

Patriarchy to the Rescue for Moore's *Daughter*

Daughter. Ishbel Moore. Kids Can, 1999. 216 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-535-2.

From the beginning of *Daughter*, where Sylvie's mother seems ready to jump from the tenth-floor balcony, this adolescent problem novel is a page-turner as Sylvie struggles to understand her mother's unpredictable, confused behaviour. The fourteen-year-old finally discovers that her divorced mother has early onset Alzheimer's Disease. Moore pairs this alienating disease with Sylvie's rebellion in the form of sexy clothing and lipstick, a rebellion that passes unnoticed because her mother is so ill. This novel explores Sylvie's desire to discover her own identity, a process undermined by her mother's literal lack of recognition. The title, not a particularly descriptive or compelling one, refers to the mother's inability to remember Sylvie's name. She is only "daughter," a role rather than an individual. While this is a terrific book for any child or adolescent who comes in contact with Alzheimer's Disease, it also most disturbingly encourages a male-identified role for young women.

Both Sylvie and her best friend, Marissa, face a troubled adolescence because they have diseased mothers and absentee fathers. Sylvie's mother may seem suicidal, enraged, and forgetful, but Marissa's mother is an alcoholic who beats her children. Even the relationship between Sylvie and Marissa lacks support as they compete for each other's help. Sylvie pulls away from the demanding Marissa and dons sexy outfits that attract male attention at school; particularly rewarding is Ryan's notice, a boy who conveniently has a grandmother with Alzheimer's. The answer to all the problems — caused by the matriarchs — lies not in friendship but in the patriarchs. Sylvie's father's previous lack of attention is dismissed as the result of her mother's disease. Marissa's mother gets drunk and beats the children only when the father is away driving his rig in order to provide for the family. Marissa's father rescues the family by leaving the mother; Sylvie's father saves Sylvie by taking over, hospitalizing the mother, and filling the parental role that he had neglected. Sylvie moves from a female world — that of her mother and girlfriend — to a male world, a metaphorical shift literally enacted toward the end of the novel: "Dad pulls out of the parking lot, away from the hospital, away from Mom. The three of us, Dad, Ryan and me, are lost in our thoughts" (213). Moreover, the novel has an envelope structure, which also illuminates Sylvie's growth away from identification with the female to reliance on the male. It begins and ends on the balcony of the tenth-floor apartment, but where her mother appeared to be ready to commit suicide at the outset, her father has "his feet ... firmly on the cement," and Sylvie can lean against him (216). Moore's novel ultimately insists that patriarchy provides solutions to the problems caused by girls and women: a disturbing message in a novel about female identity.

Laura M. Robinson teaches English literature at the Royal Military College and Queen's University. She has published articles on L.M. Montgomery and Margaret Atwood.