretaking. Gustafson argues that cultural norms relegate true motherhood to those mothers who provide day-to-day care for their children, and disavow motherhood to those women who do not have custody. Gustafson analyzes her 2001 case study of a nursing professor mother who defends her non-residential, non-caretaking position in terms of what a good sacrificial mother would do. This defense strategy, selective denial, is defined by Gustafson as the process whereby the non-residential mother “selectively calls up the image of the good mother” (42). Because the nursing professor mother focuses her strategic defense against the negative stereotype of non-residential mothering on aspects of good sacrificial
mothering, Gustafson claims that non-residential mothers seek to establish a position of good but absent mothering. However, Gustafson further argues that good but absent mothering still engages in the binary polarization of good and bad mothers because the mother still wants to be seen as good, rather than as a mother who asserts subjectivity in assuming the position of non-residential mother.

Rose’s experience of daughterhood mirrors the non-residential mother’s experience of motherhood. When Rose assumes the position of non-caretaking daughter after Flo moves into the County Home, Rose becomes subject to the classification of bad daughter. Like non-residential mothers who want to be categorized as good mothers, Rose attempts to be viewed as a good daughter in order to combat the cultural condemnation of her as selfish and neglectful. I argue that as a non-caretaking daughter Rose defends against her discursively judged negative position of non-caretaking by employing selective denial in an attempt to align herself within the terms of the ideal sacrificial caretaking daughter. The affective terms of selective denial in which Rose engages are found in the “Good Daughter” sections of this thesis: pure intentions, empathy, sacrifice, reconciliation, and mothering. Like non-residential mothers, Rose’s attempted alignment to be good, I argue, disavows her subjectivity when she assumes a non-caretaking
position. Rather, she engages in a subcategory of the non-caretaking daughter: the good non-caretaking daughter.

Because the good non-caretaking daughter links her behavior to the good daughter, like the non-residential mother who links her behavior to the good mother, the good non-caretaking daughter re-inscribes the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization rather than opening up a third, non-polarized space within the daughter discourse.

I conclude, after careful analysis of “Spelling,” that Munro’s story illuminates the difficulty daughters experience in attempting to negotiate a non-binary position in the daughter discourse as played out through caretaking. When Rose works to perform the position of the good non-caretaking daughter, her thoughts and actions actually “reinscribe rather than challenge” the good daughter/bad daughter binary (Gustafson 24).

According to Gustafson, theorists should engage in careful analysis of atypical women’s caretaking positions, such as that of non-residential mothers’, in order to ascertain whether or not re-inscription of the binary is being created. Gustafson warns that valorizing non-caretaking mothers risks re-inscribing the binary between good and bad mothers (44-45). Although it is tempting to analyze Rose’s behavior as occupying that elusive third space, I argue, rather, that “Spelling” illuminates Munro’s worldview that daughters are always caught in the good
daughter/bad daughter binary in the matter of maternal caretaking.

In the “Conclusion” section of this thesis, I summarize my overall argument. Then, in the “Postscript” section, I suggest the political implications of my analysis. As Judith Butler argues in her essay, “The Question of Social Transformation,” all theory derived from lay or professional philosophers is the foundation for social transformation (204-205). I write this thesis not only to analyze Alice Munro’s wonderful story, but to bring to my reader’s attention the effects of caretaking on daughters, in the hope that my intervention will produce social transformation in some small way. According to research described by Brody, the practical and political implications for caretaking daughters are rather dire. As the population ages and requires more attention, many more daughters will be called upon to “take care” (Hogan).

In “Suggestions for Further Study,” I argue that caretaking is one of Munro’s most important explorations in the seventeen stories of daughters and their ill mothers. I recommend further interrogation of the sixteen remaining stories for an enlarged understanding of Munro’s worldview on daughterly caretaking and the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization.
Finally, to facilitate and encourage additional research, analysis, comparison, and interpretation, I provide a list of Munro’s seventeen stories of daughters and their ill mothers in a “Bibliography of Ill Mother Stories.”
II. CRITICAL CONTEXT

It would be impossible to review all the critical literature written about Alice Munro and her oeuvre; Carol Mazur’s thorough, 456-page annotated bibliography attests to the difficulty of that endeavor. The subject index in Mazur’s bibliography for The Beggar Maid alone extends to three pages (449-451). Therefore, this section of the thesis narrows the review to the critical literature discussing Munro’s story, “Spelling.”

The critical literature on “Spelling” seems to fall into several categories: the aesthetics approach; the character study approach; the feminist approach with attendant emphasis on a daughter’s maternal inheritance of shame; the autobiographical approach; analysis of the scene with the old speller; and, an inquiry into the nature of the “self.”

3 Hooper.
4 Martin.
5 Carrington; Cox; Rasporich.
6 Howells; Ross; Thacker (1991, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2005). Deborah Heller refers to Munro’s recurring theme of a daughter’s response to her mother’s illness in her 2009 essay-length book, Daughters and Mothers in Alice Munro’s Later Stories. Heller marks the early stories’ narratives on “a young daughter’s failure, or inability, to meet the demands of a mother suffering from a progressively debilitating disease, the daughter’s youthful shame at the bizarre symptoms of her mother’s illness, and her subsequent guilt in later years” (7). Heller’s essay does not refer to “Spelling” as an autobiographical story, although the story features an ill mother figure. Her purpose is to use autobiographical elements from earlier ill mother stories to interpret variations in later stories, “My Mother’s Dream,” “Family Furnishings,” “Soon” and “Silence,” to illuminate how “fragments of an original constellation [of mother-daughter dramas] are retained but reconfigured and set in contexts that lend them a new significance” (9). But, similarly to the other autobiographical critics, Heller does not interpret the mother-daughter drama in terms of caretaking theory.
7 Blodgett; Heble; Matthews; Redekop.
8 Ibid. Blodgett; Struthers.
While critics pay considerable attention to "Spelling," no critic has investigated Munro’s contribution to daughterly caretaking contained in that narrative. My thesis addresses this critical oversight. “Spelling” provides an excellent example of a daughter figure caught in the discourse of caretaking.

In my quest to open the discussion on Munro’s exploration of caretaking, I utilize the work of several theorists. Michel Foucault’s theory of power relations sets the stage for my argument that Rose is susceptible to the caretaking discourse.

Katie Hogan argues in *Women Take Care* that sacrificial caring women are used by the culture to legitimize the AIDS epidemic and to return women to an earlier comforting role, without addressing caring women’s needs and their exposure to HIV. I use Hogan’s argument to support my claim that women live in a discursive environment of sacrificial caretaking.

I argue that the daughterly caretaking model stems from the cultural paradigm of the good mother. I use Gustafson’s definition of the sacrificial good mother in “The Social Construction of Maternal Absence” to suggest that daughters are socialized to become caretakers by the same discourse that socializes women to become good mothers.

Susan Cayleff suggests that little attention has been given to the lesbian daughter’s experience of parental caretaking. In
her article, "Feeding that Hand that Bit You," she argues that familial history presents unique challenges to many lesbian daughters in returning home to care for parents. Cayleff’s brief article illuminates similar challenges for Rose and enables me to argue that Rose is already performing self-sacrifice by disregarding her complicated family history when considering taking on long-term care of Flo.

I refer to Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb’s description of motherly caretaking duties in “Bitches with Broomsticks: The Bad Mother in American Maternity Poetry” to argue that caring is dirty work and that it is only when Rose arrives home to perform caretaking for her stepmother that she realizes just how physically challenging the work is. This realization helps Rose begin to reclaim her subjectivity.

Brody’s research on the gendered differences between daughters and sons in the performance of filial responsibility proved useful in interpreting Rose and her half-brother Brian’s behaviors.

Gustafson’s theory of unbecoming motherhood helped me interrogate the discourse of the non-caretaking daughter. Gustafson argues that mothers who do not live with their children are defined by the culture as less than true mothers, or not mothers at all. She suggests that strategies used by non-residential mothers (such as selective denial) re-inscribe
rather than challenge the binary polarization of the good versus bad mother. I utilize her theory to suggest that Rose uses similar strategies to legitimize her move into a non-caretaking daughterly role; but just as non-residential mothers may not be successful in challenging the good mother/bad mother binary, Rose’s strategies as a non-caretaking daughter are unsuccessful in challenging the binary polarization of the good daughter. Indeed, I argue that Rose’s actions re-inscribe the good daughter/bad daughter binary.

I argue in the postscript that I am performing a political act by intervening in the existing body of criticism on the work of Munro to argue for the importance of the caretaking theme in her work. I use Brody’s sociological research to support my argument that women have provided caretaking services and will continue to do so at alarming costs to themselves, while at the same time making it possible for the culture to take little corporate responsibility for the elderly. Daughters will be increasingly called upon to care for their elderly parents as the population ages. Daughters will most likely be caught in the caretaking discourse and may inadvertently re-inscribe the good daughter/bad daughter binary if they should assume a non-caretaking position, rather than working to create a third space for the non-caretaking daughter.
III. ANALYSIS

An analysis of Munro’s story, “Spelling,” provides fruitful material for the discussion of the discourse of caretaking. Rose’s negotiation of the discursive norms of caretaking reveal that it is difficult for daughters to assume a position of non-caretaking without re-inscribing the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization in their efforts to resist stigma. In this “Analysis” section, I divide my argument into two main parts: Rose’s attempt to perform daughterly caretaking, and her subsequent attempt to negate the stereotype of the selfish non-caretaking daughter. I track Rose’s caretaking journey by first discussing her entrapment in the gendered norms of caretaking. Then, I argue that Rose capitulates to the discourse of sacrificial caretaking by desiring to care for Flo in a full-time capacity. I submit that Rose begins to reclaim her subjectivity after she arrives home when she realizes she cannot continue caring for Flo. After Flo moves into the County Home, Rose resists the stereotype of the non-caretaking daughter by deploying certain strategies to justify her role of the non-caretaking daughter. I argue that Rose’s focus on combating the stereotype of the non-caretaking daughter overshadows her subjective response to caretaking. Her thoughts and actions, therefore, re-inscribe the polarized norms of the good daughter/bad daughter binary.
I conclude that Munro’s story illuminates a daughter’s affective difficulty in claiming subjectivity when attempting to legitimize her non-caretaking position in the situation created by maternal illness.

A. The Gendered Norms of Caretaking

When Rose agrees to go home to help care for her stepmother, Flo, Rose succumbs to the gendered norms of the caretaking discourse. Women are socialized to provide caretaking via the cultural ideal of the good mother. The good mother takes care of her children, husband, and household without regard to her personal agency. Gustafson brilliantly describes the ideology of the good mother:

[The good mother] is the woman who embraces the beliefs, appearance, and behavior consistent with white, middle-class, Judeo-Christian family values (Kaplan, 1992). The good mother acknowledges a child’s need for love, caring and nurturance and puts that understanding into everyday practice. The good mother is selfless and puts the needs of her child before her own needs in all things. This selflessness can precede birth and even conception... [A] child’s needs are advanced as the good mother’s raison d’être because biological ties are presumed to bind together mother and child emotionally, socially, and morally.
To meet a child’s endless demands for attention, the good mother in contemporary Western society is charged with the impossibility of rendering continuous, intensive care from birth to independence (Büskens, 2001). The good mother is also fiercely protective of her child and is responsible for ensuring a child’s safety under every circumstance (Büskens, 2001).

(Gustafson 26)

The good mother will naturally want to sacrifice time, energy, and subjectivity by loving, nurturing, protecting, and attending to children’s physical and emotional needs. Gustafson notes the “impossibility” of the ideal; nevertheless, mothers are held accountable for their success or failure in accomplishing the goal of good mothering. Mothers who do not attain the ideal, who deviate from the cultural requirements of the good mother model, are considered bad mothers.

“Like mother, like daughter,” the old saying goes. Indeed, cultural expectations for caretaking are passed along to daughters. Brody reports that daughters want to take care of their elderly parents and want to provide a good role model for their children:

...[t]he vast majority of women want to care for their elderly parents and do so willingly. Daughters derive many positive benefits from parent care such as
satisfaction from fulfilling what they see as their responsibilities, adhering to religious and cultural values, expressing their affection, seeing to it that the parent is well cared for, reciprocating help the parent had given them in the past, and feeling that they are serving as a good model for their own children to follow. (49)

Brody claims that, in general, daughters see their contribution to caring for elderly parents as a moral and ethical imperative. And many daughters respond to the caretaking needs of family members. Brody claims as many as 75% of the caregivers of the elderly are women—"...primarily wives and daughters, but also daughters-in-law and other female relatives" (5). Rose is drawn into the discourse of maternal caretaking because caretaking is what good women, and especially good daughters, do.

Rose may be responding to the good daughter discourse when she imagines she will take care of her stepmother, but it is not her first response. Rose originally assumes that blood-relatedness will supersede gender in the execution of caretaking responsibilities, and that her half-brother would carry out the primary caretaking obligations: "She had assumed that Brian and his wife, Phoebe, whom she saw seldom, were keeping in touch with Flo. After all, Flo was Brian’s mother, Rose’s stepmother" (SP 182). But Rose soon discovers that gender trumps blood.
Brody exposes the gendered norms of the socially constructed role of caregiving: “...among primary caregivers, daughters outnumber sons in a ratio of more than three to one; among primary caregivers of the extremely disabled elders, the ratio is four to one” (40). Women take care, and daughters take care in greater proportion to sons.

Brian’s contribution reflects Brody’s observation that sons provide practical rather than physical assistance to their mothers:

Sons love their parents, do not neglect them, provide emotional support, and have feelings of responsibility. In general, however, sons tend to do certain tasks reflecting the cultural assignment of gender-appropriate roles such as money management and home repairs, and they often are major participants in making important decisions. But direct, hands-on or personal care of the elderly is almost invariably a woman’s role. Sons assume the role of primary caregiver when they have no sisters or none close by. When they do so, however, they are helped by their wives (the daughters-in-law). Sons do less than daughters and experience less strain (Horowitz, 1985b). To emphasize, when sons do become ‘primaries,’ they transfer many of the caregiving
tasks to their wives and tend to use more formal
providers than do daughters. Sons help their fathers
more than they help their mothers and provide almost
no personal care help for mothers. (43)

Brody’s claim that sons follow the “cultural assignment of
gender appropriate roles” supports my claim that within the
caretaking discourse, women are expected to be the primary
actors. Rose’s half-brother, Brian, exhibits the quite typical
hands-off pattern of care exhibited by sons, as reported by
Brody. He delegates regular maternal contact to his wife,
Phoebe (SP 182), chooses the County Home for Flo based on cost
and perceived (presumably not personally investigated) level of
care, and negotiates that Rose should be the one to carry out
the plan of moving Flo there:

It had been decided that Rose would go to Hanratty,
that she would make arrangements to get Flo into the
Wawanash County Home. Brian had already made
inquiries about it, or his secretary had, and he said
that it seemed not only cheaper but better run, with
more facilities, than any private nursing home. (SP
184)

The phrase, “It had been decided,” reveals a great lack of
agency from Rose. It suggests that Brian controls the plan and
Rose may be agreeing to it under some duress.
This rather coercive mechanism is not exclusive to heterosexual women like Rose. The nexus of gender and perceived availability also plays a part in a lesbian daughter’s experience of being chosen by siblings to provide care. Cayleff’s article contributes valuable insight into this mechanism:

Fairly common misperceptions may arise with siblings as well. They may assume that, as a lesbian, you have more freedom, that your relationship is not a marriage in the same way theirs is, and that you have more usable income. These erroneous beliefs in turn prompt the belief that the lesbian daughter should take on more caretaking than a heterosexual sibling (Gallagher, 1998). (Cayleff 247)

Cayleff implies that daughters who do not conform to heteronormative marital standards are often chosen by default by families to provide care because they are understood to have less important obligations.

Brian might justify his hands-off approach by suggesting that he has more familial responsibilities: he has an international engineering job (SP 182), and he has four children and a wife to support (SP 184). Rose, in contrast, is a single, non-custodial mother who is in-between professional acting jobs. Brian’s attitude toward Rose’s erratic, and in his opinion
rather trivial, professional obligations (SP 183-184) and relative personal freedoms seem to make her the best candidate to provide care.

What can Rose do?

She is a woman, a stepdaughter, an actress in between jobs, and a non-custodial parent. Rose does not conform, and she is chosen. The cost of refusing to assist Flo into the nursing home, for Rose to claim she cannot or will not assist Flo in her time of need, would apparently signal her decision to completely cut herself off from the family and any role in it. Their worst suspicions about her would be confirmed. The risk of complete alienation from the family is not a risk Rose wishes to take.

Indeed, Rose seeks to be more deeply integrated into the family. Rose hopes to gain reintegration through her secret desire to be the one who cares for Flo “as long as [is] necessary:”

Rose’s docility, her good behavior, was partly based on a vision she had been building up all evening, and would never reveal to Brian and Phoebe. She pictured herself going to Hanratty and looking after Flo, living with her, taking care of her for as long as was necessary. She thought how she would clean and paint Flo’s kitchen, patch up the shingles over the leaky spots (that was one of the things the
letter had mentioned), plant flowers in the pots, and make nourishing soup. She wasn’t so far gone as to imagine Flo fitting comfortably into this picture, settling down to a life of gratitude. But the crankier Flo got, the milder and more patient Rose would become... (SP 184-185)

Rose imagines that taking on the guise of the caretaking daughter includes giving up her work identity, repairing and beautifying the home, and mothering her recalcitrant ill stepmother, an altruistic, but fairly naïve, plan for great self-sacrifice. The potential of personal gain wrought through the secret plan of becoming the sacrificial caretaking daughter has rich advantages for Rose. She hopes self-sacrifice will eliminate their accusation of “egotism and frivolity” (SP 185) and gain their admiration and respect.

This plan for “excessive caretaking” follows a pattern reported by Cayleff for lesbian and gay children (246). She cites a study suggesting that overcompensation is a way to “prove [they] are ‘good enough’” and to regain status within the family (246). Of course, lesbians and gays are trying to recover their lost family status due to the revelation of their sexual orientation whereas Rose may be attempting to gain a status she never enjoyed: that of a real daughter. Certainly, Rose has more to gain by transforming into the sacrificial
caretaker daughter through her grandiose secret plan which far exceeds the caretaking work of Brian, Flo’s full-blooded son. Rose is poised, then, to respond to the discursive norms of the caretaking daughter by returning home and caring for Flo. She is drawn in by the paradox of caretaking: validation through the loss of self. However, a careful study of the other linked stories in the collection *The Beggar Maid* reveals that a caretaking response from Rose will be quite a bit more complicated than just showing up and transforming herself into an Angel in the House. Like a lesbian daughter in many ways, Rose the stepdaughter must somehow disregard her complicated family history in order to care. In the next section, “Forgetting,” I argue that Rose’s acquiescence to the caretaking plan masks the sacrifice she has already made by agreeing to return home: that of forgetting her past.

### B. Forgetting

When Rose secretly dreams of caring for Flo at home, contrary to the plan developed by her half-brother Brian, she seems to be experiencing a kind of amnesia or memory loss (an apparent loss of memory that mirrors Flo’s dementia). The way Flo has been presented in earlier stories makes it impossible for readers to ignore the impression that Rose is almost

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9 A Victorian poem written in admiration of a wife. See Patmore for full citation.
10 “Forgetting” and “Remembering” titles and subsection titles are broadly inspired by Brown’s chapter titles in *The Gifts of the Body*. See Brown for full citation.
delusional, imagining she might be capable of success in saving Flo from the nursing home. Rose must overlook the feelings that home never seemed like home; her stepmother never seemed like a mother; that the memory of her birth mother was erased; and that Rose herself had already failed the traditional mother role by becoming a non-residential mother after her divorce. Rose must forget that her femininity and passion were ridiculed and that her stepmother disapproved of her and claimed center stage in their relationship. But in order for Rose to become the good daughter, she must negotiate the complex history of her family relationships. Like lesbian daughters, Rose must be transformed into the caretaking daughter; she must forget many things that went before. She must forget how she came to be who she is. In forgetting the past, Rose has already sacrificed an important aspect of her subjectivity.

**Forgetting Home**

When Rose agrees to go back home to help Flo, she is going back to a place that had not been very nurturing to her, and far from the ideal. Early representations of home in the collection suggest that a hybrid home developed after Rose’s mother died and Flo married Rose’s father:

Flo came along soon afterward, to take over Rose in the basket, marry her father, open up the front room
to make a grocery store. Rose, who had known the house only as a store, who had known only Flo for a mother, looked back on the sixteen months or so her parents spent here as an orderly, far gentler and more ceremonious time, with little touches of affluence.

(RB 4)

The implication is that the home had not been a real home since Rose’s mother died, and what remained was only a simulacrum of a home, not fully a home, not fully a store. For Rose, the hybrid home and the hybrid family are sadly inferior to what could have been. The romantic idealization of home with her birth mother makes that imagined home complete and pure, and a place where Rose would have been loved in a “far gentler” way. In contrast to the fantasized home, Rose’s concrete memories include her parents’ deaths, a stepfamily, beatings, mockery, embarrassment, degradation, and poverty, and the feeling that the line between the private and public spheres is literally a thin door and a sign in the window (RB 17). She has never felt she belonged there.

One tangible example of Rose’s disenfranchisement is her feeling about the arrangement of Flo’s kitchen. The kitchen can be thought of as the central location of women’s work at home. Rose has never understood Flo’s kitchen arrangement:
The old arrangement of the kitchen: mysterious, personal, eccentric. Big pan in the oven, medium-sized pan under the potato pot on the corner shelf, little pan hanging on the nail by the sink. Colander under the sink. Dishrags, newspaper clippings, scissors, muffin tins, hanging on various nails. Piles of bills and letters on the sewing machine, on the telephone shelf. You would think someone had set them down a day or two ago, but they were years old.

The eccentric way in which Flo arranges kitchen items, and Rose’s mystification, suggests Rose has never understood the way Flo’s mind works, and for years has not felt at home in the home place. In Rose’s imagination, had her mother lived, life would have been orderly and comprehensible.

Imagining herself going home to care for Flo means forgetting not only what it feels like to be in the hybrid home, but what it feels like to come from living on the wrong side of town. As a child, Rose had a difficult time accepting that her family lived in West Hanratty:

They lived in a poor part of town. There was Hanratty and West Hanratty, with the river flowing between them. This was West Hanratty. In Hanratty, the social structure ran from doctors and dentists and
lawyers down to foundry workers and factory workers and draymen; in West Hanratty it ran from factory workers and foundry workers to large improvident families of casual bootleggers and prostitutes and unsuccessful thieves. Rose thought of her own family as straddling the river, belonging nowhere, but that was not true. West Hanratty was where the store was and they were, on the straggling tail end of the main street. (RB 6)

Rose would like to have believed that her family existed in the middle of the river, like the middle class which "straddles" the divisions between rich and poor, so that the family would be invisible in its ordinariness. But at some point she learns to more truly compare and evaluate their socioeconomic status, by leaving home to go to college.

When Rose goes to college, she recognizes not only the acute poverty in which her family exists, but how the upper classes romanticize the poor. At college, Rose stays with a scholarship sponsor, Dr. Henshawe, whose home displays casual elegance: "Her house was small and perfect. Polished floors, glowing rugs, Chinese vases, bowls and landscapes, black carved screens. Much that Rose could not appreciate at the time" (BM 69-70). She and Dr. Henshawe dine with china on blue placemats. Being there "destroyed the naturalness, the taken-for-granted
background of home” (BM 70). Rose cannot appreciate either home now; there is a sensory conflict that each place exposes. Rose thinks angrily of Dr. Henshawe’s paradoxical horror and idealization of poverty; poverty is something Dr. Henshawe has obviously never experienced:

Poverty was not just wretchedness, as Dr. Henshawe seemed to think, it was not just deprivation. It meant having those ugly tube lights and being proud of them. It meant continual talk of money and malicious talk about new things people had bought and whether they were paid for. It meant pride and jealousy flaring over something like the new pair of plastic curtains, imitating lace, that Flo had bought for the front window. That as well as hanging your clothes on nails behind the door and being able to hear every sound from the bathroom. It meant decorating your walls with a number of admonitions, pious and cheerful and mildly bawdy. (BM 70-71)

Poverty is more than acquisitions; it permeates the way one negotiates the world. According to Rose, living in poverty means wanting more, but not having the good taste to know what “more” is; it means envy and shameful exposure, and making do with empty platitudes.
Similarly, Rose’s wealthy fiancé, Patrick, had romanticized her background. When they visit West Hanratty to have the obligatory meet-the-parents dinner, Patrick is horrified, and Rose ashamed, by the unsophisticated food and garish decorations:

It was just as bad as she thought it would be...[T]he table was spread with a plastic cloth, they ate under the tube of fluorescent light. The centerpiece was new and especially for the occasion. A plastic swan, lime green in color, with slits in the wings, in which were stuck folded, colored paper napkins. (BM 89)

Rose feels very exposed by this display; everything seems a false pretension, a mistake. Patrick tries to excuse the experience by suggesting that Rose’s real mother, and hence the home, would have been more refined. She understands he imagines a different background, one with a shabby chic poverty experience:

She saw that he was trying to provide for her a more genteel background, perhaps something like the homes of his poor friends: a few books about, a tea tray, and mended linen, worn good taste; proud, tired, educated people. (BM 91)

But, Rose’s home, and her background, are not genteel. Rose’s college experience educates her about socioeconomic differences
and creates in her a desire to overcome the disadvantages of her background.

To go home means not only to forget she had those dreams of escaping poverty, but to forget that she failed to achieve them. Rose must forget the judgment she feels for having left home to marry Patrick but failing to stay rich by divorcing him. She must disregard her feeling of shame:

If you stay in Hanratty and do not get rich it is all right because you are living out your life as was intended, but if you go away and do not get rich, or, like Rose, do not remain rich, then what was the point? (SP 184)

Rose intuitively understands the judgment of the town: if people from West Hanratty have the audacity to leave home, then they had better make good, because otherwise they are just posturing if they fail, falsely considering themselves better than their fellow townspeople. In this Rose has been one of the failed ones.

Rose has to forget how much she wanted to escape her home in West Hanratty and to what great lengths she went. She attends college, marries Patrick, and moves across the country to Vancouver to try to transform herself into someone else. Her escape is not unlike lesbian daughters who leave home to experience a life free from judgment: “[Lesbian daughters] may
have relocated away from parental and kin networks in order to experience the freedom they found impossible to garner near their birthplace” (Cayleff 244), which makes it difficult for them to return to care for elderly parents. Rose has not been driven from home by homophobia, but she has been driven away by a sense of not fitting in to the home space created by Flo, and by the poverty. West Hanratty is a place she rarely returns to, even after her divorce. When Rose thinks about returning to West Hanratty to perform the good daughter role as Flo’s caretaker, she must forget what it felt like to be at home and poor; she must ignore her embarrassment for having had the gall to leave, and for failing to remain rich after she left.

**Forgetting Mother**

When Rose decides to go home, she must forget how her mother was forgotten, how her mother’s memory was erased. Rose was very young when her mother died, and she does not remember anything about her. There is only one story told about Rose’s mother—the story of her death—and Flo is the one to tell:

Flo’s only story about her mother, the one about her death, was oddly grudging. Flo liked the details of a death: the things people said, the way they protested or tried to get out of bed or swore or laughed (some did these things), but when she said that Rose’s mother mentioned a hard-boiled egg in her chest
made the comparison sound slightly foolish, as if her mother really was the kind of person who might think you could swallow an egg whole. (RB 4)

Munro’s device of Flo’s telling has the effect of killing off Rose’s mother to make room for Flo. Further, by repeating the details of the death (the “hard-boiled egg in her chest”), Flo implies that Rose’s mother was frivolous and perhaps not really as fit to be a mother as Flo is, and, thus, Flo’s implication is that Rose is slightly more fortunate to have a more practical woman like herself for a mother figure.

The erasure of Rose’s mother is further augmented by the indication that there are few items in the house that belonged to her. Flo removed, or Flo and Rose’s father colluded to remove, any reminders of Rose’s mother:

[Rose] had nothing to go on but some egg cups her mother had bought, with a pattern of vines and birds on them, delicately drawn as if with red ink; the pattern was beginning to wear away. No books or clothes or pictures of her mother remained. Her father must have gotten rid of them, or else Flo would. (RB 4)

The egg cups take on a special significance for Rose because they are the only clue to her mother’s character. Rose appears to be the only family member to notice her mother’s absence, as
she marks the fading pattern on the egg cups. It is as if the red ink refers to her mother’s blood drying up and disappearing; likewise, Rose’s connection to her. The egg cups speak to Rose of an imagined gentility; her yearning for a time when her mother loved her, a nurturing love now absent in her home life.

Flo and Rose’s father may have thought Rose would adjust better if she did not dwell on the loss of her mother; that Rose would accept Flo more easily if everyone pretends that her stepmother is her real mother. But even Flo’s body speaks of the inconsistency of her role in Rose’s life:

Rose’s earliest memories of Flo were of extraordinary softness and hardness. The soft hair, the long, soft, pale cheeks, soft almost invisible fuzz in front of her ears and above her mouth. The sharpness of her knees, hardness of her lap, flatness of her front. (RB 11)

To Rose, the soft places of Flo’s body are not the places that provide nurture. Those places—the lap and breasts—are hard and unyielding. Flo’s body presents almost as if she is a half-mother, not nurturing, not life-giving.

The erasure of Rose’s mother’s memory, and the replacement, or stepmother, exposes a gap in Rose’s identity. The gap causes Rose to idealize her mother more, while faulting her stepmother for the impossibility of filling that gap. I would argue that
Flo’s mothering practices which Rose notices stand in stark contrast to her imagined genteel mother. Those traits distinguish Flo’s character in a very particular way, and the contrast drives the push/pull of their relationship. Rose considers Flo a bad mother figure. A stepmother is defined by what she is not.

Gustafson provides an apt description of the bad mother stereotype:

The bad mother is imagined to ignore, trivialize, or reject her child’s need for love, caring, and nurturance both as an intellectual understanding and as a lived practice. She is regarded as unloving and uncaring. The stereotypical image of the bad mother that springs to mind is the woman who neglects, abuses, or fails to protect her child. A woman who is unwilling or unable to perform her motherly duties is thought to be motivated by selfishness, self-absorption, and self-indulgence--all individual defects. (28)

I would argue that a stepmother has no chance of being characterized a good mother by virtue of being unrelated by blood. As Laura V. Salwen points out in her article, “The Myth of the Wicked Stepmother,” a stepmother experiences a “lack of specific norms for role behavior’ (Kampara, 1980, p. 70) leading
to role ambiguity and role confusion” (118). Stepmothers have “ambiguous or nonexistent legal status” (Salwen 119); yet, they are “generally expected to fulfill the same role and functions as natural mothers without the benefit of the positive side of ambivalent feelings—the deep and abiding love most children feel for their natural mothers” (Salwen 122). Although Salwen’s article does not specifically address the confusion from a stepchild’s perspective, it is likely that stepmother role ambiguity creates confusion for stepdaughters as well. While role ambiguity is undoubtedly painful for both stepmother and school-age stepdaughters, it may continue when those long-standing strains carry into a stepmother’s old age and the stepdaughter’s middle age, and caretaking of an elderly stepmother becomes an issue.

When Rose thinks about going home to care for Flo, she must forget several of Flo’s mothering practices. One of the mothering practices that troubles Rose the most is Flo’s bullying. A good example of browbeating occurs in “Privilege.” Rose refuses to use the school outhouse because the filth overwhelms her. Consequently, she occasionally wets her pants running home after school. When Rose arrives home, soiled, Flo launches into a scornful rant:

“Wee-pee, wee-pee,” [Flo] sang out loud, mocking Rose. “Walking home and she had a wee-pee!”
Flo was also fairly pleased, because she liked to see people brought down to earth, Nature asserting itself; she was the sort of woman who will make public what she finds in the laundry bag. Rose was mortified, but didn’t reveal the problem. Why not? She was probably afraid that Flo would show up at the school with a pail and shovel, cleaning up, and lambasting everybody into the bargain. (PR 25-26)

Rose receives no sympathy, only ridicule, from Flo, who rejoices at her downfall. Flo’s rhetorical question, “Who do you think you are?” from an earlier story, “Royal Beatings,” resurfaces here (RB 15). In Flo’s worldview, there is no better way to discredit self-important people than physical humiliation. Rose does not tell Flo of the problem at school because she believes Flo would not consider herself too superior to get right down into the shit and clean it up. As if this were not a harrowing enough picture to imagine, Rose expects Flo would display no modesty or embarrassment at doing so—only rage that conditions could so exist. To Rose, this seems to overstep the boundaries of appropriate mothering and to display a misunderstanding of Rose’s needs, something Rose imagines her mother would not do, as Rose romanticizes her mother to have been more refined.

Indeed, later in the story the narrator reveals that Rose has good reason to fear Flo’s interference. Rose had told her
stepmother that a boy at school had tripped her and torn her raincoat, to cover up the lie that she had torn it coming down from the fire escape where she meets with her crush, Cora, and her two friends:

Flo came to the school to raise Cain (her stated intention) and heard witnesses swear Rose had torn [her Morey raincoat] on a nail. The teacher was glum, would not declare herself, indicated Flo’s visit was not welcome. Adults did not come to the school in West Hanratty. Mothers were strongly partisan in fights; would hang over their gates, and yell; some would even come out to tug hair and flail shingles, themselves. They would abuse the teacher behind her back and send their children off to school with instructions not to take any lip from her. But they would never have behaved, as Flo seemed to believe (and here Rose saw her for the first time out of her depth, mistaken) that offenders would confess, or be handed over, that justice would take any form but a ripping and tearing of a Morey coat, in revenge, a secret mutilation in the cloakroom. (PR 30)

Rose’s interpretation of good motherhood suggests that her stepmother cannot possibly understand the rules of the school game. Mothers support their children in West Hanratty, but they
do not directly require adults such as teachers to be accountable, or to bring justice for their offended children. Flo’s sense of motherly duty is overdeveloped and directed outwardly. However, Flo does not seem to be aware of her own injustices and bullying toward Rose.

In addition to browbeating of the psychological kind, Flo perpetrates beatings of the physical kind. While her half-hearted cuffing does not perturb Rose much in “Royal Beatings” (3), Flo’s inclination to call Rose’s father into the ring does. Rose and Flo argue grandly, and when Flo cannot control her temper any longer, she tells Rose’s father that his daughter is insufferable and needs a beating: “The things Rose has said to Flo are such that, if Flo had said them to her mother, she knows her father would have thrashed her into the ground” (RB 16). Rose’s father proceeds to give Rose a battering, and Rose, humiliated, goes to her room (RB 17-19). Flo tries to make it up to her by bringing her cold cream and treats, and Rose, hating herself, caves in to it (RB 20-21). Rose cannot prevent her surrender, just as a prisoner cannot help taking kindesses from a jailer.

Readers are led to believe that this regularly occurs (RB 12; RB 13). The beatings create a sense of shame and complicity and hatred and twisted love—nearly the furthest point from “an
orderly, far gentler and more ceremonious time” that Rose imagines existed when her mother was alive (RB 4).

Another troubling mothering practice Flo exhibits is a lack of modesty on Rose’s behalf. For example, twice Flo made a spectacle of Rose on the train in Toronto. When Rose was young, Flo purchased chocolate milk for Rose that turned out to be sour. Flo stomps to and fro on the train, hunting down the vendor to make an exchange, once again over-mothering as with the Morey raincoat incident. Then, Flo begins talking with a woman next to her about Rose’s private bodily concerns: “[Rose’s] morning constipation which was why she was lacking color” (WS 59-60). These maternal excesses cause Rose “to throw up in the train toilet” (WS 60).

Later, when Rose takes her first solo train trip to Toronto, Flo draws attention to Rose while putting her on the train: “‘Keep an eye on her, she’s never been away from home before!’ to the conductor, then looking around and laughing, to show that was jokingly meant” (WS 60). No one laughs. This takes place after Flo’s earlier warning to Rose about men who might be angling to take advantage of her while on the trip (WS 57-59). Flo seems to simultaneously want to protect Rose and to want to be the center of attention, not appropriately modest nor genteel behavior for a real mother.
Rose’s principle opportunity to escape materializes in the person of Patrick, the graduate student who wants to marry her. Rose dreads the scene she knows will unfold when Flo endeavors to play the part of mother during dinner with Patrick, and: “[I]t was just as bad as she thought it would be” (BM 89).

Not only is the table decorated with a large swan napkin-holder and a plastic tablecloth, as mentioned earlier, but Patrick refuses the coarse-textured food. Mid-way through dinner, Flo shares some tidbits of local history. Not five miles from where Flo was born “was the worst place ever created for suiciding:"

[Rose] had doubts about what was coming, and rightly so, for then Patrick got to hear about a man who cut his own throat, his own throat, from ear to ear, a man who shot himself the first time and didn’t do enough damage, so he loaded up and fired again and managed it, another man who hanged himself using a chain, the kind of chain you hook on a tractor with, so it was a wonder his head was not torn off. Tore off, Flo said. She went on to a woman who, though not a suicide, had been dead in her home a week before she was found, and that was in the summer. She asked Patrick to imagine it. (BM 90-91)
This storytelling performance shatters any illusions about Flo’s qualifications to be the mother-in-law of an heir to a “mercantile empire” (BM 80). Flo displays a morbid interest in notable suicidal acts, but the recitation probably makes Rose want to kill herself. However, Patrick brushes it off: “‘Of course, that’s not your real mother,’ Patrick said. ‘Your real parents can’t have been like that.’ Rose did not like his saying that either, though it was what she believed, herself” (BM 91). Patrick refuses to accept that Flo has anything to do with Rose’s character. He implies that character transfers genetically—and that Flo’s illegitimacy as stepmother produces the show he has just beheld, not poverty and a hard life. Rose rebels at his assessment. Seen from Rose’s new eyes, the eyes of someone finally able to leave home for good by marrying Patrick, Flo has good intentions (BM 91). Rose feels a loyalty she had not felt before. But it is a long time—not until Flo moves into the County Home—before Rose admits to herself that she feels any empathy toward her stepmother.

Like many lesbian daughters who return to their family of origin as caretakers, Rose must forget the forgetting of her mother, and forget the ways Flo mothered her—the bullying, beatings, ridicule, and mortification.

Rose’s plan to take care of Flo means forgetting why she never called Flo by the name of “Mother.”
Rose hopes to care for Flo, but she forgets she gave up being the primary custodial parent for her daughter, Anna, after her divorce from Patrick. Although she loves Anna deeply, creating a new sexual life along with developing her ability to provide for herself financially proves difficult for Rose. In “Providence,” Rose brings Anna to live with her in a town in the Kootenay Mountains where she has a radio job (PR 137), while Rose simultaneously attempts to negotiate a long-distance affair with a professor at the University of Calgary. Once she and Anna arrive at her apartment, with Anna settled into bed, Rose feels satisfied she has done the right thing:

She could feel the weight of Anna in the apartment then just as naturally as she had felt her weight in her body, and without having to go and look at her she could see with stunning, fearful pleasure the fair hair and fair skin and glistening eyebrows, the profile along which, if you looked closely, you could see the tiny almost invisible hairs rise, catching the light. For the first time in her life she understood domesticity, knew the meaning of shelter, and labored to manage it. (PROV 145)

Rose loves Anna with a deep motherly affection that manifests itself in fine, glowing, remembered details; the golden light on
her daughter’s face makes her look like an angel. Awash with love, Rose determines to create the conditions for them to stay together. Rose wants to be a good mother.

Rose discovers, however, that although they settle in well together, illness, the weather, and childcare difficulties make it impossible for Rose to rendezvous with her lover. Once a conference on radio had been conveniently located in Calgary, and Rose arranged for a teacher to stay with Anna for a few days, but Anna got sick and Rose had to cancel (PROV 147). After two days, Rose has to leave Anna home alone while she goes to work (PROV 148). At another time, plans are spoiled by the babysitter calling off with an emergency; Rose determines to take Anna with her but a blizzard intervenes (PROV 150-154).

At the end of the school year, Patrick suggests Anna come back to live with him and his new wife-to-be in Vancouver:

And did Rose not think [Patrick writes], that it might be better for Anna to be settled in her old home next year, in the house she has always known, to be back at her old school with her old friends...rather than traipsing around with Rose in her new independent existence? Might it not be true—and here Rose thought she heard the voice of the stable girl friend
--that she was using Anna to give herself some stability, rather than face up to the consequences of the path she had chosen? (PROV 154-155)

Giving Anna stability resonates with Rose. Rose recognizes she cannot provide stability for Anna; Rose needs and wants to go to Toronto to try for a better job. Rose agrees to the plan: she becomes a non-residential mother; Anna, a stepdaughter. Rose justifies her decision: “Poor, picturesque, gypsying childhoods are not much favored by children, though they will claim to value them, for all sorts of reasons” (PROV 155).

Coincidentally, Rose’s agreement to become a non-residential mother provides a good example of Gustafson’s theory that mothers who do not function as caretakers employ defense strategies such as selective denial in order to align themselves with the good mother paradigm (42-44). Every narrative indication from the story suggests to the reader—in a balanced way, without blame for Rose or Anna—this might be for the best. The search for better employment in a better location and the pursuit of relationships will make her a bad mother. Rose cannot simultaneously be a good mother and claim subjectivity.

Interestingly, the mouthpiece of the discourse of motherly caretaking comes from Rose’s former husband. It is as if Rose cannot formulate this decision herself; she cannot claim
subjectivity. The discourse of good mothering is too strong to allow Rose herself to send her child back to her father.\textsuperscript{12}

When Rose plans to go to West Hanratty, she forgets that mothering Anna took another course and the reasons for that course. Rose forgets that she justified non-residential motherhood, and succumbs to the cultural norm of the good mother by privileging what she thought were Anna’s needs, rather than claiming that agency and motherhood can go hand in hand.

\textbf{Forgetting Passion}

Cayleff suggests that lesbian children must often lead double lives when they recognize their sexual identity will not be accepted by their family of origin. She claims:

Living this split life leads to trying to please others rather than caring for oneself, thinking of one’s own needs as invalid, unacceptable, or the more deeply held and most damaging belief that ‘My secret self is shameful, unworthy, evil’ (Hardin, 1999: 33).

(Cayleff 245-246)

Although Rose does not quite believe her secret self is “shameful, unworthy, evil” in precisely the same way as provoked by the lesbian experience, in returning home to care for Flo,

\textsuperscript{12} We will see this lack of agency repeat itself when Rose becomes a non-caretaking daughter--Rose does come to the decision after two days that she cannot care for Flo once Rose understands the challenges of doing so; however, Flo herself makes the decision to move into the County Home. Rose is not forced to assert her subjectivity.
Rose must forget that she might not have “turn[ed] out to be the right kind of woman” (HAG 48).

Rose’s femininity differs from Flo’s, and it compares unfavorably. For example, Rose’s father approves of Flo’s femininity compared to hers:

Flo was his idea of what a woman ought to be.

Rose knew that, and indeed he often said it. A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining, and bossing and seeing through people’s pretensions. At the same time she should be naïve intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs. (HAG 47)

Evidence from the stories suggests that Flo is exactly the type of woman described here. Rose fears that she cannot be more like Flo, “the right kind of woman” (HAG 48), and worse, she combines this failure with her father’s worst characteristics: dreamy, vain, clumsy, and living life in her head (HAG 48).

Rose also likes to flaunt her “gaudy ambitions” (HAG 47).

Rose’s father holds Flo up as an example to her, although Rose knows he is proud of her, too. Yet, her father must be loyal to his wife, to “seem to be in sufficient agreement with Flo” (HAG
After Rose’s father dies (HAG 55), Rose has no silent or private advocate for the way she is becoming a woman.

Following the death of Rose’s father, Flo assumes responsibility for policing Rose’s femininity, in an attempt to make Rose more like her. Flo wants to circumscribe Rose’s passionate nature; she considers it misplaced energy, with the potential for making Rose vulnerable and getting her into trouble. And, it is not very practical. Flo creates an aura of limitations and protections through her stories and warnings. However, Flo’s method of coercion depends mostly on ridicule. When Rose develops a crush on an older school girl and steals candy from the store to give to her, her stepmother explodes into a rant:

Flo was dumbfounded. She said so. Not at the stealing. She was naturally against stealing but she seemed to understand that in this case it was the secondary evil, it was less important.

“What were you doing with it? Giving it to her? What were you giving it to her for? Are you in love with her or something?”

She meant that as an insult and a joke. Rose answered no, because she associated love with movie endings, kissing, and getting married. Her feelings were at the moment shocked and exposed, and already,
though she didn’t know it, starting to wither and curl up at the edges. Flo was a drying blast.

“You are so,” said Flo. “You make me sick.”

It wasn’t future homosexuality Flo was talking about. If she had known about that, or thought of it, it would have seemed to her even more of a joke, even more outlandish, more incomprehensible, than the regular carrying-on. It was love she sickened at. It was the enslavement, the self-abasement, the self-deception. That struck her. She saw the danger, all right; she read the flaw. Headlong hopefulness, readiness, need. (PR 37-38)

Flo mocks Rose, trying to mold her, to frighten her into curbing her passions, to prevent her from letting go. The syntactical overtones suggest Flo’s force begins to “dry up” Rose’s maturing female body, and the female body’s response to sexual arousal. As time goes on, Flo continues to laugh at Rose for this crush, but to little effect: “So long after, and so uselessly, Rose saw Flo trying to warn her and alter her” (PR 39). Rose remembers the derision, but not the essence of the warning to protect herself from losing herself to passion. Rose continues her headlong pursuit.

Later, in “Wild Swans,” passion returns. During her first solo train trip to Toronto, and after she has been warned by Flo
about male predators posing as United Church ministers, she coincidentally encounters a man who says he is a United Church minister. He sits next to her and after a few moments of casual conversation, he pretends to fall asleep, his newspaper draped over part of her coat; he slips his hand up her skirt, and proceeds to bring her to orgasm, which she (surprised at herself) allows (WS 62-65). Rose recognizes in herself a kind of passion that she cannot nor will not stop:

But there was more to it than that. Curiosity. More constant, more imperious, than any lust. A lust in itself, that will make you draw back and wait, wait too long, risk almost anything, just to see what will happen. To see what will happen. (WS 64)

Rose submits to this experience because she craves transformation from the poor girl from the small Ontario town to someone, something, else. This contradicts Flo’s life-long injunction to remember who she is, where she comes from, and what she is about—a woman in her proper place.

In later stories (“Mischief,” “Privilege,” and “Providence”), Rose is quite sexually adventurous, or tries to be, especially after her divorce, a woman who breaks out of a certain mold. When Rose plans to return home to care for Flo, these adventures will likely have to be put on hold. Full-time
caretaking, as Rose discovers while caring for her daughter, Anna, does not leave much time for sexual exploration.

In a way, Rose leads a double life, the one she presents to Flo and the one she actually lives: she is a performer. When Rose plans to go home to care for Flo, she must forget how her version of femininity differs from Flo’s, and like lesbian daughters, she must forget that her version of femininity caused tension between them. She must forget, also, that caring for Flo will most likely put a stop to her sexual life and her passion, as did caring for her daughter Anna.

**Forgetting Disapproval**

Like lesbian daughters who must hide their homosexuality when they go back home to care for elderly parents, Rose may be forced to hide her true self, the self that has always earned familial disapproval. Cayleff argues: “...[t]he prospect of re-immersing one’s self in the midst of the family of origin to begin caretaking may mean reassuming that cloak of invisibility...” (246). Rose has never been the favored child. In contrast to her professional life where she regularly performs on-stage, she has had to play second-fiddle to her half-brother. Rose must endure the feeling that she has never been fully approved of or fully loved.

In “Royal Beatings,” Flo elevates Brian over Rose. During their argument, Flo compares Rose unfavorably to her half-
brother because Rose taught him a dirty ditty. Flo claims Rose has damaged Brian with her brazen impudence:

What do they have to say to each other? It doesn’t really matter. Flo speaks of Rose’s smart-aleck behavior, rudeness and sloppiness and conceit. Her willingness to make work for others, her lack of gratitude. She mentions Brian’s innocence, Rose’s corruption. Oh, don’t you think you’re somebody, says Flo, and a moment later, Who do you think you are? (RB 15)

According to Flo, Rose is not even worthy to attempt to corrupt Brian; she should not even be trying. Who does Rose think she is, causing so much trouble for Flo? Who does she think she is to ruin Flo’s life, and Brian’s, with her cheekiness, filthy mind, and sense of entitlement? Flo calls on Rose’s father to get Rose in line, and he accommodates by beating her. Flo seems to infect the home with her disapproval of Rose.

Later, Rose’s accomplishments, after her divorce, do not measure up to Brian’s. Once Flo visited Brian and Phoebe, and afterward, she accuses Rose of being jealous because she has not acquired the accoutrements of middle-class life:

But afterward it seemed to be a pleasure to [Flo], to sit and list the things Brian and Phoebe owned, the features of their house...the door chimes, the
automatic garage doors, the swimming pool..."[Y]ou wouldn’t turn them down if you was offered.” (SP 184)

Rose tells her the things owned by Brian and Phoebe are quite ordinary, but Flo’s insistence on Rose’s jealousy implies that Flo blames Rose for her failure to be in such a stable economic situation (SP 184).

Flo’s judgment of Rose’s failure appears to carry forward into the sibling relationship between Brian and Rose. Rose suspects that Brian and his wife Phoebe have never appreciated her. Before she meets with them to talk about Flo’s fate, Rose must decide how to present herself: conservatively or more in keeping with her profession. Rose chooses to wear an Indian caftan, “…the very thing that would justify their saying that Rose was always so theatrical” (SP 183).

Rose also recognizes their air of condescension:

She had an idea that Brian and Phoebe moved in a permanent cloud of disapproval of her. She thought that they disapproved of her success, limited and precarious and provincial though it might be, and that they disapproved of her even more when she failed. She also knew it was not likely they would have her on their minds so much, or feel anything so definite. (SP 183)
It seems impossible for Rose to gain approval, regardless of what she does, and for her to try is to assume anyone is noticing. Flo’s life-long disapproval of Rose appears to have infected Rose’s relationship with Brian and Phoebe.

On many occasions, Brian makes it perfectly clear that he does not respect Rose’s chosen profession:

In Rose’s presence Brian had said more than once that he had no use for people in her line of work. But he had no use for a good many people. Actors, artists, journalists, rich people (he would never admit to being one himself), the entire Arts faculty of universities...Rose did not know if he spoke the truth or if this was something he had to say in front of her. He offered the bait of his low-voiced contempt; she rose to it... (SP 183-184)

Brian’s posturing demonstrates his opinion that Rose does not measure up, that she does not do real work, does not quite exist in the real world. Brian’s job as an engineer and Flo’s job as a general store owner both are concrete and pragmatic, whereas Rose’s profession as an actress is elusive in nature and temporary in scope. In Flo’s eyes, she has never been as pure as Brian, and in Brian’s eyes, she has never been worthy.

Rose has encountered a “permanent cloud of disapproval” in both childhood and adulthood. Her feelings about this past
disapproval and her failure to ever have gained approval, must be forgotten even as she attempts to, once more, please the family through full-time care of Flo.

**Forgetting Center Stage**

Rose forgets what it feels like to be upstaged by Flo when she plans to go home to care for her full-time. She forgets Flo’s outrageous world view, her storytelling, her boasting. At the beginning of “Spelling,” Flo has center stage. For the first page of the story, Flo holds the reader’s attention by her boast that she can detect when a woman is “going off the track” (SP 178). Flo knows the signs: men’s work boots, old hat, torn raincoat, “shredded scarves,” and “layers of ravelling sweaters” (SP 178). They come to the store and tell Flo their paranoid stories; she takes pleasure in goading them along (SP 178). Flo enjoys marveling over the absurdities of life. As with many of Flo’s boasts, this one entertains, but hollowly: it is a small thing to notice and brag about. Her store is not a very big stage.

Nevertheless, Flo has claimed center stage in Rose’s life, not for her gentility, of course, but for her character traits which I have illuminated in the previous “Forgetting” sections. But Rose craves center stage for herself. She slyly invites Flo to an award ceremony hoping to claim the spotlight: “...it was possible that [Rose] did, secretly, want Flo to come, wanted to
show Flo, intimidate her, finally remove herself from Flo’s shade. That would be a natural thing to want to do” (SP 190). Rose wants to cease orbiting Flo, to claim subjectivity—but she has been unable to do so. When Rose goes home, she simultaneously forgets the feeling of always having been in Flo’s shadow while at the same time hoping she will be valorized for her sacrifice. Rose wants be center stage.

**Conclusion: Forgetting**

The discourse of caretaking produces self-sacrifice, most commonly assumed to mean that the sacrifice of time and energy spent, responsibilities carried out, and pleasures deferred, begin at the moment caretaking commences until the loved one dies. The demarcation of self-sacrifice at the beginning of caretaking falsifies and demeans the caretaking daughter’s perception of her past and erases her subjectivity before she arrives to perform caretaking tasks. When Rose surreptitiously promises herself to care for Flo full-time, she ignores, like lesbian daughters, all the past indignities perpetrated by her family. She forgets her hybrid home and the poverty of West Hanratty; she forgets how her mother was forgotten and how her stepmother tried to replace her; she forgets how her head-long drive for passion was ridiculed; she forgets Flo’s life-long favoritism of Brian and that half-brother’s disdain; she forgets how it feels for Flo to always claim center stage. Like many
lesbian daughters, Rose denies the past that she has spent a lifetime trying to escape. She is not bitter or vengeful about her past; nevertheless, for Rose to intend to go back home as a long-term caretaker, she performs a type of self-sacrifice, even before the caretaking begins. She forgets.

When she arrives home, she remembers.

C. Remembering

In this section of the thesis, I argue Rose’s subjectivity reasserts itself when she begins the caretaking process. She remembers who she is and what her capabilities and limitations are, and she realizes that she cannot provide the caretaking response she had anticipated. This section discusses the activities and experiences Rose has while caretaking for Flo which produce her decision within two days to intend to stop full-time caretaking services.

When Rose embarks on her caretaking adventure, she hopes to inaugurate a new era in her life, that of self-sacrifice, regardless of her complicated family past. She expects to be transformed into a new person, welcomed into her family, and crowned with glory. Rose yearns for the validation that comes with the paradox of sacrificial caretaking. But very shortly, that ideal is challenged: “This vision did not survive the first two days of being home” (SP 185). Rose’s rather romantic, naïve dream of caring for Flo full-time is produced by the
silence that surrounds the burden of caretaking. As Gustafson notes about mothering:

Many women have, and many more hide, feelings of guilt when becoming a mother seems to be at odds with the romantic ideal. The process of becoming a mother and assuming the responsibility of motherwork is rife with contradictions between the ideology and practice—between the imagined and the lived experience of mothering. (31-32)

According to Gustafson, the idealization of mothering makes it impossible for mothers to speak about the difficulties in the everyday experience of mothering. Likewise, Cayleff suggests that silence about the stresses of caretaking complicates the lesbian daughter’s experience:

There is still considerable hesitation among lesbians to speak out about the burdens that elder caretaking imposes. This despite decades of feminist support for women who speak about things previously considered taboo, or the Gay Liberation Movement’s encouragement of lesbians to speak out about issues that oppress them. (Cayleff 240)

When Rose idealizes the nature of caretaking with idyllic plans to repair Flo’s house and make nourishing soup, she expects that
her crown of glory will come with very little effort. However, the reality of caretaking makes her reconsider that fantasy.

This section of the thesis investigates Rose’s motivation for giving up her hope of becoming a saint. I argue that Rose remembers and regains her subjectivity soon after she begins caretaking.

**Remembering Work**

When Rose arrives home to care for Flo with the secret intent to stay and care for her full-time, she immediately remembers one truth about caretaking: it is dirty work. Her romantic notion that she will “clean and paint Flo’s kitchen,” and “plant flowers in the pots,” gives way to the reality of the situation:

Flo had got into the habit of keeping the table set for the next meal, to save trouble. The plastic cloth was gummy, the outline of the plate and saucer plain on it as the outline of pictures on a greasy wall. The refrigerator was full of sulfurous scraps, dark crusts, furry oddments. Rose got to work cleaning, scraping, scalding. (SP 179)

Rose performs backbreaking labor to try to put Flo’s kitchen back in order—not the vague, rather quixotic tasks she had envisioned her assistance to be.
Rose’s romantic vision of the caretaking she plans for Flo mirrors the discursive notions of good mothering. Earlier I argue that there is a veil of secrecy surrounding the burden of caretaking. Here is another paradox: if the burden is recognized by the culture, women are expected to enjoy it. For example, good mothers are imagined to take pleasure in getting their hands dirty caring for their household and children. In her article, “Bitches with Broomsticks,” Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb interprets the 1940s/1950s’ psychiatrist and psychologist John Bowlby’s portrayal of the successful, caring, post-war mother:

Simply put, the “good” postwar mother was expected to not only put herself “unreservedly” and “continuously at the disposal of others” (n. 9, Bowlby, Child Care, 78), but she also had to find her work wholly fulfilling. She still had to wash out diaper pails, to wipe up baby barf and baby bums, but she no longer had a right to complain--let alone ask for assistance--because such tasks were suddenly of supreme importance and could be completed satisfactorily by her alone. She had to whistle while she worked: the future of her family--no, the future of the free world--seemed to depend on it. (79)
According to MacCallum-Whitcomb’s interpretation of Bowlby, the discourse of the good mother pressures women to believe their dirty work for the family contributes not only to the welfare of her family, but to the greater national good. Rose’s conviction that daughterly caretaking will be unproblematic stems from this idealization of mothering tasks. Daughters are socialized to believe that it is their job to care for their elderly parents and because of the secrecy surrounding the challenges of caretaking, daughters may underestimate the toll it may take on them.

Caretaking in Flo’s house involves not only cleaning. It soon dawns on Rose that Flo’s condition will require constant housekeeping vigilance. Flo will undo what Rose has done. Consider the next morning’s scene after Rose’s cleaning assault:

The second morning Rose got up and found that a gigantic stirring up had occurred in the kitchen, as if someone had wielded a big shaky spoon. The big pan was lodged behind the refrigerator; the egg lifter was in with the towels, the bread knife was in the flour bin and the roasting pan wedged in the pipes under the sink. (SP 179)

Rose’s efforts to clean and order the kitchen are fruitless; Flo’s illness creates confusion and disarrangement. Indeed, after breakfast, Flo picks up the cutting board and marches off
“as well as anybody with two canes could march--to hide it somewhere, in the piano bench or under the back steps” (SP 180). Caretaking tasks are often reversed. Any mother will tell you this is a common frustration--children undo, with a peculiar logic of their own--what a mother has just straightened and cleaned.

Difficult as this is for a mother, mothering Flo will not be similar to mothering children. A common misconception about Alzheimer’s disease is that patients regress to childhood and that caring for them is like caring for a child. However, caretaking for the two is not the same. Children are expected to eventually attain self-sufficiency while the effects of the disease upon Alzheimer’s patients require more, and more intensive, care over time (Brody 125).\(^\text{13}\) When Flo disarranges the kitchen and marches off with a cutting board, Rose begins to understand that caring for her is going to require quite a bit of ingenuity, patience, and tolerance for the unexpected. While Rose might have imagined she could care for Flo indefinitely, the overwhelming nature of the work presents itself very early after her arrival home. Part of caretaking is hard physical labor like cleaning and organizing, and part of it means a

\(^\text{13}\) See also The Alzheimer’s Association website for the stages of disease and caretaking tasks needed: [http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_stages_of_alzheimers.asp](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_stages_of_alzheimers.asp)
frustrating sense of the unknown, and negligible, and certainly easily reversible, results.

Contrast this women’s work at home with Rose’s achievements as an actress. While Rose has not been wildly successful, her profession creates freedoms and opportunities to do what she loves. As much as she can be, she has been in charge. Rose has been in several television and many theatrical productions. For two years prior to Flo’s illness, she toured with traveling companies, performing in small venues, and “chatting about these productions” on television (SP 181). She won an award (SP 190).

Caretaking will not win Rose any awards. As Hogan notes, caretaking is relegated to the private sphere, and although women are expected to fulfill the idealized role, they are to do so with altruistic motives: “The physical, mental, and professional costs to women when they cast aside a self-created, dynamic identity in favor of responding to the needs of others in distress are concealed behind the loving spectacle of women’s sacrifice” (2). Caretaking women are to be satisfied with intangible rewards, although the value of their familial caretaking work is estimated to be $196 billion a year (Hogan 2).

When Rose forgets her past in order to try to stay with Flo “as long as [is] necessary” (SP 185), she does not realize,
until she arrives home, what that sacrifice will entail. Once there, she remembers the rigors of caretaking, the repetitive housekeeping tasks, the powerlessness, and the intangible rewards that should be enough, are not enough. She begins to remember who she is.

**Remembering Resources**

Rose hopes to do a couple of repairs when she gets home, but when she arrives, more needs done than replacing a few shingles (SP 185). In the scene after Rose visits the County Home, West Hanratty is described as having gone upscale and that Flo’s house has not kept up. Distinctions between Hanratty and West Hanratty have gradually diminished, with a bypass, a new paved road, new mercury vapor streetlights, and a new bridge; many of the homes are now covered with paint and aluminum siding. In contrast, the windows from Flo’s store are boarded up and the signs are painted over; Flo’s house is the only “eyesore” left (SP 188). The negative comparison between Flo’s home and the surrounding neighborhood makes a sad commentary on Flo’s “hard life” (SP 190); she has not had the financial wherewithal, nor the apparent psychic energy, to ensure maintenance of her home.

While we do not read of Rose’s speculation about the cost of caretaking, the inclusion of this information about the house suggests this as an issue Rose must address. Not only is the
exterior an “eyesore,” the interior needs attention. The kitchen is in poor shape (SP 179), Flo’s room is “rubble-lined” (SP 188), and the only part of the house where the smell is “bearable” (SP 188) is in the glassed-in porch. Part of caretaking will entail remodeling the house, inside and out, making it livable, and maintaining its value.

Rose, like many daughters, would find the cost prohibitive, added to any income she might lose as a result of full-time, long-term caretaking. Studies reported by Cayleff suggest that women, not men, are more likely to change their work status to care for an elderly parent, including:

...going to work late, leaving early, taking time off work, taking a leave of absence, dropping back to part-time or taking a less demanding job, losing job benefits, turning down a promotion, choosing early retirement, or giving up work entirely. (249)

A long-term study found 11.6% of working daughters had quit their jobs to provide care for an elderly parent (Brody 261). Unemployed women are thus, clearly, more vulnerable to lost benefits (Cayleff 249). Some estimates cite a loss of $659,139 in “lost wages, lost Social Security benefits, and pension benefits” over a lifetime (Brody 54). Not only do women lose benefits for caring, they give substantial resources to the elderly parent for daily needs such as groceries and medications
(Cayleff 249). Rose’s pleasant dream of caring for Flo did not take into account the financial resources that would be required.

Although Rose seems to have been poised to care for Flo “as long as [is] necessary,” (SP 185), especially since she is between jobs, she does not think beforehand how long her time of sacrifice might be, nor does she calculate the material costs involved in lost labor and in making the house livable. When Rose arrives home to see the state of the interior, and the condition of the house compared to the surrounding neighborhood, Rose faces the fact that a substantial financial investment will be necessary to care for her stepmother at home. While she had hoped to do so, the challenge presents a monumental sacrifice. The narrative clues suggest that Rose realizes part of her sacrifice will also be monetary; we may assume that the nature of her employment as an actress does not make this very feasible.

Remembering Her Name

Not only does Rose remember the frustrations of caretaking and the implied financial hardship when she returns home, she faces an unsettling predicament. Flo does not recognize her. When Rose launches into the kitchen assault, Flo thinks Rose is a customer behind the store counter. Rose insists: “‘I’m Rose...’ (SP 179). Flo insists she cannot be Rose: “‘Rose is
away,’ Flo said. She had a habit now of sticking her bottom lip out, when she was displeased or perplexed. ‘Rose got married’” (SP 179). Not only does Flo not remember that Rose is her stepdaughter, she does not remember that Rose divorced some years ago. Her stepmother does not recognize Rose for who she is now; the disease causes her to put Rose squarely in the past.

The second morning, after kitchen items have been mysteriously rearranged in the night, Flo thinks Rose is a caretaker from the county. Flo says: “'You’re that woman they were sending to look after me’” (SP 180). Rose agrees that she is, and Flo says, “I haven’t got money to pay you. They sent you, they can pay you’” (SP 180). When Rose acquiesces to Flo’s interpretation of her identity, it suggests Rose gives up part or all of who she is. If Rose stays to care for Flo in the long-term, it may feel to her as if all of her identity will be erased.

This is a paradox of the caretaking discourse: women should seek glorification through the erasure brought about by self-sacrifice. For someone like Rose who craves recognition and approval for her self-sacrifice, the erasure of her identity could be difficult. This is not to imply Rose only cares about being glorified on center stage, although she would like to replace Brian as the favored child. However, I would suggest that women who serve as caretakers face similar erasure, not
necessarily by the people to whom they attend, but by the culture—and that erasure matters. As Hogan argues, the culture glorifies women’s caretaking sacrifice, particularly in times of crisis:

In times of crisis and great suffering, such as wars and mass epidemics, the figure of the idealized, good woman as modest and selfless, sacrificing her own individuality for the good of the family, community, and nation, has repeatedly emerged in Western culture as a balm and source of comfort. (33)

Hogan submits that the discourse of caretaking normalizes the expectation for, and the dependence upon, the silent, nameless, sacrificial woman as a means for reducing communal responsibility for providing care. Given that by 2030, a projected 70 million people or 20% of the U.S. population will be over the age of 75, (Brody 8), the idealized, silent, sacrificial daughter may well continue to be paradoxically glorified for her erasure by saving the nation from its discomfort over Alzheimer’s disease and the issues of personhood due to memory loss.

Rose asserts her name only once more: when Flo assures her she is ready to move to the County Home (SP 189): “'They hired you to take me, now you get a move on and take me,' Flo [says]. ‘I’m not hired. I’m Rose. I’ll make you a cup of tea.’ [Flo
says:] ‘You can make it. I won’t drink it’” (SP 189). Flo does not acknowledge that she knows Rose. But the effect of Flo’s decision to move to the County Home seems to give Rose permission to remember who she is, and to insist on her name.

When Rose comes to care for Flo, she does not expect to be forgotten; she does not expect that her identity will be erased. Several times in the story, Rose has to remind Flo who she is; frequently, Flo denies that Rose is who Rose says she is. When Rose remembers how much it matters to be recognized, she claims more subjectivity on her journey to becoming a non-caretaking daughter. For Rose, the glory she hopes to receive for being the sacrificial daughter is not enough to overcome the erasure that occurs when she loses herself through caring.

**Remembering Hope**

The popular discourse of caretaking overlooks the immense emotional strain that long-term care arouses. Brody reports, “[I]t is difficult to witness the discomfort, pain, and unhappiness of someone about whom one cares” (51). Caretakers risk depression, chronic stress, stomach disorders, exhaustion and anxiety (Cayleff 248). Had Rose continued caring for Flo indefinitely, she may have put her own health at risk.

Caretaking for an elderly parent with Alzheimer’s disease implies watching a loved one face gradual decline in physical and mental abilities, with death as the expected outcome. There
is no hope for an alleviation of symptoms; there is no hope for recovery. The time period from diagnosis to death varies from five to seven years (Post 36). When Rose secretly vows to take care of Flo, she has a vague rather romantic notion that she will care for Flo “for as long as [is] necessary” (SP 185). She does not know how long it will be until death arrives; she does not seem to be thinking about death as the end result of the process Flo is undergoing.

One of the hopes Rose entertains is that she will be able to alleviate Flo’s suffering. When Flo decides she is ready to move into the County Home, Rose tells her she does not have to go that day. But Flo insists. Rose imagines herself a midwife:

[Flo] made Rose think of a woman who had started in labor. Such was her concentration, her determination, her urgency. Rose thought Flo felt her death moving in her like a child, getting ready to tear her. So she gave up arguing, she got dressed, hastily packed a bag for Flo, got her into the car and drove her out to the Home, but in the manner of Flo’s quickly tearing and relieving death she was mistaken. (SP 189)

Rose wants to help Flo breathe and push, to help give birth to death, in the hope of avoiding prolonged distress. But a quick death is not to be. The phrase, “in the manner of Flo’s quickly
tearing and relieving death she was mistaken,” gives the long perspective to Flo’s circumstances. Readers are given to understand, from this retrospective phrase, that Flo lives quite awhile after she enters the Home. Rose will not be able to help Flo give birth to a quick death.

While the narrative does not directly refer to Rose’s thoughts about the years of care that might have been required for her stepmother, the reference to Rose’s inadequacy for alleviating long-term suffering suggests that care would have gone on for some time. Rose would have had to be intimately involved in the gradual, irreversible effects of the disease. When Rose recognizes she cannot provide long-term care, and when she realizes later how long Flo lived, Rose remembers how difficult it would have been to care for a long time without hope.

**Remembering Gratitude**

Rose anticipates living with little gratitude in the expectation that her caretaking experience will be thanks enough: “[Rose] wasn’t so far gone as to imagine Flo...settling down to a life of gratitude. But the crankier Flo got, the milder and more patient Rose would become...” (SP 185). For the ideal caretaking woman, satisfaction resides in the sacrificial nature of the task. Not only will the work be satisfying, cultural notions imply; it will be transformative. Cayleff
suggests that there is a postfeminist surge against gains made by women in defining and choosing their social roles in favor of caretaking. She quotes from Bader’s work:

‘[T]here is a counter theme being promoted...that the rewards of caregiving are so enormous, that this is such a profoundly moving experience, that nothing else compares...it’s...an indirect way of saying to women that they’re better off going back to this role because of the spiritual rewards. It feeds into a backlash to return women to the home...’ (Bader, 2000:32). (Cayleff 239)

There is discursive pressure to value the act of caretaking so much that gratitude is not needed. Self-sacrifice means not only living without subjectivity but living without expectation of appreciation. Becoming a ministering angel or a suffering servant in the act of caretaking is imagined to be reward enough. This is another paradox of the caretaking discourse.

Rose wants to nurture Flo; she wants to make her “nourishing soup” (SP 185). She knows Flo well enough to know that her stepmother will not be “settling down into a life of gratitude” for Rose’s efforts, but Rose anticipates she will be able to not only tolerate Flo’s irritability but become transformed into an angel of mercy: “[B]ut the crankier Flo got, the milder and more patient Rose would become...” (SP 185).
However, Rose’s dream of sainthood collapses quite soon after her arrival. She offers to make a trifle (an English dessert) for Flo. She transforms ordinary ingredients, “...berries, peaches, custard, cake, whipped cream and sweet sherry...” into a magical, luscious confection: “...suave dreamy custard, the nipping berries, robust peaches, luxury of sherry-soaked cake, munificence of whipped cream” (SP 185). Rose observes: “Flo ate half the bowlful. She dipped in greedily, not bothering to transfer a portion to a smaller bowl. ‘That was lovely,’ she said” (SP 185). Rose thought she had never heard such an admission of grateful pleasure from her. “‘Lovely,’ said Flo and sat remembering, appreciating, belching a little. (SP 185)

Although Rose feels gratified that she has made something so agreeable to Flo, Flo’s enjoyment brings back feelings of inadequacy from the past. Eager to please again, Rose offers to make another one soon, but “[F]lo recovered herself. ‘Oh well. You do what you like’” (SP 185). The scene ends with a sense of deflation; Flo, either because of her illness, or because of her personality, cannot thank Rose directly for making her a trifle.

“Trifle” has another meaning, of course. It is just a small thing Rose does. But it is another small thing to give thanks. The phrase, “Flo recovered herself” suggests that Flo, dementia or not, would not be inclined to express appreciation
for gestures of caretaking. Rose does not blame Flo for the effects of the illness; nevertheless, caring for her stepmother would have meant living without much gratitude. The feeling from this scene suggests that Flo’s lack of gratitude has more of an impact on Rose than she had earlier imagined. Living without appreciation is one of the aspects of sacrificial caretaking that play into Rose’s decision to give up after two days.

**Remembering Her Act**

The next day, Rose visits the County Home. When she returns, Rose puts on an act for Flo. She lies about the desirability of the County Home. Rose attempts to convince Flo that she will know people at the County Home, that the view and the rooms are pleasant, the activities are fun, and that the food looks delicious (SP 185-186). Munro depicts Rose’s attempt to convince Flo of the Home’s many benefits before describing, in the next scene, Rose’s actual encounter with the deplorable truth. This narrative technique reveals a troubling failure for the actress: she has tried to act, but she cannot act.

Flo will have none of the act; she hands back a paper bird mobile Rose purchased at the County Home Craft Center and tells Rose, “Stick it up your arse...” (SP 186). Flo can see through Rose’s performance. By the time Rose tells Flo that there are desserts (now Flo’s favorite food) served at the Home, Rose’s
effort to persuade Flo she will like living there because Flo can have marshmallow sauce on her ice cream does not seem very compelling (SP 186). Rose herself seems very much like a marshmallow with her insubstantial claims.

If Rose had continued her plan to care for Flo at home, there likely would be many more incidents like this. Rose would have had to convince Flo of many things. Alzheimer’s patients exhibit problematic behaviors and may become very combative, even aggressive (Brody 57). Stephen G. Post, in his book, The Moral Challenge of Alzheimer Disease, cites a booklet giving practical advice for caregivers dealing with bathing issues such as: “...resident does not want to come to the bathing area; resident does not want to get undressed; resident hits and slaps during bath; resident bites; resident does not want/like hair washed; resident hollers or screams” (35). The point I am making is that the tasks involved in caring for dementia patients often involve coercion and speciousness. This is not the kind of acting Rose has practiced professionally. Rose would have had to use all of her performance powers to convince Flo of many things.

Instead, Rose remembers the kind of acting she wants to do. This kind of acting is to perform for an audience willing to be persuaded of an alternate reality on a stage where she will hopefully receive recognition and adulation. When Rose cannot
persuade Flo of the benefits of the County Home, it is but a small taste of future probable scenes. The sentiment suggests Rose would have been coping with a very recalcitrant audience (Flo) on a very small, thankless stage.

**Conclusion: Remembering**

In this section, I have endeavored to argue that Rose remembers who she is after arriving home to provide caretaking for Flo. These acts of remembering are based on recognition of the mental, physical, emotional, and monetary costs of caretaking. Facing the enormous burden of her caretaking plan, Rose reaches the conclusion, within two days, that she cannot follow through with her plan to provide full-time caretaking for “as long as [is] necessary” (SP 185). It is important to recall that Rose does not decide to quit the plan because of her complicated family history; as I have argued in the “Forgetting” section of this thesis, she forgets her past before returning to West Hanratty. While home, Rose recognizes Flo’s personality is difficult, or more difficult, in illness; nevertheless, Rose endeavors to perform the role of the caretaker by cleaning the house, putting things in order, and making a special dessert. Rose discovers, however, that she cannot give Flo what her situation requires. Rose quits because she assesses the cost and decides she cannot pay it. Rose remembers the difficult nature of caretaking; she remembers her financial resources are
limited; she remembers how important it is to be recognized, to live with hope and to receive gratitude. She remembers that her kind of acting involves willing participants on a larger stage. Within two days of being at home, Rose accepts that she cannot be a sacrificial caretaking daughter, regardless of the accolades she may have received for heroic measures. She cannot be the good daughter.

In coming to this realization, I argue that Rose claims subjectivity; she approaches the third space for women who negotiate the caretaking discourse. Rather than valiantly continuing to sacrifice herself in an overwhelming caretaking situation, Rose recognizes her limitations.

However, Rose’s moment of agency, her third space, is muted by Flo’s own enactment of independent agency. Her stepmother determines the time to move to the Home. In a way, Rose is saved from exercising her subjectivity or living in the third space by Flo’s resolution, much like Patrick saved Rose from having to exert her subjectivity in the matter of Anna’s place of residency. I would suggest this salvation speaks to the difficulty of articulating the dimensions of a third space for Rose within the caretaking discourse. What does it look like for a daughter to occupy a non-binary caretaking position? We will explore this question later.
The discourse of caretaking has worked to regulate Rose’s response to her stepmother’s illness. Following the gendered norms of caretaking, Rose accepts, in consultation with her half-brother, the task of moving Flo into the County Home. Like lesbian daughters, Rose performs an act of self-sacrifice when she disregards her family’s complicated past in order to go home. The paradox of sacrificial caretaking produces her desire to undertake long-term care in the hope of restoring her position in the family and win respect. The silence surrounding the burden of caretaking generates Rose’s idyllic notions of her mission. Soon after Rose arrives home, she ascertains the serious nature of Flo’s illness and her own naïve and inadequate response. Rose recalls some of her own subjective needs that cannot be accommodated by caring for Flo. Rose concludes that she is not equipped to carry out her plan. This conclusion exhibits some independent agency on Rose’s part; however, Rose does not have to try very hard to put her realization into effect because Flo resolves to move into the Home herself. Rose’s third space is not articulated.

Rose’s efforts to perform the position of caretaking daughter terminate after she helps Flo move into the County Home; Rose must now negotiate daughterhood as a non-caretaking daughter. In the next section, I will investigate the affective
repercussions for moving Flo to the County Home and for entering the discourse of the non-caretaking daughter.

D. The Discourse of the Non-Caretaking Daughter

When Rose transitions to the position of a non-caretaking daughter, she must negotiate the idea that she is a bad daughter. Although Rose realizes she cannot continue to care for Flo, she nevertheless must contend with feeling she has failed to be a good daughter. As we have seen, in the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization, non-caretaking daughters represent the opposite position of caretaking daughters. Caretaking daughters embody the ideal of self-sacrifice. Cultural norms stipulate that caretaking daughters should provide sacrificial care to become good daughters, first because it is what women do; and second, because they love their mothers, want to give something back, feel regret for past relationship difficulties, want to reconcile, and/or believe their mothers’ needs are greater than their own.14

Within this framework, non-caretaking daughters are viewed as selfish and uncaring. Regardless of the ways in which daughters may arrive at the non-caretaking position, non-caretaking daughters are seen as bad. There is pressure, therefore, on the non-caretaking daughter to prove she is still

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14 See Brody, Chapters 5, 6 and 7.
a good daughter, although not fulfilling the caretaking
function.

Non-residential mothers feel similar pressure, according to
Gustafson. She argues that because non-residential mothers live
apart from their children they are automatically viewed as bad
mothers (Gustafson 39). In response to the negative judgment
against non-residential mothers, these mothers employ acts of
resistance to appear to be good mothers. Gustafson’s 2001 case
study of a non-residential mother/nursing professor illuminates
her observations of two defense strategies. One of the
strategies, selective denial, pertains to my argument.
Selective denial is defined by Gustafson as the process whereby
the non-residential mother “selectively calls up the image of
the good mother” (42). The nursing professor mother describes
her repeated contact with educational professionals and
physicians on behalf of her child (Gustafson 42). She claims
she wants what every mother wants: what is best for her child,
even if that means living with the father (Gustafson 43).
Gustafson claims the nursing professor mother’s thoughts and
actions actively resist the bad mother designation as she seeks
to identify herself in a new subcategory of the good but absent
mother (Gustafson 43).

I would argue that an analysis of “Spelling” illustrates
the idea that a non-caretaking daughter may employ similar
strategies in order to distance herself from being judged negligent and self-centered. Rather than asserting her right to occupy a non-caretaking position as a viable option for subjective reasons, Rose employs selective denial to align herself with the caretaking daughter. The following “Good Daughter” sections support my assertion that Rose first recognizes that she cannot care with pure intentions; then, she positions herself as a loving, empathic, unselfish, sacrificial, conciliatory, mothering daughter. This alignment with the self-sacrificial thoughts and actions of the caretaking daughter creates a subcategory of the non-caretaking daughter: the good non-caretaking daughter.

Importantly for Gustafson, the alignment strategy of the non-residential mother re-inscribes the good mother/bad mother binary:

Resistance through selective denial intends to salvage the maternal subject by creating a new subcategory of the good but absent mother at the expense of re-inscribing or Othering those “bad” absent mothers. Establishing new categories or definitions for good mothering by erasing and creating new boundaries around the old categories has the effect of reinforcing the binary polarization of the good mother/bad mother. (43)
Gustafson concludes that resistance strategies such as selective denial re-inscribe the binary of the good mother/bad mother, allowing and encouraging “negative consequences” for those who do not have the resources or identity cachet to be seen as good, but absent mothers (43).

Like non-residential mothers, non-caretaking daughters are pressured by discursive norms to disavow their subjectivity, to color their position in terms of the sacrificial caretaking daughter. Consequently, the subcategory of the good non-caretaking daughter merely re-inscribes the good daughter/bad daughter binary rather than articulating a third, non-binary space within the daughter discourse. I will argue in the following pages that Rose’s utilization of selective denial repositions her within the good daughter/bad daughter binary.

Gustafson expresses concern about feminist valorization of new categories of women expressing new positions, such as that of the non-residential mother. She calls for careful analysis of acts of resistance that might appear to call forth new categories but in fact re-inscribe a binary:

This finding is a cautionary note to theorists who may be tempted to create new categories of the good absent mother that simultaneously re-inscribe master discourses of the bad Other and the discourse of binary polarization. (45)
Heeding her call, I analyze Rose’s acts of resistance to the selfish and uncaring daughter label. In the following sections, I will provide evidence that supports my assertion that, like non-residential mothers, Rose employs selective denial to justify her position as a non-caretaking daughter--and that this alignment re-inscribes the good daughter/bad daughter binary rather than establishing new terms of the daughter discourse.

This analysis of Rose as a good non-caretaking daughter suggests that the discursive pressures on the non-caretaking daughter are nearly as strong as those for the caretaking daughter. Rose does not successfully open up a third space for daughters to exercise subjectivity, but rather re-inscribes the necessity of being a good daughter, caretaking or not.

**Good Daughter Pure Intentions**

Rose employs selective denial to align herself with the caretaking daughter by recognizing that she cannot care with pure intentions like the paradigmatic good daughter. Caretaking daughters seek to gain positive attention through the paradoxical mechanism of self-sacrifice, of being erased. Like non-residential mothers who defend their position through selective denial, Rose thinks she is a better daughter if she relinquishes caring for Flo if she cannot do so purely.
This failure to care with pure intentions is poignantly brought to Rose’s attention when she encounters an old woman, Aunty, at the County Home. Aunty has few remaining physical or cognitive capabilities. Aunty can spell, however; but, without apparent understanding of the words, her performance seems devoid of meaning. Rose wonders where Aunty’s words come from and what they mean, if anything:

Rose wondered what the words were like, when [Aunty] held them in her mind. Did they carry their usual meaning, or any meaning at all? Were they like words in dreams or in the minds of young children, each one marvelous and distinct and alive as a new animal? This one limp and clear, like a jellyfish, that one hard and mean and secretive, like a horned snail. They could be austere and comical as top hats, or smooth and lively and flattering as ribbons. A parade of private visitors, not over yet. (SP 188)

When Rose witnesses Aunty spelling without any perceptible cognizance, the sense from the scene is that Rose recognizes she has been performing caretaking in a comparable manner. The parade she envisions seems to refer back to the imaginary parade Rose thinks of when Flo threatens “a royal beating” (RB 3). Words can have a double meaning or no meaning at all. The implication for Rose is whether or not her thoughts and actions
surrounding caretaking stem from true feelings and intent, or are they just an empty performance? Rose returned to West Hanratty perhaps more focused on herself than Flo, with her wish to be reintegrated into her family, to be the favored child, to be considered a good daughter, and to be admired for doing good work.

This sense of inauthenticity hearkens back to an earlier part of the story, when Rose feels ashamed of chatting up her company’s productions on television and radio:

There was nothing shameful about any of this, but sometimes Rose was deeply, unaccountably ashamed. She did not let her confusion show. When she talked in public she was frank and charming; she had a puzzled, diffident way of leading into her anecdotes, as if she were just now remembering, had not told them a hundred times already. Back in her hotel room, she often shivered and moaned, as if she were having an attack of fever. (SP 181)

Rose has to pretend, when she is giving interviews, that she has never given one before, never told those stories before. The anecdotes and interviews become repetitive and meaningless, and she merely parrots the role, like Aunty parroting spelling words. It causes her shame to pretend thusly. She does not
remember the people she has met and performed for—they do not seem real people to her (SP 181).

This theme of performance purity appears again in the last story, “Who Do You Think You Are?” The narrative takes place while Rose is still in West Hanratty, but after Flo has gone into the County Home. Rose meets a childhood friend again and realizes the source of her shame:

The thing she was ashamed of, in acting, was that she might have been paying attention to the wrong things, reporting antics, when there was always something further, a tone, a depth, a light, that she couldn’t get, wouldn’t get. And it wasn’t just about acting she suspected this. Everything she had done could sometimes be seen as a mistake. (WDYTYA 209)

Rose fears she has been performing falsely in her theatrical roles, and in her life, as if she is incapable of portraying emotional depth. Rose has likewise tried to mimic the actions of a caretaker, without getting to the heart of the matter. Rose discovers this about her relationship to Flo when she meets the old speller. Rose comes face to face with the specter of performing without substance. Aunty can spell words; she can get right some building blocks of the language, but not the big picture. Rose has been performing the part of daughterly caretaker, but unsuccessfully, because she does not
really understand what the part entails. Rose now recognizes
the larger picture about caretaking is that it is not just about
the caretaker; it is about the loved one’s needs and wants, too.
Rose has missed an important point. She has been caring for Flo
for Rose’s sake, not for Flo’s sake. She has not been a good
daughter with pure intentions.

Rose’s position as the good non-caretaking daughter
suggests that only good daughters can caretake well, and only
good non-caretaking daughters will realize how important purity
of intent is. We know that Rose feels this way because of the
profound affective changes (discussed in the following “Good
Daughter” sections) she experiences after visiting the County
Home.

Rose’s affective response to recognizing her selfish
motives for caretaking marks her attempt to become a good non-
caretaking daughter. Her realization that she has been merely
acting a part legitimizes the idea that only good daughters who
are solely focused on their ill mothers can care perfectly.
Believing that she cannot care with authentic intentions and
that therefore she is a bad daughter--and would be better as a
non-caretaking daughter--merely re-inscribes the good
daughter/bad daughter binary. Daughters who cannot care with
pure intentions are bad and should relinquish caretaking, unlike
idealized daughters who take care with pure intentions.
The County Home tour also results in a clear-eyed appraisal of Flo’s future. Patients are categorized by cognitive and physical ability and treated like objects when they lose cognitive abilities. Whether or not Flo stays at home or moves to the Home, her health is going to dramatically change. The nature of this change is sobering, and the commitment Rose will have to make to care for Flo at home will intensify, further intensifying the dissonance between Rose’s mixed intentions and Flo’s needs.

Rose’s realization that she has been trying to play the part of caretaking daughter without really understanding the part, without pure intentions, without taking into consideration Flo’s subjectivity, and without assessing Flo’s future, suggests that Rose has not been an effective caretaking daughter. Now, in order to be a good non-caretaking daughter Rose feels compelled to deploy selective denial to defend her position against the charge of acting in her own best interest, rather than Flo’s. Like a non-residential mother who aligns herself with the good mother by suggesting that her child is better off in a stable home situation with his/her father, Rose aligns herself with the good daughter by believing Flo will be better off at the County Home, even though the conditions of the Home seem less than ideal. Rather than openly acknowledging her subjectivity and independent agency--that the job is too
difficult for her--Rose must allay her guilt for moving Flo into the Home by aligning herself with the affective position of the good daughter.

I argue that Rose’s insight into her own inauthentic behavior is the fulcrum of the story because after her visit to the County Home Rose begins performing differently toward Flo: Rose begins to think, feel, and care more about Flo than herself. In the following sections, we will see Rose continue to create the subcategory position of the non-caretaking daughter: the good non-caretaking daughter.

**Good Daughter Unselfishness**

Hogan argues that women who exert subjectivity are labeled as selfish: “...[w]hen women are constructed in contemporary representations as independent agents, they are often depicted as self-involved and heartless” (2). In contrast, a good mother is validated when she is “selfless and puts the needs of her child before her own needs in all things” (Gustafson 26). I have been arguing that the binary discourse of the good daughter/bad daughter follows a similar track. In this section, I provide support for the claim that Rose’s unselfish thoughts and actions are a defense strategy to locate herself as a good non-caretaking daughter, and, therefore, a good daughter.

In the scene following her visit to the County Home, Rose’s affective response to Flo changes. Rose performs daughterhood
more thoughtfully. Rose dreams Flo has secret powers, she fears
Flo’s death, and she wants to keep Flo home a little longer.
These desires illuminate the good non-caretaking daughter’s
desire to be seen as focused on the ill mother. Heretofore,
Rose has focused on what she will do, such as maintaining order,
organizing, cooking, and beautifying the house in order to be
transformed into the perfect daughter. Now, Rose centers her
attention on Flo.

The night after her visit to the County Home Rose dreams
that Flo has secret powers and will thrive in her new home:

Then in one of the cages Rose spotted Flo, who was
handsomely seated on a thronelike chair, spelling out
words in a clear authoritative voice (what the words
were, Rose, wakening, could not remember) and looking
pleased with herself, for showing powers she had kept
secret until now. (SP 188)

The dream suggests a kind of resurrection for Flo, as if she has
burst through the limitations of her body and the institution,
that she has somehow become immortal. Through the dream, Rose
hopes Flo will find inner strength to bear the inevitable and
perhaps somehow even flourish. Rose’s dream focus on Flo’s
plight and her desire to see Flo with secret powers exemplifies
how a good non-caretaking daughter hopes her non-caretaking
position will not irretrievably damage the ill mother.
A good non-caretaking daughter must want to protect and rescue her stepmother, even though she cannot fulfill the function of caretaker. Like a good mother who is “fiercely protective of her child and is responsible for ensuring her child’s safety under every circumstance” (Gustafson 26), Rose hopes for some grace or miracle in Flo’s situation. Upon waking, Rose cannot hear Flo stirring in the next room. Running barefoot (SP 188) to Flo’s room demonstrates Rose’s fear and emotional vulnerability—and Rose’s desire to rescue and protect Flo.

But Flo is not in her room. It is almost as if Flo may have risen from the dead. Rose finds her in the kitchen:

[Rose] went into the kitchen and found Flo sitting at the table, dressed to go out, wearing the navy blue summer coat and matching turban hat she had worn to Brian’s and Phoebe’s wedding. The coat was rumpled and in need of cleaning, the turban was crooked. (SP 189)

Flo makes a rather comical character in that kitchen with her rumpled coat and crooked turban, in contrast to her queen-like demeanor in Rose’s dream. But she has displayed her secret power: that of deciding when it is time for her to get the assistance and security she needs. She will not be talked out
of it. Flo seems to be squarely facing her dilemma, as much as it is possible for her to do. It seems admirable.

I have argued elsewhere that Flo rescues Rose from any repercussions of Rose’s remembered subjectivity when Flo decides it is time to move into the County Home. Rose is taken aback. She does not want Flo to go yet; paradoxically, she wants to prolong their time together. I interpret this to mean that Rose thinks she can take care of Flo a little while longer, if not “for as long as [is] necessary” (SP 185). Rose’s protestations that Flo does not have to go that day (SP 189) suggest her capitulation to the good daughter discourse and her participation in the good non-caretaking subcategory: she positions herself as a good daughter who wants to care for her ill stepmother even as she can no longer perform that role. The affective distress over not being able to care is a product of the bad daughter discourse: she fears she appears selfish to not be able to care and wants to work against that charge.

The notion that good non-caretaking daughters should find a way to prove unselfish paradoxically re-instates the charge of selfishness, as they selfishly want to demonstrate unselfishness. This push/pull between selfishness and unselfishness therefore re-inscribes the binary between good daughters who unselfishly provide sacrificial care and bad
daughters who are seen to selfishly withhold care but who wish to be seen as unselfish as good daughters.

**Good Daughter Empathy**

As we have seen, good mothers are charged with sacrificial caretaking. Gustafson’s description of the good mother suggests that she “acknowledges a child’s need for love, caring, and nurturance and puts that understanding into everyday practice” (26). Daughters who take care of their mothers likewise put their mothers’ needs before their own. After Flo moves into the County Home, the narrative pauses from the present action to recount two memories of Flo. This pause gives the sense of Rose reflecting on important aspects of their past relationship. Rose positions herself as affectively connected to Flo. I argue that Rose’s particular memories suggest that a good non-caretaking daughter will reflect on her own flaws contributing to the troubled mother-daughter relationship, a defensive strategy that attempts to position her as a good daughter.

The first memory is Rose’s recollection of a time when she openly mocked Flo’s concerned letter about Rose’s performance with one bare breast in a nationally televised production of *The Trojan Women* (SP 190). This is not the first or only time Rose has made fun of Flo in front of her friends. She knows mocking is “shabby” (SP 190) but upon reflection she experiences a “fresh and overwhelming realization” (SP 190) that Flo’s concern
was well-meant: “[T]hey were all a hard life had to offer” (SP 190).

The details of Flo’s hard life include being “given away by her father” at the age of twelve, after her mother died, to work on a farm. The family was required to send her to school, but they rarely did; there was too much work to do. Once Flo got into trouble on the farm; thereafter, the family never sent her back to school. Flo ran away at the age of fourteen to work in a glove factory (HAG 44-45). Later, Flo worked as a waitress in Toronto’s Union Station and saw murders and fights with prostitutes (BM 58). Flo married Rose’s father who had baby Rose (BM 4); he died when Rose was a teenager (HAG 55).

For the first time, Rose considers that her stepmother performed mothering as well as she was able and that Flo loved her in her own way. Despite all the humiliations, beatings, disapproval, and erasure, Flo cared. The regret for not understanding earlier the “gulf” (SP 190) between them does not mean Rose has to make up for everything Flo did for her. However, Rose’s reflections at this particular time suggest that recognizing the gulf is necessary to perform good daughterhood.

Another act of selective denial is to experience regret for setting up Flo to perform motherhood on an atypical stage; that is, outside West Hanratty. Rose invites Flo to an award
ceremony. To Rose’s surprise, Flo makes a remarkable appearance:

[Flo] had always been decently, soberly, cheaply, dressed, but now it seemed she had spent money and asked advice. She was wearing a mauve and purple checked pants suit, and beads like strings of white and yellow popcorn. Her hair was covered by a thick gray-blue wig, pulled low on her forehead like a woolen cap. From the vee of the jacket, and its too-short sleeves, her neck and wrists stuck out brown and warty as if covered with bark. (SP 190-191)

Nothing about Flo’s attire fits: her outfit does not fit her correctly; she does not fit into the assembly; and she does not fit well as Rose’s mother. Not only does her costume make her stand out, but her surprised outburst upon seeing an African Canadian man seems to subdue her enough to possibly realize that however hard she is trying to mother and honor Rose, she is out of her element; she does not belong. Flo has unsuccessfully tried to perform the motherly role at the ceremony, but Rose’s remembrance at this particular moment makes it clear that Rose regrets putting Flo in this uncomfortable position. In order to perform good daughterhood, Rose must acknowledge her penchant for setting up her stepmother to fail and to feel sorrow for doing so.
Rather than feeling sorry for Rose’s embarrassment at the award ceremony, as one might have in earlier stories similar to this, the description of the scene makes one feel sorry for them both. The mental picture of Rose trying to convince Flo to participate, and Flo, refusing to sit, refusing to talk, refusing to eat or drink (SP 191) makes them both appear to be in a rather tragic, pathetic play where neither one seems to know what the next stage direction will be. Flo seems no longer to be solely the perpetrator of Rose’s unhappiness, but only a bit player on a bigger stage.

These two memories illustrate Rose’s journey to empathy for Flo and to the role of the good non-caretaking daughter. Rose reflects on Flo’s hard life and how hard she tried, despite many disadvantages and many missteps, to be a mother to Rose. Flo’s effect on Rose no longer produces humiliation or anger but one of regret and loss: Flo is the only mother Rose has known.

Rose’s affective experience speaks to the power of the good daughter discourse. Rose focuses on empathy and regrets in order to perform what would be legible to others and herself as good non-caretaking daughterhood. Again, Rose’s particular reminiscences place her squarely into the good daughter/bad daughter binary. Like mothers who feel guilty for not perfectly fulfilling their role (Gustafson 31–32), daughters regret actions that do not fulfill the model of the good daughter.
I have argued that the advent of Flo’s illness creates a dilemma for Rose. Her response to the good daughter paradigm has been to attempt to fulfill its requirements by hoping to sacrificially care for her stepmother while at the same time denying her own complicated family history. When Rose returns home, however, she discovers she cannot be transformed into the caretaking daughter; she recovers some sense of her subjectivity and what the sacrifices would mean to her in physical, mental, emotional, and monetary terms. At the time she assumes the position of a non-caretaking daughter Rose must face the discourse of the bad daughter. Although she has not told anyone of her plans, she still must face her own failure to be a good daughter. Observing the old speller confronts Rose with the idea of performing without substance, of using Flo for her own gain rather than considering Flo’s subjective needs. When Rose transitions to a non-caretaking position after Flo moves into the Home, Rose performs the good non-caretaking daughterly role by employing the defense strategy of strategic denial to align herself with ideal-daughter feelings of unselfishness and empathy. This affective focus locates Rose in the good daughter/bad daughter binary as she struggles to defend herself against the negative connotation of her non-caretaking position.

It is difficult to imagine how a non-caretaking daughter free from the binary would exercise her right to so position
herself within the caretaking arena based on her subjective strengths, limitations, life situation, etc. The difficulty of inscribing such a daughter’s thoughts and actions will be addressed later in this thesis.

**Good Daughter Sacrifice**

Now that Flo is in the County Home, Rose visits occasionally while she stays in West Hanratty to perform the “horrifying cleanup” (SP 191) of Flo’s house. While readers would not expect Rose to leave town immediately after Flo moves, Rose notably continues to take responsibility for Flo’s needs, in contrast to Brian’s absence. Like good mothers who are “charged with the impossibility of rendering continuous, intensive care from birth to independence (Büskens, 2001) (Gustafson 26), the good daughter does not abandon the ill mother but remains until the end. Rose stays to clean up the house, which clearly surpasses the intervention of her half-brother.

The phrase “horrifying cleanup” suggests that the work is sacrificial; Rose does what is necessary, sacrificing time and energy getting her hands dirty for Flo’s sake. I argued earlier that the idea of sacrificial cleaning is one element that helps Rose position herself as a non-caretaking daughter, once she arrives home she realizes how much effort will be required to clean the house and keep it clean, particularly with Flo’s
tendencies to undo everything Rose has done. But good daughters, like MacCallum-Whitcomb’s good mothers, perform sacrificial caring which often requires the mundane task of cleaning; here, Rose aligns herself with the good daughter ideal.

Rose further secures her role as the good non-caretaking daughter when she visits Flo at the Home, taking with her a few necessities as well as the wig Flo had worn to the award ceremony. Because the trajectory of the story focuses on Rose’s continued encounters with Flo, rather than Rose alone, the plot continues to categorize Rose’s attempts to be a good daughter to end her story with Flo on good terms, as a good non-caretaking daughter. A good daughter will not abandon her mother to being psychologically or socially alone, regardless of any personal inconveniences this may adumbrate. Just as good mothers attend to their children’s every emotional need (Gustafson 26-27), the caretaking daughter embodies the good daughter’s role of time spent with the ill mother. Rose strategically aligns with the caretaking daughter in order to view herself as a good non-caretaking daughter and a good daughter.

**Good Daughter Reconciliation**

Rose carries the wig into the County Home, and puts it on for Flo’s enjoyment. Through this moment of complex identification, Rose seems to reconcile with Flo. I would argue
that the healing of old family wounds during a mother’s illness is one of the hallmark characteristics of the good daughter. Long-held resentments have no place in caretaking for the self-sacrificial daughter.

Cayleff quotes Devine (1984) who suggests that caretaking by lesbian daughters can oftentimes promote reconciliation in a difficult relationship, seen as a positive by-product of caretaking:

‘Involvement in these care-giving activities actually may serve as a healing force in the relationship...Family members (may) change their values regarding lesbianism in order to accept a new role for the daughter. For some parents this might not occur until old age...when the lesbian daughter is the one a parent turns to for caregiving or support’ (Devine, 1984, cited in Raphael and Meyer, 2000: 149).

(Cayleff 248)

While returning home may re-open old wounds, Cayleff suggests that recalcitrant parents may relinquish their judgment when aging or illness require their dependence on a lesbian daughter.

Similarly, Rose’s visit home to West Hanratty to care for Flo ultimately facilitates an act of reconciliation between Rose and her stepmother. This reconciliation occurs when Rose visits Flo in the County Home bringing the wig Rose found under the bed
during the “horrifying cleanup” (SP 191). Multiple resentments are resolved by Rose’s performance with the wig. First, Flo recognizes Rose for the first time since she arrived home:

...when [Flo] saw Rose carrying the wig, she said, “Rose! What is that you got in your hands, is it a dead gray squirrel?”

“No,” said Rose, “it’s a wig.”

“What?”

“A wig,” said Rose and Flo began to laugh. Rose laughed too. The wig did look like a dead cat or squirrel, even though she had washed and brushed it; it was a disturbing-looking object. (SP 191)

Rose can be recognized because her identity is no longer being erased by full-time sacrificial caretaking. With the wig, Rose is performing more in keeping with her identity as an actress. The fact that Flo recognizes Rose in this capacity seems to symbolize that Flo is more accepting of Rose’s vocation.

Flo jokes about what would happen to her if she put on the wig: “...somebody’d be sure to take a shot at me” (SP 191). This seems to reference Rose’s frequent mocking of Flo to her friends, having taken potshots at her. Perhaps Flo’s comment produces guilt for Rose so that Rose wants to give Flo an opportunity to laugh at her: “Rose stuck [the wig] on her head, to continue the comedy, and Flo laughed so hard that she rocked
back and forth in her crib” (SP 191). As a way of being a good daughter, Rose gives Flo an opportunity to laugh at her in a moment of reconciliation.

Rose also at long last gets her center-stage moment. Recall that Rose’s invitation to Flo to the award ceremony was partly based on Rose’s wish to come out from under Flo’s shadow: “Of course it was possible that she did, secretly, want Flo to come, wanted to show Flo, intimidate her, finally remove herself from Flo’s shade” (SP 190). At that event, Flo rather took over the stage with her costume, her outburst, and her refusal to join the celebration. Here, Rose gets the full attention of her audience of one. It is an ironic moment; nevertheless, a poignant one, and a small moment of reconciliation.

By donning the wig, Rose also marks their shared failure in caretaking. Rose has rarely appreciated Flo’s mothering; Rose herself has failed to care for Flo “as long as [is] necessary” (SP 185). The two women share of a history of mother-daughter failure. The effect of donning the wig suggests that both women have been coerced and circumscribed by the caretaking discourse, masquerading as mother and daughter, causing life-long conflict.

The conflict Rose and Flo engage in is as old as the hills, as the narrator explicates in “Royal Beatings.” Rose and Flo argue, and it seems they participate in a mythical narrative:
The wrangle with Rose has already commenced, has been going on forever, like a dream that goes back and back into other dreams, over hills and through doorways, maddeningly dim and populous and familiar and elusive. (RB 13)

No one knows for sure where or how or when the conflict between mothers and daughters begins. When Rose puts on Flo’s wig, her action symbolizes the inheritance of that mysterious discourse of womanhood which focuses on nurturing and caretaking.

Rose and Flo share an inheritance, and that inheritance is the history of struggle within social power relations that make them kind of crazy trying to fit into roles that are not automatically natural just because of their gender. Rose and Flo’s bubbling laughter recalls Flo’s early statement at the beginning of the story: “Mothers and daughters often the same way. It was always in them. Waves of craziness, always rising, irresistible as giggles, from some place deep inside, gradually getting the better of them” (SP 178). Rose and Flo’s laughter at the County Home symbolizes the “waves of craziness” that result from the bad fit.

Rose had wanted to reconcile through her secret plan for full-time caretaking. For a lifetime, Rose has tried to separate herself from Flo and from her family to forge a new life apart from West Hanratty and the poverty and hardship it
represents. But now, Rose must be satisfied with the small reconciliation facilitated by the wig. Rose’s vocation is recognized, she allows herself to be laughed at, she claims center stage, and she symbolically identifies with Flo’s caretaking difficulties produced by cultural pressure to be good mothers and daughters. Flo’s life-long behavior, and perhaps Rose’s own behavior, is now more legible to Rose.

When Rose dons the wig, she accepts that she and Flo have both been miscast as caretaking mother and daughter figures. Rose’s implied recognition and acceptance of their mutual failure marks a moment for the discursive re-inscription of the good daughter. While reconciliation might appear to be a positive undertaking, waiting until a mother is terminally ill to reconcile seems to seek not only peace with the past, but absolution for entry into the world of the good daughter.

**Good Daughter Mothering**

Not only are good daughters expected to want to be reconciled when their mothers are ill, they are expected to lose their lives in favor of their mothers’. Good daughters’ lives become arranged around their maternal caretaking duties, which often resemble those of mothers’. Although Rose is no longer a caretaking daughter, she has one more opportunity to perform the role of the good non-caretaking daughter. After their shared laughter, Rose mothers Flo during a brief moment of distress:
When she got her breath, Flo said, “What am I doing with these damn sides up on my bed? Are you and Brian behaving yourselves? Don’t fight, it gets on your father’s nerves. Do you know how many gallstones they took out of me? Fifteen! One as big as a pullet’s egg. I got them somewhere. I’m going to take them home.” She pulled at the sheets searching. “They were in a bottle.”

“I’ve got them already,” said Rose. “I took them home.”

“Did you? Did you show your father?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, well, that’s where they are then,” said Flo, and she lay down and closed her eyes. (SP 192)

Rose seems to instinctively know that this white lie is what Flo needs to calm her down. She does not argue about Flo’s interpretation of reality, but performs a falsehood for Flo’s sake.

Some critics may argue that it is Flo’s illness that causes Rose to capitulate. However, the feeling engendered by the syntax of the scene suggests that by participating in Flo’s reality, Rose agrees to deny her subjective knowledge of time and place, regardless of whether or not her denial is caused by Flo’s illness. The feeling of deflation from the mutual “waves
of craziness” (SP 191) to the simple “Yes” (SP 192) suggests that Rose does feel some pain in acceding to Flo’s version of reality. Flo has not understood or recognized Rose in the present reality but places Rose in the past when Rose’s father was still alive. Like mothers who are attuned to their children’s every emotional need (Gustafson 26), Rose puts aside asserting her identity to attend to Flo.

Like a small child, Flo “lay down and closed her eyes,” reassured. Flo no longer must twist herself into motherhood, as is alluded to in “Royal Beatings.” Some time after Rose’s beating, her family sits around the kitchen table and watches Flo perform:

...Flo put down her teacup, stretched out with her head resting on the chair she had been sitting on and her feet on another chair (somehow she managed to tuck her dress modestly between her legs at the same time), and lay as stiff as a board, so that Brian cried out in delight, ‘Do that! Do that!’

Flo was double-jointed and very strong. In moments of celebration or emergency she would do tricks.

They were silent while she turned herself around, not using her arms at all but just her strong legs and
feet. Then they all cried out in triumph, though they
had seen it before. (RB 22)

This performance suggests the elaborate gyrations Flo must enact
to be a mother, stepmother, and wife. Rose’s performance in
Flo’s reality suggests a similar gyration for Rose, as Rose
twists herself into good daughterhood so that Flo can lie back
down peacefully. When Rose agrees to participate in Flo’s
alternate reality, it feels as if Rose denies her own
subjectivity, much as a mother who pretends she dwells in her
child’s reality. Although Rose occupies a non-caretaking
position, she agrees to exist in Flo’s reality, at least for a
little while, in order to be seen as a good daughter.

Conclusion: The Discourse of the Non-Caretaking Daughter

I began my argument suggesting that Rose’s affective
experience of becoming a non-caretaking daughter reflects a
similar process to that undergone by Gustafson’s non-residential
mother. I illustrated Gustafson’s argument that non-residential
mothers’ experiences of social condemnation cause them to employ
defensive strategies to protect their affective and social
lives. Because the terms of the defensive strategies echo the
thoughts and actions of the sacrificial good mother, Gustafson
posits that a non-residential mother’s thoughts and actions re-
inscribe the good mother/bad mother binary. After illuminating
Gustafson’s theory that non-residential mothers cannot easily
break out of the good mother/bad mother binary polarization and often re-inscribe it through their defensive strategies, I provide evidence from “Spelling” that Rose, too, cannot break out of the binary of the good daughter discourse. Although no one knows of Rose’s secret plan to function as a full-time caretaker, she herself must contend with the affective repercussions for failing to follow through with it.

I argue that Rose resists the stigma surrounding the category of the non-caretaking daughter by utilizing defense strategies that align her with the caretaking daughter. She wants to be seen as the good yet non-caretaking daughter. Rose employs the selective denial defense strategy to align herself with the good, caretaking, sacrificial daughter’s thoughts and actions: the requirement for pure intentions, empathy, unselfishness, sacrifice, reconciliation, and mothering. I argue that by utilizing the discursive terms of the good daughter to position herself as a good non-caretaking daughter, Rose tends to re-inscribe the polarization of the good daughter/bad daughter binary, rather than opening up a third non-binary space for daughters.
IV. CONCLUSION

I have argued in this thesis that Munro engages in the discourse of daughterly caretaking in “Spelling;” specifically, I explore issues surrounding the movement from a caretaking position to one of non-caretaking. Daughters are judged to be good or bad daughters based on the caretaking response they make in the matter of maternal illness. Munro’s story depicts the journey undertaken by a daughter to arrive at a non-caretaking position.

I began my argument by suggesting that Rose is compelled by the good daughter discourse to want to be the caretaker for her stepmother Flo, even though she has very good reasons from her childhood to decide otherwise. By hoping to be transformed into a sacrificial caretaker, Rose loses some subjectivity—her past. In the “Forgetting” section of this thesis, I suggest some of the childhood difficulties Rose experienced and how much of the past she must forget in order to consider going home to function as Flo’s caretaker.

I have argued in the “Remembering” sections of the thesis that once Rose begins caretaking at home, various conditions recall her self back to her self, and she realizes that she cannot become the perfect caretaking daughter. I argue that Rose’s realization, within two days, that she cannot function as a full-time caretaker locates her in a place of subjectivity.
By claiming subjectivity, however, Rose simultaneously engages in the bad daughter category through the mechanism of non-caretaking.

In “The Discourse of the Non-Caretaking Daughter” section of the thesis, I argue that Rose works to deny the negative stereotype of the selfish non-caretaking daughter by employing defensive strategies to align with the good daughter paradigm. When Rose visits the County Home, she encounters an old spelling woman who makes her consider whether her actions toward Flo have been self-serving, empty gestures rather than sacrificial.

After Flo moves into the County Home, Rose occupies the non-caretaking daughter position. In the “Good Daughter” sections of the thesis, I elaborate on some of the ways Rose attempts to appear a good daughter, although occupying a non-caretaking position. I suggest that Rose’s affective behavior works to create the subcategory of the good non-caretaking daughter. The subcategory of the good non-caretaking daughter does not open up a third space for daughters, where the right to subjectivity might be claimed, but rather re-establishes the binary polarization of the good daughter/bad daughter discourse.

When Rose visits Flo in the Home, they perform a complex moment of identification, which suggests that both women have been caught in the caretaking discourse which produces ‘waves of craziness.’ In addition, Rose’s gestures of putting on the wig,
and lulling Flo to rest, produce a disavowal of Rose’s subjectivity as she attempts to reconcile and mother Flo.

In so doing, I suggest that Rose continues to be caught in the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization. Therefore, I argue that in Munro’s worldview, daughters cannot freely inscribe their subjectivity into the discourse of maternal caretaking.

I would argue that one of Munro’s major contributions to the conversation about daughters and their ill mothers is on the issue of caretaking. One of the most interesting aspects of Munro’s explorations of caretaking is that of the non-caretaking daughter. Most or many daughters do care for their elderly parents. However, little attention is paid to those who do not. Brody focuses mostly on the difficulties non-caretaking daughters have in negotiating the sibling relationship with those daughters who are providing care (106-111). Cayleff does not discuss the non-caretaking lesbian daughter; indeed, she suggests that most lesbian daughters respond to familial pressures to care for the elderly (245), and that caring for elderly parents opens up a way for reconciliation (248). Hogan focuses primarily on film and literary representations of women who take care of others in the AIDS epidemic rather than those who do not to take care of the ill. There is even a national organization for caretakers: they can receive support through a
coalition called the National Alliance for Caregiving (National) which pools information and resources for caregivers. In general, there seems to be very little discussion about daughters who are positioned as non-caretakers. Therefore, I submit that one of Munro’s most important contributions to the topic of daughters and their ill mothers is her exploration of the affective experience of the non-caretaking daughter.

Finally, I suggest that there is hardly any available language to describe a third space within the good daughter/bad daughter binary, one that is neither good nor bad but just “is,” which allows for a range of caretaking options. Daughters find it nearly impossible to reframe the discourse to allow for the assertion of their right to assume a non-caretaking position. I refer to Gustafson’s argument to suggest that defensive strategies, such as selective denial, do not work to open up a third space in the good mother discourse, but merely locate another subcategory. Gustafson asserts that while defensive strategies protect the non-residential mother, they do not move women out of the polarized discourse:

These defensive strategies do not challenge the assumptions underpinning good mother/bad mother categories. Neither response challenges the good mother/bad mother binary that regulates the gendered division of family work and parenting labor. Neither
strategy reasserts motherwork as an impossibility for some women (DiQuinzio, 1999). Neither asserts a woman’s right to live apart from her children. Neither strategy advances a woman’s right to self-fulfillment and expression as separate and distinct from her motherwork. Nor does either strategy value the differently organized family structures that emerge when mothers live away from their children.

The language Gustafson employs above suggests how much effort it requires for non-residential mothers to assert their subjectivity in matters relating to caretaking. Likewise, daughters who, for whatever reason, decide not to, or cannot, care for their ill mothers, find it nearly impossible to position themselves as subjects and independent agents without re-inscribing the good daughter/bad daughter binary. Utilization of defense strategies such as selective denial is ineffective in reframing the discourse, and it contributes to a re-inscription of the binary that non-residential mothers are working against.

My analysis of “Spelling” suggests that for Alice Munro, daughters with ill mothers are always caught, like Rose, in the discourse of caretaking.
V. POSTSCRIPT

Judith Butler argues in her essay, “The Question of Social Transformation,” that when we participate in social transformation, when we try to argue our view of the way the world should work, we are acting out of an assumed underlying theory:

We are all, in the very act of social transformation, lay philosophers, presupposing a vision of the world, of what is right, of what is just, of what is abhorrent, of what human action is and can be, of what constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions of life. (204-205)

By juxtaposing fiction and feminist caretaking theory, I have proposed to bring out into the open, through analysis of Munro’s story “Spelling,” the glaring critical neglect of daughters caught in the discourse of caretaking.

Caretaking of an elderly mother becomes an issue because, according to Brody, modern-day daughters are caught “in the middle” between generations, more so than any generation of daughters previously. And there is overwhelming evidence that daughters are and will be providing a caretaking role in the lives of their elderly mothers.17

17 Brody does not specifically address stepdaughters when she discusses women in the middle. Given the percentage of marriages ending in divorce with subsequent
Brody tracks the sociological changes that have brought this about. Because there is a significant decrease in infectious disease, people live longer and therefore develop chronic, long-term diseases associated with aging (Brody 23-24), chronic diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease. The Alzheimer’s Association estimates there are as many as 5.3 million elderly with Alzheimer’s disease (“2010 Alzheimer’s Disease” 10). The aging population will increase significantly; by 2030, a projected seventy million people or 20% of the population will be over the age of seventy-five. Of those elderly people, a significant number will be women. A 1994 Bureau of the Census report states that: “...elderly women outnumbered elderly men by a ratio of three to two...a difference that grew with advancing age to a ratio of five to two at age 85 and over” (Brody 8). There is a significant chance, then, that the parent middle-aged daughters care for will be an elderly mother.

Brody’s findings expose the ramifications of the socially constructed role of caregiving: “...among primary caregivers, daughters outnumber sons in a ratio of more than three to one; among primary caregivers of the extremely disabled elders, the ratio is four to one” (40). According to the Alzheimer’s Association, there are about 9.9 million unpaid caregivers of remarriages, it seems likely to me that many of the daughters described may be stepdaughters.
the elderly, and, "[A]bout 60 percent of family and other unpaid caregivers of people with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias are women" (“2010 Alzheimer’s Disease” 25). Brody suggests as many as 75% of the caregivers of the elderly are women--"[...] primarily wives and daughters, but also daughters-in-law and other female relatives" (5).

Not only are daughters expected to shoulder the caretaking role, there are fewer to do so. Because there was a lower fertility rate in the 1960s and 1970s continuing into the 1980s, there are fewer children and fewer daughters to care for elderly parents (Brody 9-10). Of those fewer daughters, many of them are squeezed between their own families, their own jobs, and caring for their elderly parents. Brody estimates that 48% of caregiving daughters are in the labor force. Brody writes:

That percentage is deceptively low, however, since it does not reflect the proportions of daughters who had been working but had quit their jobs because of caregiving, or had reduced the number of their working hours, rearranged their work schedules, or taken time off from their jobs without pay. (41)

Daughters are “caught in the middle” as they are expected to interrupt their paid employment to care for elderly parents.

Brody concludes that the increased number of elderly with their increased likelihood of chronic illnesses along with the
falling birth rate means that “*contemporary adult children provide more care and more difficult care to more parents and parents-in-law over much longer periods of time than ever has been the case before*” (14).

As noted earlier, Brody is careful when interpreting sons’ contributions to the care of elderly parents. Brody notes that sons take on the “cultural assignment of gender-appropriate roles,” which is only a slight reference to the imbalance of, and mostly “hands-off,” care, which is clearly delineated here. Her observation elides the fact that sons apparently choose their cultural assignment, whereas daughters are expected by virtue of their gender to take on caregiving; in other words, Brody does not question how the socially constructed gender roles became assigned.

Brody’s statistics bear out the political urgency of the situation in regards to daughters and caregiving: more and more daughters will be required to care for elderly mothers who may be afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease unless and until a new daughter paradigm is constructed.

It is important to point out that neither Broday nor I are advocating that women should stop providing care for their ill mothers. As Brody writes:

That is not to say, of course, that women should not help elderly family members. No one would
disagree with the value we all hold that older people should receive care. No one would disagree with the proposition that it is the responsibility of the family and society to see that the care is provided. (346)

However, Brody suggests, most women operate within the cultural forces that relegate caretaking to women (346). Perhaps they are too busy caretaking to ensure wide-spread individual, health care, political, and cultural changes.
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### VII. APPENDIX A: STORY ABBREVIATIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>&quot;The Beggar Maid&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAG</td>
<td>&quot;Half a Grapefruit&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>&quot;Mischief&quot;</td>
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<td>PR</td>
<td>&quot;Privilege&quot;</td>
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<td>PROV</td>
<td>&quot;Providence&quot;</td>
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<td>RB</td>
<td>&quot;Royal Beatings&quot;</td>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>&quot;Spelling&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>WDYTYA</td>
<td>&quot;Who Do You Think You Are?&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>&quot;Wild Swans&quot;</td>
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VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

There are seventeen daughter and ill mother stories in Munro’s oeuvre, providing a rich resource for investigation on the discourses of daughterly caretaking. Munro’s explorations include both caretaking and non-caretaking daughters. Further investigations regarding the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization as played out in the caretaking discourse would further elaborate Munro’s world view on the range of affect for caretaking as well as non-caretaking daughters. For example, daughters in “The Peace of Utrecht,” “Accident,” “Forgiveness in Families,” “Wigtime,” “Winter Wind,” and “Goodness and Mercy” serve as caretakers for their mothers. Other stories, such as “The Peace of Utrecht,” “Home,” and “Connection: Chaddeleys,” “The Ticket,” and “Soon,” engage in the discourse of the non-caretaking daughter. How do these daughters negotiate the good non-caretaking daughter discourse?

Stories such as “The Ottawa Valley” and “Images” anticipate the young daughter’s engagement in the caretaking discourse. Questions of the inheritance of the caretaking discourse would be pertinent here.

I would argue that caretaking is the most important theme in Munro’s stories of daughters and their ill mothers. Daughters always negotiate how much caretaking involvement they should contribute to their mothers’ medical crisis. With the
push/pull of the mother/daughter relationship, and the complications of the good daughter/bad daughter binary polarization, the most pressing question is whether or not Munro’s stories articulate a third space for daughters in the caretaking arena. If that question cannot be answered, then what complexities does Munro unveil? Undoubtedly, Munro’s life-long exploration on the discourse of daughterly caretaking has produced interesting and valuable insights into the mechanisms of power that regulate the good daughter/bad daughter discourse as elaborated in the circumstance of the daughter and her ill mother.
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