A Woman's Legacy: Conflict in the Mother-Daughter Relationship in Contemporary American Fiction

by

Jacqueline Lautin

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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Abstract

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Jacqueline Lautin

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In this dissertation, I intend to explore the motif of the cyclical, multi-generational mother-daughter relationship in novels written by five American women during the past ten years. The minority and ethnic American women's fiction of the 1990s concerning the mother-daughter relationship continually points the reader toward the social and psychological constraints that radically shape these relationships. In spite of the distances that cause the relationship to falter, the inherent goodness in the relationship most often triumphs and the mother-daughter dyad emerges intact. In Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Cynthia Ozick's The Puttermesser Papers, Jane Smiley's A Thousand Acres, and Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory, the writers use the motif of the dysfunctional mother-daughter dyad to exemplify both the abuses of slavery and culturally sanctioned, patriarchal mistreatment by society of women, especially minority women and other marginalized groups of women.

Central to my investigation of the five novels will be the question of why so many women writers feel drawn to use the trope of mother-daughter strife in their

writing. Throughout twentieth century post-Freud literature, mothers have often been portrayed as absent, neglectful, psychotic, or overbearing. In the past, mothers often have been depicted as the perpetrators of disharmony. Contemporary women writers, however, shrug off the constraints of matrophobia, and in the novels I examine in this dissertation portray family dysfunction as having multiple perpetrators. Writers, in other words, have begun to recognize forces outside the family such as the religious and cultural traditions, as well as the prejudices of our society as being responsible for individual and collective abuse.

When stories of such huge failures at parenting appear in a temporal and national cluster, a remarkable moment has been created in literary history. Minority women novelists, employing their craft, have created an activist forum for protest using their stories to resist cultural practices and to create space for people to make choices about the way they will interact with their children.

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Introduction

A Woman's Legacy: Conflict in the Mother-Daughter Relationship in Contemporary American Fiction

"We are rooted in language, wedded, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves--to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are an action--a resistance." (hooks 28)

"Mother-love is not inevitable. The good mother is a great artist ever creating beauty out of chaos." (—Alice Randall The Wind Done Gone)

With creatures so relatively complex as humans, there is no such thing as a family biologically programmed for success or a parent-child dyad untainted by the community and its practices. If humans like other creatures are biologically programmed to propagate their species how can parenting practices be so disparate? One would think inadequate or abusive parenting couldn't be more than a fluke. Yet, abusive parents are far from difficult to find. The room for variation is great, the practices and tenor of the relationship between parents and children is influenced by the adult's experience within the community and the traditions they themselves have been brought up with. During my coursework at the Graduate Center, I began to notice the many examples in English and American literature of the set of parents who depart from lovingly and protectively rearing children.

Upon taking a class in minority American fiction with my dissertation director Neal Tolchin I was amazed at the many extreme examples of child abuse in minority American fiction especially that of women writing in the 1990s. The mother-daughter abuse during the moment in literature that I explore in this dissertation creates the conundrum that a person giving birth, nursing, and mothering can depart so completely from nurturance. Clearly, our judgment of good parenting is dependent upon our perceptions of the relationship and our preconceived notions of what good parenting actually looks like. There are so many ways to be a good parent and so many ways to fail at parenting. Even excellent parents are bound to fail in some small way. That is obvious. So when stories of such huge failures at parenting appear in a temporal and national cluster as do Tan, Morrison, Ozick, Smiley, Danticat, a remarkable moment has been created in literary history. Minority women novelists, employing their craft, have created an activist forum for protest using their stories to resist cultural practices and to create space for people to make choices about the way they will interact with their children. Writers use their stories to call for an end of practices of the community that negatively influence families and make abusive situations prevalent.

In this dissertation what I write about is not the momentarily frustrating problems of parenting, rather, I write about mothers who were not always able to make decisions about how to raise their daughters, who tried their best to care for their daughters, and in spite of this were unable to prevent certain ingrained parenting practices from harming their daughters,. I discuss the specific abuses minority

women writers portray to represent the larger abuses happening in their community's traditions or circumstances.

In this dissertation, I intend to explore the motif of the cyclical, multi-generational mother-daughter relationship in novels written by five American women during the past ten years. The minority and ethnic American women's fiction of the 1990s concerning the mother-daughter relationship continually points the reader toward the social and psychological constraints that radically shape these relationships. In spite of the distances that cause the relationship to falter, the inherent goodness in the relationship most often triumphs and the mother-daughter dyad emerges intact. In Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Cynthia Ozick's The Puttermesser Papers, Jane Smiley's A Thousand Acres, and Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory, the writers use the motif of the dysfunctional mother-daughter dyad to exemplify both the abuses of slavery and culturally sanctioned, patriarchal mistreatment by society of women, especially minority women and other marginalized groups of women.

Central to my investigation of the five novels will be the question of why so many women writers feel drawn to use the trope of mother-daughter strife in their writing. Throughout twentieth century post-Freud literature, mothers have often been portrayed as absent, neglectful, psychotic, or overbearing. In the past, mothers often have been depicted as the perpetrators of disharmony. Contemporary women writers, however, shrug off the constraints of matrophobia, and in the novels I examine in this dissertation portray family dysfunction as having multiple perpetrators. Writers, in other words, have begun to recognize forces outside the

family such as the religious and cultural traditions, as well as the prejudices of our society as being responsible for individual and collective abuse.

Sociologists Belsky, Alvy, and Hutchinson support this idea of cyclical dysfunction considering "child maltreatment as being influenced by forces within the individual, the family, the community, and the culture" (Cicchetti and Toth 545). Most of the novels I work with in this dissertation contain incidents of what Cicchetti and Toth refer to as the "individual and collective abuses of society," which in turn lead to a departure from nurturing parenting, where a parent's actions or words cause emotional, physical, or psychological damage to a daughter. According to Laurie A. Couture[1], "Child abuse and neglect, in the legal sense, refers to any action on the part of an adult or caretaker that intentionally inflicts, or causes to result, in non-accidental physical or psychological injury, psychological deprivation or sexual violation to a child, excluding corporal punishment" (from the internet, ChildAdvocate.org). Couture's human rights definition is basically the same with the exclusion of the corporal punishment clause. With the legal and human rights definitions of abuse set forth, I shall introduce my primary texts.

I chose to compare novels by Cynthia Ozick, Amy Tan, Edwidge Danticat, and Toni Morrison because I wanted to work with the idea of mother-daughter conflict occurring in several different cultural groups within the same time frame. The 1990s is a particularly rich moment in minority women's writing and there is a great deal of minority women's work about the conflict-filled nature of mother-

[1] Laurie A. Couture, M.Ed. provides services to help parents, teachers, trainers, social workers and others develop respectful, nurturing , developmentally appropriate and humane methods for guiding the behaviors and meeting the physical, psychosocial and educational needs of children.

daughter relations. I am amazed that there are so many authors—far too many to investigate in this dissertation--giving voice to this issue at the same moment, perhaps because the novels were written during a second wave of feminism. While the specifics of mother-daughter dysfunction vary among the texts, this recurrent motif has important implications for a discussion of the mother-daughter dyad in women's fiction.

In these four novels, immigrant, ethnic, and minority mothers, following the traditions of their cultures, often behave in ways that American-born daughters consider abusive. Gradually, these mothers realize that their cultures' traditional parenting strategies are unacceptable in America and to their own Americanized children. As daughters learn more about their mothers' cultural traditions and the collective abuses they endured, they begin to understand their mothers' actions and the motives behind them.

In many of the texts I discuss in this dissertation, characters that have suffered from dysfunctional mother-daughter relationships carry over the unrest to the following generation, yet this is not the case with all families in the stories. Minority and ethnic women writers consistently portray abused characters acting in and against their culture to change it, and, in the process, going to any length to avoid passing on a legacy of dysfunction to their own offspring. The authors I have chosen present characters that make the active choice to fight the urge to parent the way they themselves were parented. These are characters who adamantly refuse to continue their multi-generational cycle of dysfunction and who seek various preventative measures. One of the most drastic is the genital self-mutilation enacted by Danticat's

Sophie in order to put an end to her mother's daily virginity tests. Also, Amy Tan makes it clear that education and self-knowledge are imperative for ending what seems an unbreakable cycle of generational and cultural dysfunction. Others like Morrison project their beliefs by creating childless characters and by having their characters opt for halting the legacy of collective societal abuse by killing their children.

I will support my reading with texts from a variety of disciplines. For my chapter on Tan, for example, I will utilize the writings of Confucius whose teachings continue to dictate the often sexist Chinese cultural traditions which Tan critiques in her novels. African-American slave narratives, the Old Testament, the Kabbalah, and Holocaust survivor interviews, narratives, and memoirs will contribute to my discussion of Morrison and Ozick's resistance to racism and sexism. Their use of the trope of child killing calls upon historical moments when African American and Jewish mothers, acting contrary to their beliefs, felt compelled to kill their children. Because Danticat's characters endure sexual abuse enacted by parents and sanctioned by their community, I will employ incest survivor and incest perpetrator narratives and psychological and medical studies pertaining to sexual abuse survivors and eating disorders. I intend these writings to give readers a sense of the historical background of the novels I am working with and to help make sense of the schisms between fictional mothers and daughters caused by their sometimes diametrically opposed beliefs of what constitutes a satisfactory parent-child relationship.

While there is much interesting mother-daughter theory, literary critics have written very little about extreme mother-daughter disharmony. Kloepfer's

Unspeakable Mother offers a useful discussion of the family strife found in the language of Jean Rhys and H.D., yet it fails to undertake an analysis of the significance of the problem, just what I wish to accomplish in this dissertation. Walker, Bulkin, Hirsch, and Gallop write about the mother-daughter relationship in literature, however, their focus lies in directions other than mother-daughter dysfunction. Brown-Guillory's Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century explores the "tensions and conflicts" present in the mother-daughter dyad, and will be the text that most influences this dissertation. My goal is to show that the "tensions and conflicts" are caused not merely by individuals but by society and its traditions. Elaine Tuttle Hansen's discussion and definition of motherhood aids me in proving that Ozick's unorthodox couple Puttermesser and Xanthippe can indeed be considered mother and daughter. Multiculturalists prove slightly more useful. Ruoff and Spivak especially so for their discussions of the marginalization of various ethnic groups in the United States. Ling, Takaki, Kauvar, and Wyatt provide excellent analyses of my chosen novels from a cultural standpoint, yet none specifically writes about the motif of child abuse. I found a plethora of germane criticism of Beloved, too much, in fact to list in this prospectus. Boudreau, Wyatt, and Barnett were particularly useful. I will utilize the essays of Gershom Scholem, Elaine Kauvar, and Harold Bloom to name a few in my discussion of The Puttermesser Papers. I will refer to Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory often during this dissertation, especially with respect to the rape Sethe of Beloved survives at Sweet Home. Catherine Sears' work provides theoretical background to my discussion of eating disorders. In addition, my research delves into

the psychological aspects of the mother-daughter relationship. Psychologists whose work has proved invaluable to name just a few are Hope Edelman, Alice Miller, Louis Shengold, Carol Gilligan, Mary Pipher, Terri Apter, and Nancy Chodorow. The work of physicans and medical researchers cited in this dissertation include T. Berry Brazelton, Dante Cicchetti, Sheree Toth, and Elizabeth Hutchison.

I devote "Chapter Two, Verbal Violence: Silence as Emotional Abuse in Amy Tan's Novels" to Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club. To explain significant misunderstanding within the mother-daughter dyad I argue that a multi-generational cycle of dysfunction, a cultural communication gap of sorts, is partly the blame of the sexism enacted upon Chinese women by their families and culture. Tan's novels present examples of abuse occurring in China and explain how this abuse shapes mother-daughter miscommunication and misunderstanding occurring between Chinese mothers and the next generation, their American-born daughters. The criticism of Amy Ling, Marina Heung, Bonnie Braendlin, Stephen Souris, Ben Xu, and Victoria Chen--all with unique and sometimes conflicting ideas about the mother-daughter relationship in Tan's texts--will prove useful for my argument that Tan's repeated writing about dysfunctional mother-daughter dyads is her way of challenging the validity of continuing damaging cultural traditions regardless of the setting and of her ability as a daughter to understand and forgive, for although the characters experience the losses that accompany a strained and unhappy mother-daughter relation, Tan's stories are hopeful. Each of Tan's daughters reconciles with her mother; each one comes to understand that the legacy of dysfunction that has been passed down for generations of women does not have to limit or destroy. I will also

relate the characters and traditions of Tan's novels to the fiction of Maxine Hong Kingston, Gish Jen, and Fae Ng as a way of noting the similar themes present in other current Asian American fiction by women.

In Tan's writing, we are frequently reminded that "elders were victims as well as victimizers," mothers who were hurt by their own family dysfunction and who try to find another way of rearing their own daughters (DeMott 7). One such mother is Lindo Jong, one of the four Chinese mothers of The Joy Luck Club. Seeking vindication for her methods of child rearing, this contrite mother says, "I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?" (Joy Luck 254) According to Gloria Shen, "this wish becomes the very source of the conflicts and tensions in their [Tan's mothers and daughters] relationship" (238). Repeated stories of disharmony within Chinese American mother-daughter relationships, and within mother-daughter dyads of other minority groups such as the Italian American mother and daughter who Lena hears through her bedroom wall, imply that Tan is not chronicling dysfunction within the Chinese American mother-daughter dyad specifically, rather, she sees mother-daughter difficulties as a far-reaching, cross-cultural problem within our society, and as Gloria Shen writes, "to portray the mother and daughter relationship as both typical and universal. (Shen 235--from Brown and Gooze)

In "Chapter Three, The Ghost and the Golem: Infanticide as Historically Based Phenomena in the Writings of Cynthia Ozick and Toni Morrison, "I discuss Cynthia Ozick's The Puttermesser Papers and Toni Morrison's Beloved two novels in

which characters commit infanticide. In this chapter, I will argue that the portrayal of child killing in both Jewish American and African American fiction suggests that mothers kill their children to save them from future pain and exploitation, and also that this child killing becomes a resistance to oppression, and a protestation of the abuses of slavery, racism, anti-Semitism, and sexism. I will work with Ozick's The Puttermesser Papers in conjunction with an analysis of examples of the Jewish history of child killing: incidents from the Old Testament and Holocaust survivor narratives in which Jewish mothers recount the circumstances under which they killed their children are examples of this phenomenon. I will use African American slave narratives depicting infanticide as historical background for child killing in Morrison's Beloved.

Ozick, who has dedicated her writing to exploring the question of modern Jewish cultural and religious identity, purposefully has her characters deviate from the teachings of the Torah when Puttermesser kills her "daughter," a golem created from soil, water, and a recitation of Kabalistic ritual prayer. The critics whose ideas I have incorporated into this chapter generally acknowledge Xanthippe to be Puttermesser's "daughter," and in this chapter I give extensive explication of this idea. A basic tenet of Hebrew thought deems it imperative for the survival of the Jewish people that life be preserved at any cost, no matter how horrible or painful the circumstances, and Puttermesser's ability to kill a daughter, the only person who resembles her in appearance and knowledge and thought, speaks to Ozick's idea that sexism and anti-Semitism create an environment so intolerable that non-existence is preferable.

This is the very message Morrison sets forth in Beloved. A phenomenon present throughout African-American slave narratives, and a multi-generational cycle within Sethe's family, infanticide among slaves typically occurs because of what Ruoff calls "economic paternalism," the ability of slave masters to sell their own children away from their mothers and into the hardships and horrors of slavery. One such historical example is Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl in which Jacobs writes, "I thought to myself that, God being my helper, they [my children] should never pass into his [slave master's] hands. It seemed to me I would rather see them killed than have them given up to his power" (Gates 407). Sethe kills her baby for several reasons: to prevent her from being reenslaved and sold by her master, and because Sethe has been raped, her stolen breast milk a symbol of her loss of ability to nurture her child. In addition, Sethe is betrayed by her community. Kristin Boudreau sees Sethe actions as caused by disorientation brought about by the "torture" she has suffered under the institution of slavery. She believes that all, ". . . the characters in Morrison's novel have no access to the methods of ordered narrative. Their language, their reasoning powers, even their sense of self have been dismantled by the process of torture" (Boudreau 453). One could use Boudreau's idea in conjunction with Herman's idea of post-traumatic stress syndrome to explain Sethe's actions, yet this seems reductive to me. I believe that Sethe makes a *conscious* decision that day in the woodshed, that she is acting upon her motherlove and desire to *protect* her children and upon her understanding of her world, rather than acting because she is unable to reason.

I devote "Chapter Four, A Mother's Complicity: Sexual Abuse in the Works of Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory and Jane Smiley's A Thousand Acres." to a discussion of the trope of sexual abuse in Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory and incest in Jane Smiley's A Thousand Acres. In these novels, sexual abuse and incest are perpetuated and validated by the victims' mothers, themselves caught up unaware in the community's insistence on reproducing women's subordination. Sophie, the daughter in Danticat's novel, is sexually assaulted by her mother Martine as was Martine by her mother; that both mothers participate in the cultural traditions of the community causes their complicity. Ginny and Rose, the daughters in Smiley's novel, are sexually assaulted by their father Larry, and both the men and women of their community are socialized to hold their peace in the face of injustice. Sophie's mother, following the Haitian tradition of what Danticat calls a "virginity cult" is herself the perpetrator of mother-daughter sexual abuse.

How does one explain the complex occurrence of what seems to be sexual abuse when Sophie's mother "tests her" in Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory? The testing, a Haitian tradition, which, because of socialization over many generations, the community has become immune to its destructive nature, is explained to Sophie by her mother Martine who says, "When I was a girl, my mother used to test us to see if we were virgins. She would put her finger in our very private parts and see if it would go inside" (Danticat 60). Sophie, a self-conscious and psychoanalyzed character, describes the testing as causing symptoms typical of sexual abuse, such as an eating disorder and sexual dysfunction, saying, "I hated the tests. It is the most

horrible thing that ever happened to me. When my husband is with me now, it gives me such nightmares that I have to bite my tongue to do it again" (Danticat 123, 156).

Danticat intends readers to read sexual abuse as the marginalization of Haitian women. Linked with a story about the disappointment Haitian parents feel when a girl is born to them, and with a rape that occurred when Martine was a teenager, Sophie's sexual testing represents injustices to Haitian women caused by long-standing misogynist traditions, the oppression of women by the patriarchal Haitian society, and the brutality of a society caught up in the turmoil of military occupation. Sophie's bulemia taints her relations with her family and represents a purging or a way of expelling the toxic byproducts of incest.

Martine's vigilante testing of Sophie speaks to her need to control Sophie entirely, to jealously possess her daughter body and soul. Martine's proselytizing to Sophie that they are twin souls or marrassa, a Haitian folklore phenomena I will discuss in depth in this chapter, results in a regression to a pre-individuation state and an enmeshment that Sophie grapples with throughout her early adulthood as she takes possession of her body through bulimia, self-mutilation, sexual intercourse, and motherhood. In the twisted thinking of a depressed and mentally ill person Martine believes her actions will keep Sophie safe, while the Haitian cultural tradition of the virginity cult serves as a rationalization for the testing.

This dissertation will contribute to a deepening understanding of the tensions of establishing boundaries for the segment of cultural history a family chooses to incorporate upon migration to America. The mother-daughter relationship, complex by nature, becomes strained to the point of emotional, physical, or psychological

damage, and sometimes even abuse. I attempt to explain why these writers have chosen to use the idea of mother as the center stage upon which the drama of the daughters' quest for an understanding of herself as an American and minority American woman is played out. Because of a mother's central position in the family, these four writers portraying daughters as wanting to turn their backs on their cultural identity, have used the motif of mother-daughter dysfunction to represent the pain of being part of a marginalized group of people.

In Smiley's text, there is no question that Ginny and Rose are sexually assaulted by their father. Because of the silences and competitiveness within the community and the oppression of women in Zebulon County, Iowa Larry's incest seems not to be shocking. Ginny and her sister Rose speak with wonder about their mother's role in the incest. They come to believe that, cowed by their Larry's physical and psychic strength, their mother did not make the effort she should have to protect them from their father's sexual advances. Ginny learns from a neighbor that her mother suspected Larry's abusive potential, yet did not ascertain her daughters' safety. Rose's precautions of sending her teenage daughters to boarding school point up what her mother should have done to protect her daughters. The realization that their community prefers to hide rather than remedy any sort of irregularity becomes a catalyst for the sisters to seek self-reliance. In Ginny's case that means a life off the family's farm, while for Rose, rebelliously embracing organic farming during the high yield farming-focused 1970s seems like change enough. Like Danticat, Smiley uses the trope of sexual oppression to promote reader awareness of the ongoing marginalization of women.

I think what most interested me about these four beautiful and moving novels was that there was often immense sadness and longing for some of the pairs of both mother and daughter for each other. The pursuit, through the recounting of the story, of an intensity, a closeness that can really only be found in the most connected of all relationships, that of a mother and her daughter, comes to an end when the pair has made peace. In a daughter's case it is peace with a mother's foreign, albeit inherently well-meaning, methods of childrearing, and in a mother's case, it is with an acknowledgement of a daughter's modern and in most cases Americanized behaviors and values. The admission and acceptance of the daughter's acculturation by the mother, and the understanding of a mother's community values and experiences in her home country is what allows each mother-daughter dyad to finally let feelings of dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the relationship rest.

Chapter 2: Verbal Violence: Storytelling and Silence as Emotional Abuse in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club

I devote Chapter Two to Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club. I intend to explain problematic mother-daughter dyads in the novel with the argument that a multi-generational cycle of dysfunction is an emblem of the sexism enacted upon Chinese women by their families and culture. Tan's The Joy Luck Club presents examples of abuse occurring in China and explains how this abuse predates dysfunction occurring between immigrant Chinese mothers and the next generation, their American-born daughters. The criticism of Amy Ling, Marina Heung, Bonnie Braendlin, Stephen Souris, Ben Xu, Patricia Hamilton, and Victoria Chen--all with unique and sometimes conflicting ideas about the mother-daughter relationship in Tan's texts--will prove useful for my argument that Tan's repeated writing about dysfunctional mother-daughter dyads challenges her readers to criticize and to try to stop the perpetuation of damaging cultural traditions in the New World setting. In this chapter, I will relate the characters and traditions of The Joy Luck Club to the fiction of Maxine Hong Kingston, Gish Jen, and Fae Ng as well as Tan's other novels as a way of explaining the similar themes present in current Asian American women's fiction.

The Joy Luck Club depicts daughters who have extreme difficulty coming to terms with their mothers' traditional Chinese parenting practices. According to Confucian dictates, parents must neither compliment nor praise their children, lest they give children an inflated sense of their abilities. Chinese children accept this upbringing with the understanding that a false sense of one's achievements will prove detrimental in the harsh work world, and that their parents treat them so for their

benefit (Qiu). The American-born daughters of The Joy Luck Club, privy to the laudatory and cheerful Americanized parenting of their peers, view their mothers' Confucian style of parenting as harsh and hurtful. While, because of their American frame of reference, Tan's daughters could be said to misperceive their mothers' motives, they suffer noticeably from the stories, comments, and silences handed down to them by their mothers; they feel that in spite of the difficulties of life in China, their mothers are reprehensible for perpetuating the abusive traditions in a new country and with a new generation.

I contend that the mothers in The Joy Luck Club are not deliberately abusive, for as survivors of a trauma or abuse stemming from Chinese cultural traditions, they behave in the ways of their culture, yet their daughters fault them when their unenlightened parenting perpetuates rather than halts abusive traditions. Ben Xu explains, "All the Aunties [mothers] have experienced two kinds of extreme situations: one kind is famine, war, forced marriage, and broken family in China, and the other is cultural alienation, disintegration of old family structure, and conflict between mother and daughter in America" (5). As a result of these trauma and of their traditional upbringing, the The Joy Luck Club mothers pass on their abusive legacy to their daughters, thus creating a multi-generational history of disharmony.

Psychologist Evelyn Bassoff validates the idea that some families unconsciously pass on a legacy of mother-daughter conflict, writing, "And some mothers, because they were once victims of parental cruelty, heap abuse upon their innocent children" (48). Leonard Shengold, author of Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation, concurs with Bassoff when he writes, "We

regularly find that abusers of children have been abused as children by their own parents. . . . [in] a passing down of a traumatic past from generation to generation" (4). According to Miller, author of Banished Knowledge: Facing Childhood Injuries, however, "It is quite simply not true that human beings must continue compulsively to injure their children, to damage them for life and thus destroy our future. When I wrote The Drama of the Gifted Child, while still under the influence of psychoanalytic thinking, I still believed that such a cycle of abuse was inevitable. Now I know that that is not true" (Banished 5).

I agree with Miller's idea that a cessation in a multi-generational cycle of abuse is possible if a person she describes as a "sympathetic witness" is present, and believe that Tan tries to show readers that because the mothers in The Joy Luck Club are themselves victims of abuse, they are not completely at fault; their good intentions allow them space for loving acts and, ultimately, to make amends with their daughters

In Tan's writing, we are frequently reminded that "elders were victims as well as victimizers," mothers who were hurt by their own families and know no other way of expressing their pain than by hurting their own daughters (DeMott 7). One such victim-victimizer is Lindo Jong, one of the four Chinese mothers of The Joy Luck Club. Seeking vindication for her methods of child rearing, this contrite mother says, "I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?" (Joy Luck 254) Lindo realizes that because of her outmoded parenting practices she has unconsciously created disharmony with her daughter. Later, like the well-meaning mother she is, she struggles to repair their relationship. According to Gloria Shen,

“this wish becomes the very source of the conflicts and tensions in their [Tan’s mothers and daughters] relationship” (238). Lindo Jong's admission of her dreams for her daughter Waverly are key for understanding her motives, for Waverly's biggest point of contention with her mother is that her mother lives vicariously through her successes, and withholds love when Waverly experiences failures. While this pattern of withholding seems to be the case when Lindo describes her hopes for Waverly, it is easy to see that she has had Waverly’s best life interests at heart.

In spite of her intentions, enmeshment, a term Patricia Love, author of The Emotional Incest Syndrome, uses to describe an overly close parent-child relationship, would be a suitable way to describe Lindo's relationship with Waverly. Lindo fits Love's description of the "abusive/critical parent," expressing her disappointment with Waverly "no matter how hard [Waverly] trie[s] to please her" (Love 17). On the flip side, though, Lindo derives vicarious satisfaction from Waverly's chess playing acumen, worshiping newspaper clippings of Waverly's chess tournament wins. When Waverly expresses her desire to stop playing chess, and, consequently, her desire to dissolve the overly critical relationship that constitutes Lindo's enmeshment with her, Lindo gives her the silent treatment. Lindo strives to avoid having her daughter repeat her own life, one that she had no control over, but Lindo's efforts to shape Waverly's character into that of a self-sufficient, self-supporting person are temporarily eclipsed by her methods. It is not until Waverly matures and begins to understand her mother that she realizes her mother’s criticism is not flat out meanness, rather it is Lindo’s way of suggesting a change, a method of rectifying a problem.

Lindo uses the same methods of childrearing that her family used with her even though they are hurtful and damaging because these are the only methods she knows, yet she wants her daughter to have a better life. Being an unassimilated immigrant excludes her from hearing about the parenting practices of American mothers. Rather than offering Waverly self-chosen venues for an expression of her interests, she believes that she must control and shape Waverly into conformity instead of just guiding her development. The cultural traditions in place during Lindo's childhood and the way her parents and community followed them are Lindo's role model for child rearing; she knows no other methods.

Marina Heung writes, "Because of their historical devaluation, women in the Chinese family are regarded as disposable property or detachable appendages despite their crucial role in maintaining the family line through childbearing" (601). And Takaki writes, "In Chinese culture, family and home were synonymous. They even shared the same character in the Chinese language. Women of all classes were regarded as inferior to men and were expected to remain at home, attentive to family and domestic responsibilities" (37).

Coupled with her understanding of the American Dream--that it is a force powerful enough to counterbalance fate-- Lindo's fear of Waverly leading a devalued and inferior life because of her gender prompts her to choose chess, a game that has weak gender and age barriers, those which Waverly's skill allows her to overcome. In spite of all her good intentions, Lindo's methods of shaping Waverly's fate and trying to create a more deliberate life for Waverly are unenlightened, for Lindo criticizes Waverly throughout her childhood and into her adulthood; and Waverly experiences

hurt feelings similar to those of her childhood when her mother underhandedly criticizes her future husband. Waverly rues her mother's ability to manipulate language when she says:

> This was worse than I had imagined. She had known all along [that I was going
>
> to marry him], when she criticized the mink jacket, when she belittled his freckles and complained about his drinking habits. She disapproved of him. (Joy Luck 201)

Lindo Jong's criticism of her daughter causes Waverly's self-described "self-loathing," yet however harmful her methods Lindo succeeds in producing a skilled and independent daughter something Waverly comes to realize much later (Joy Luck 194).

Like Lindo Jong, the immigrant mothers of Tan's other novels face difficulties adjusting to a society into which their daughters fit seemingly without effort. Daughters who hold Americanized expectations of parenting refuse to accept traditions such as male chauvinism or filial responsibility; they cannot relate to their mothers' reactions to trauma such as war or excommunication from the family. Using the motif of mother-daughter dysfunction enables Tan to alert readers to the marginalization of minority women, especially Asian American women. Functioning similarly to the novels and motives of other minority writers chronicling abuse, Tan's novels are designed to make readers uncomfortable for viewing Asian women as part of a minority group rather than as part of mainstream society. Repeated stories of dysharmony within Chinese American mother-daughter relationships, and within

mother-daughter dyads of other minority groups such as the Italian American mother and daughter who Lena hears through her bedroom wall, signal readers to take notice of Tan's design for her book. The reader comes to understand that Tan is not denoting problematic Chinese American mother-daughter dyad specifically, rather, she sees mother-daughter unrest as a far-reaching, cross-cultural problem within our society. Gloria Shen explains the novel's design saying:

> The first-person testimonies allow the reader to examine each of the characters closely and to develop a sense of empathy with each of them; but, at the same time, the testimonies reveal a pattern, particularly in the way the mothers and daughters relate to one another. The purpose of this treatment is obvious: to portray the mother and daughter relationship as both typical and universal. (Shen 235--from Brown and Gooze)

Because Tan constructs her novel with stories told from the perspective of both mothers and daughters, we are able to understand the cultural significance of each party's actions and we read the microcosm of repeated mother-daughter dysfunction as a trope for the macrocosm, a society in which repeated abuses, such as racism and sexism, occur.

The Joy Luck Club's daughters, Waverly, Rose, Lena, and Jing-mei, each feel that cultural differences have deprived them of an important connection with their mother. They believe that their mothers have been inflexible and often downright mean in their parenting practices. The daughters shrink from the frightening stories their mothers tell them, and consider the pressures their mothers place upon them to be excessively demanding. Sociologist Kieran O'Hagan contends that "damage to the

child's psychological development and emerging personal identity [is] primarily caused by [a] parent's (primary caretaker's) immaturity, defended life-style, and conscious or unconscious aggression towards the child" (453). Storytelling, in Tan's novels, becomes the mothers' way of justifying the "defended life-style," in this case parenting practices, and causes symptoms typical of a dysfunctional mother-daughter dyad which would prognosticate "damage to the child's psychological development and emerging personal identity" (O'Hagan 453). Throughout this chapter, I will utilize O'Hagan's idea of family disharmony in my discussion of Tan's scenes of the mothers' inadequate parenting of their daughters and how their storytelling, though meant to be instructive, is often terrorizing to the point where it causes subsequent damage to their daughters' psychological development and identity.

Through tales of Old World traditions, the mothers in The Joy Luck Club attempt to prepare their daughters for life, yet this is not the type of parenting their Americanized daughters favor. Angered by their mothers' inability, or perhaps refusal, to help them assimilate into American society, Waverly, Rose, Lena, and Jing-mei, Pearl, and Libby withdraw from their relations with their mothers. Because of an inescapable feeling of outsider status due to physical appearance, or because of having a different, and therefore embarrassing, family life from other children, the daughters feel marginalized, and as if they must perpetually strive for acceptance. Of the four The Joy Luck Club daughters, Lena is Anglo-Chinese, as is Olivia of The Hundred Secret Senses, a recurring point of interest for Tan. Lena describes her own appearance as "English-Irish, big boned and delicate at the same time" but with "Chinese parts," and explains while telling a story about a shopping trip with her

mother during which they are mistaken for "that poor little girl and her maid" that her Caucasian appearance gives her a special status, one that the other mothers and daughters cannot attain (Joy Luck 106, 111).

Unlike Lena, Olivia finds that although her mother is Caucasian and her father Chinese she is awarded no special status based on appearance, for, according to her family, she has her father's features. Olivia recounts a painful memory from her childhood when neighborhood boys taunt her with the slur "dumb chink," words which point out her "un-American" appearance and the widespread Caucasian American prejudice against people of Asian descent. Amy Ling discusses the struggle of women of Chinese ancestry in her article "Chinamerican Women Writers":

> Before they can arrive at a positive concept of self those who are doubly disdained--women and Chinese, for example--must fight through two dominant negative views: first, that of women within the Chinese society, given the weight of Chinese history and ancient custom, and second, that of women and of Chinese held by the white society. (310)

Mothers in Tan's novels appear oblivious to their "foreigner" or as a Maxine Hong Kingston character terms it "FOB--Fresh Off the Boat" status, yet their daughters are constantly aware of the Caucasian perception of them as foreigner because of their Asian facial characteristics, termed by sociologist Robert E. Park a "racial uniform" (2). Ronald Takaki aptly defines the problem in Strangers from a Different Shore when he recounts his experiences with the Caucasian ideal of American appearance:

> My fellow students and even my professors would ask me how long I had been in America and where I had learned to speak English. "In this country," I would reply. And sometimes I would add: "I was born in America, and my family has been here for three generations." (3)

Takaki's feelings of discomfort echo the feelings of Tan's daughters; both were born and reared in this country, yet they feel that they will never attain one hundred percent citizen status because of their "racial uniform," and, for Tan's characters, because their mothers do not or are not able, to the daughters' satisfaction, to help them to assimilate.

Takaki explains that problems arising from having Asian facial characteristics are difficult ones, particularly for "Asian immigrants [who] could not transform themselves as felicitously" as European immigrants, for:

> they [Asians] had qualities they could not change or hide--the shape of their eyes, the color of their hair, the complexion of their skin. They were subjected not only to cultural prejudice, or ethnocentrism, but also racism. . . . Unlike the Irish and other groups from Europe, Asian immigrants could not become 'mere individuals, indistinguishable in the cosmopolitan mass of the population.' (Takaki 13)

Persistent foreigner status in one's native land combined with mother-daughter disharmony leave both the mothers and the daughters with "damaged personal identity and psychological development" (O'Hagan). Even the American-born The Joy Luck Club daughters feel that they can never fully assimilate due to their distinctly "different" appearance. Being able to speak perfect English and attending

American colleges do little to alleviate the feeling Tan's characters have that they are sidelined or marginalized because of appearance. In Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan explain that:

> In reentering girlhood and remembering images of perfection and various forms of psychological foot-binding that are imposed on girls at the time when they become young women, we found ourselves turning to the girls in our study who, because of color or class, live in the margins, who are so clearly at odds with the dominant models of female beauty and perfection as to reveal the cultural hand behind the standards. (226)

Because the The Joy Luck Club daughters are girls whose appearance differs from the "dominant models of female beauty" and are "so clearly at odds" with the standards of their peer group, they seek assimilation through other means-- their selection of spouses.

In four cases in Tan's fiction, Asian American daughters embrace "the forbidden other," "the outsider" or "the barbarian" by marrying white men. Their act of rebellion – going against their mothers by deviating from tradition--is, paradoxically, a simultaneously desperate yet hopeful attempt at a more complete assimilation. Stemming in part from the fantasy of becoming more American or Caucasian by intermarriage, Lena, Waverly, Rose, and Olivia convince themselves that marrying a white "Wangorian" or "ghost" will enable them to escape some of the prejudices they face because of their "racial uniform" (Park 2). One cannot help but wonder whether daughters marry outside of their cultural group in an attempt to purge

their lives of Chinese cultural tradition, and, by association, the feared stories of their mothers. Poor choices the daughters make in spouses reflect their damaging relations with their mothers. The daughters believe that by marrying men outside their ethnic group, in other words "not mother," they will be able to eliminate some of the Chinese culture's hurtful sexist traditions from their lives and replace them with the more diplomatic and seemingly more caring American traditions. This belief is quickly proven to be incorrect because of the serious complications that arise due to cultural differences that the daughters and their spouses must overcome. In choosing "the outsider" the daughters have actually chosen "the insider"; they have, in most cases, chosen problematic, and often abusive, relationships similar to those they have with their mothers. Evelyn Bassoff believes that "One of the most destructive effects of poor mothering can be a child's feelings of disconnection from her self" (135). It is this disconnection from self that causes Rose, Waverly, Lena, and Pearl to look for relationships with men who do not meet their emotional needs.

In a study titled "The Relation of Childhood Abuse and Early Parenting Experiences to Current Marital Quality in a Nonclinical Sample" psychologists William Belt and Richard R. Abidin conclude that "The way women perceived their parents' early nurturing was significantly predictive of the depth of their current marriage, . . . perceptions of even relatively minor levels of abuse may be predictive of women's later reports of marital conflict" (1028). Tan repeatedly offers this lesson in her novels: an emotionally bereft mother-daughter relationship invariably leads to daughters choosing similarly lacking relationships with male partners. Lena and Rose of The Joy Luck Club and Olivia of The Hundred Secret Senses, in relationships with

abusive male partners, perceive their mothers' treatment of them to have been abusive. While Lena and Rose feel compromised by their mothers' storytelling, Olivia complains of the "meager souvenirs of her [mother's] love" and wonders, "How is it that as a child I knew I should have been loved more?" (Hundred 7, 8). Olivia's character could not be a more fitting example of what Belt and Abidin hypothesize in their study. Not only does she report that she perceives her parents' early nurturing to have been lacking, but also, her perception of her marriage is that it is flawed and troubled.

Belt and Abidin report that "Verbal abuse, which does not violate a child's physical boundary, might intuitively seem to be less damaging to a child's relationship functioning than physical or sexual abuse. However, perceiving oneself as having been verbally abused in childhood is associated with women's later perceptions of marital conflict, regardless of otherwise good parenting" (1028). Tan's mothers are not physically abusive, they are, in Object Relations theorist D. W. Winnicott's words, "good enough mothers," and more. They are responsive to the physical needs of their daughters, and they show caring and love in their ways. However, the daughters perceive themselves to have been verbally battered by their mothers' storytelling, and just as Belt and Abidin theorize in their report, they perceive their marriages to be problematic.

Once Rose and Lena reconfigure their estranged relationships with their mothers, they reevaluate their abusive marriages. This revelation, a sudden understanding of their partial culpability--their own folly in their choice of husbands and their behavior within the relationship, moves them to action. As I discuss in a

later section of this chapter, with the newfound support of her mother and with the advent of a sudden understanding of her mother's cultural ideals, Lena, as a last ditch effort, begins to agitate for a more equal relationship before abandoning her life with her husband Harold. Rose, at her mother's urging and her own realization of her miscommunication with her mother, attempts to reclaim what is rightfully hers within the marriage: her house, her husband, and her voice. Both women derive their strength from their new understanding of their mothers' support; both realize that they have attempted to use their husbands' outsider status as a way of escaping their mothers' stifling traditional ways. Davidson and Bronner write, "In her essay on immigrant and minority women, Ms. Natalie M. Rosinsky . . . . shows how in the fiction by [these] oppressed women, 'each protagonist comes to recognize her mother as fellow victim rather than total villain.' The protagonists 'discover the deeper rapport that--along with suffering--unites them to their mothers'"(255).

It is interesting to note here that Amy Tan's contemporary, novelist Gish Jen, also creates a character who chooses a Caucasian man as a partner while simultaneously rejecting her Chinese background. In Jen's spoof on cultural tradition-laden novels, Amy Tan's, in fact, Chinese American Mona of Mona in the Promised Land dates the Jewish American Seth and converts to Judaism herself. Understanding the in-depth symbolism of certain Jewish traditions and becoming the "official mascot of the Temple Youth Group" enable Mona to feel that she has overridden her family's incomplete assimilation (Jen 32). Mona's attempt to assimilate into another minority group is not foolhardy; she feels that in her home town, at least, Jewish people are not a minority and that they have been more

successful at assimilation than her own group has. Far more pronounced, indeed exaggerated, than in Tan's novels, the characters' dithering between cultural groups enables Jen to cast her aspersions on traditions like those that threaten to prevent Mona's older sister Callie from going off to Radcliffe for college because her parents disapprove of a daughter leaving home. All the more powerful is this lesson because the family is presented in contrast to families with behavior typical of Jen's "Scarshill" a community that replicates Scarsdale, a wealthy suburb of New York City, where college acceptance is of paramount importance and where actually there are many more Chinese American families that seem to be assimilated than not.

Like Jen's characters, Tan's women eschew cultural traditions they consider useless or damaging. In The Joy Luck Club Rose's desperate attempt to escape Chinese cultural traditions foisted on her by her mother in the form of frustrating stories about fate and superstition leads her into the very role which she struggles to avoid. In a dream, Rose attempts to assert her will against a set of actions predetermined by her mother; however, her fear, as she tries to choose a doll different than the one her mother has decreed she will, "paralyzes her" (Joy Luck 208). Rose believes that by marrying the Caucasian Ted, a person seemingly outside the realm of fate as Rose believes him to be because of his outsider status, she is avoiding her fate. Yet, she does not realize that her very steps to avoid her fate, such as letting Ted make all decisions, leave her acting the part of a typical submissive Chinese wife of several generations ago, (because she is acting the part of a submissive "China doll" in her marriage, she, herself, is represented in her dream by the dolls she must choose between) and this leads to her to her downfall. Rose's refusal to make choices

because she feels trapped by forces that have predetermined her unalterable fate is read by Ted as indecisiveness and submissiveness, and he believes this to signal Rose's willingness to assume a non-participant status within their marriage.

Rose's sessions with her psychiatrist are a failure in many ways. Her psychiatrist, male chauvinist and unschooled in the complexities of Rose's struggle to find harmony among her mother's traditions, her Americanized self, and her life with her Caucasian husband, devalues her as an individual, a real person with real problems, and therefore does not shepherd her toward meaningfully probing the earlier, significant events of her life. However, in a transference of her anger toward her mother and toward Ted, her anger at her "sleepy eyed" therapist incites her to action, and, simultaneously, as if she had been waiting for this precise moment, Rose's mother An-mei begins to offer encouragement and advice. Stephen Souris believes that, "confronting Ted seems to have unleashed a realization at a deeper, psychic level about the abusive nature of her mother, as well. In her dream, her mother is planting weeds that are running wild" (110) but I contend that the events occur in the opposite order. Lena's understanding of her mother's motives and honorable intentions initiates a realization of the abusive nature of her relationship with Ted. Psychologist Evelyn Bassoff's work with her female patients supports this theory. Bassoff writes, "They [female patients] too seldom initiate therapy to explore early problems with mother; rather they present troubled relationships with lovers or husbands or problems at work or feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, emptiness, and anxiety. What frequently happens, however, is that after a few sessions, whatever the presenting problems might have been, their attention turns to mother. As they talk

about less-than-happy childhood, they begin to connect their present distress to her early influence" (4). Rose gathers strength from the realization that it is her mother's stories about inescapable fate that cause her indecisiveness, yet her real empowerment arises from Rose's realization of how alike she and her mother are and how much they need each other. From this point, she is able to become a more active participant in her marriage, rather than letting her belief in fate force her into inaction, and in spite of the fact that what she is really participating in is the breakup of her marriage she has undergone a metamorphosis from the "China doll" wife she once was to a woman with "wood" or strength.

In the "Without Wood" chapter of The Joy Luck Club An-mei laments her daughter's lack of wood, her pliability, yet she refuses to extend herself to her daughter until Rose can prove that she is able to overcome her lack of wood, her lack of a backbone. As Rose begins to understand that what motivates her mother is her own upbringing, and as An-mei gradually assumes responsibility for her earlier, and admittedly damaging, storytelling, Rose is able to gather strength and retrieve her personality, her sense of self worth. In "Without Wood" Rose comes to an understanding, as all the daughters do, with her mother by acknowledging her mother's Chinese cultural background and heritage. Davidson and Bronner write, "As Maglin states, "there is a need to recite one's matrilineage . . . The sudden new sense the daughter has of the mother; the realization that she, her mother, is a strong woman; and that her voice reverberates with her mother's'--all this is part of the new matrilineage" (254). When she decides to listen to the wood in herself, or, in other words, to stop trying to avoid her fate, and to listen to her matrilineal cultural

heritage, she stands up to Ted for the first time in years. Her mother's comment that "Ted is doing monkey business" initially seems to Rose to be a criticism, but understood in the context of a helping, nurturing mother trying to pass on her "wood," her strength, to the next generation, Rose realizes her mother is counseling her and offering her support while she attends to the problem.

Rose and An-mei's dysfunctional relationship leads to Rose's marital problems with Ted, and there are several other instances of mother-daughter dysfunction in The Joy Luck Club that seem to leave daughters especially susceptible to abuse by their lovers. Belt and Abdin discuss the likelihood of women who had problematic relations with parents to choose abusive partners. They write, "Women in this sample seem to have inherited a model of relating from their parents that is consistent with the depth of the relationship they now have with their husband" (1028). Consistent with this finding, Chan writes of her private practice:

> In a group of twelve Asian-American professional women, eleven expressed similar feelings of objectification and the accompanying feelings of distrust, worthlessness, and self-blame. Most remarkably, perhaps, each of these women blamed herself and felt that she was alone in her feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. (37)

The daughters echo this sentiment in their comments to each other and to outsiders. Lena of The Joy Luck Club tells readers, "And I think that feeling of fear never left me, that I would be caught someday, exposed as a sham of a woman. But recently, a friend of mine, Rose, who's in therapy now because her marriage has already fallen apart, told me those kinds of thoughts are commonplace in women like us" (Joy Luck

169). In essence, a mother-daughter relationship characterized by dysfunction has had far-reaching effects; it has destroyed the possibility of happiness in the characters' adult relationships.

In an incident metonymic of mother daughter interactions in The Joy Luck Club, another mother, Ying-ying St. Clair, tells her daughter Lena stories which catalyze the beginning of her lifelong struggle with an eating disorder. Ying-ying tells Lena that "'your future husband have one pock mark for every rice you not finish'" (165). Lena succumbs to the fear instilled in her by her mother's stories, and panics, believing her future husband to be "this mean boy Arnold"(Tan 165). She says, "I did a terrible thing. I saw what I had to do so I would not have to marry Arnold. I began to leave more rice in my bowl" (Tan 165, 166). When Arnold dies from the measles, a disease that manifests itself with pock marks, Lena's belief that she is responsible engenders such guilt that she reverses her fast with "a half-gallon of strawberry ice cream from the freezer," saying "and I forced spoonful after spoonful after spoonful down my throat . . . . And I remember wondering why it was that eating something good could make me feel so terrible, while vomiting something terrible could make me feel so good" (Tan 167).

In the words of Maud Ellmann, author of The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment, "Since women succumb to anorexia more commonly than men, many feminists interpret the disorder as a symptom of the discontents of womankind. Anorexia, they argue, has now replaced hysteria as the illness that expresses women's rage against the circumscription of their lives" (2). In accordance with Ellman's argument that eating disorders are passive political

protests, we can understand Lena's eating disorder as a protest or as terrorist measure against her mother's intrusive and frightening storytelling.

Patricia Yaeger believes that women writers create a "terrorist text" because they are disempowered by the writing of men. If we configure Yaeger's theory to apply to Tan's novel, we understand that in Lena's case, anorexia becomes the text that she uses to passively protest her mother's storytelling. Because her language has been expropriated by her mother, her voice silenced, she uses terrorist measures to lobby for change.

Psychologist Mary Pipher, whose specialty is counseling adolescent girls, writes that a girl with an eating disorder will "use food to comfort and nurture herself" (182) and that eating disorders are often an "effort to regain control" and a physical enactment of the statement "I will hurt myself more than the culture [and mother] can hurt me" (158). Lena's bingeing on ice cream "becomes cathartic" releasing the anxiety associated with her guilt over Arnold's death while simultaneously becoming a means of self-destruction and a means of self-nurturance (Pipher 158). Lena conjures up a feeling of self-worth and satisfaction with the excess of calories from the ice cream and self-destructs by purging herself not only of the calories, but also of the hurtful mothering Ying-ying offers.

Connie Chan, a clinical psychologist specializing in Asian American women's problems, describes the "feelings of distrust, worthlessness, and self-blame" harbored by many Asian American professional women. In her twenties, Lena, who has become an architect specializing in restaurant design, carries these damaging feelings from her relation with her mother to her marriage with Harold. Like the other

daughters in The Joy Luck Club, Lena's relationship with her spouse is an extension of her dysfunctional mother-daughter dyad; the pain of her relationship with her mother causes her to seek similarly hurtful interactions within her marriage. In Lena, Harold finds the submissive partner he had always sought. She acquiesces to his desire for control of their marriage, their finances, and their architectural firm. In discounting Lena's contributions to their partnership, i.e. stealing her ideas for theme-eating restaurants ("Harold actually listened to me. He took those ideas and he applied them in an educated, methodical way. He made it happen. But still, I remember, it was my idea") (Joy Luck 172)), Harold has forced Lena into Chan's description of Asian women in a sexist world who "occupied the lowest rung on the economic ladder and became the cheapest commodities" (36). Lena reports that in spite of having helped Harold start the firm "Harold makes about seven times more than what I make" (Joy Luck 173). Ann Jones and Susan Schecter, in a discussion of strategies for women with controlling partners, specify that a partner's control of a couple's finances is one of the indications of a controlling husband. Harold's control of Lena through money is complete; he sets Lena's salary, and through that her share in their household decisions. Lena reports:

> And when we bought the house, we agreed that I should pay only a percentage of the mortgage based on what I earn and what he earns [7%], and that I should own an equivalent percentage of community property; this is written in our prenuptial agreement. Since Harold pays more, he had the deciding vote on how the house should look. (Joy Luck 175-76)

This atypical arrangement seems doubly unfair to Lena. Harold has discredited her claim to the theme eating restaurant idea as well as prevented her from choosing the décor of her own house. Lena's marginalized position in her marriage is representative of her position in the community: her outsider status is heightened by her physical appearance, and her vulnerability is caused by her mother's emotional abuse.

It is interesting that the person largely responsible for creating the insecure, indecisive Lena becomes the person to buoy her, to stand beside her in the face of adversity. Ying-ying's support, an American-style effort enacted many years after immigration, is linked with an acknowledgment of responsibility for her role in Lena's eating disorder. Surprising Lena by remembering the ice cream incident, Ying-ying questions Lena about the appearance of ice cream on the joint list of expenses, and bravely tells the austere Harold that "Lena cannot eat ice cream" (Joy Luck 177). Her concern, so unexpected by Lena who lives perpetually braced against the onslaught of her mother's disapproval, initiates a reconciliation. Suddenly, Ying-ying and Lena have become co-conspirators. Lena has reached the age where, as Jane Smiley puts it, she "is old enough for her [mother] to be herself with [her]," and, as Amy Ling writes, "The daughters realize that the mothers have always had the daughters' own best interests at heart. Because their own lives in China had been circumscribed by parental and societal constraints that had led invariably to humiliation, pain, and tragedy, the mothers had all come to America to give their daughters a better life, a life of greater choice" (Smiley 93, Ling 139-140).

Ying-ying's behavior is understandable if we consider her to be the victim as well as victimizer, for her childhood in China, filled with the parental and societal constraints described by Ling, is one of sexism and discrimination. Her childhood years are filled with admonitions for her to behave in ways befitting a girl, and with the memory of the trauma of her mother's abandonment. Ying-ying's Amah, or nanny, tells her "A girl can never ask, only listen," and her mother says, "A boy can run and chase dragonflies, because that is his nature. But a girl should stand still" (Joy Luck 68, 70). Statements like these are designed to train daughters to be obedient to their future husbands and in-laws; they successfully stifle Ying-ying's ebullient nature and intellect. Amy Ling writes, "Traditionally, Chinese society has been blatantly patriarchal. For eighteen hundred years, it codified women's obedience and submission to the men in their lives--father, husband, son--and stressed female chastity, modesty, and restraint; . . ." (310). The trauma that overshadows Ying-ying's life is that Ying-ying's mother, unable to live in her husband's restrictive and stifling household, abruptly abandons Ying-ying.

In Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History Cathy Caruth claims that "What returns to haunt the victim, . . . is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). For Ying-ying, the residual fear of reprisal from her father coupled with the family's ban on discussing Ying-ying's mother, creates an ongoing state of dread for Ying-ying. She is hyper-aware of the idea that the world is in a constant state of chaos; in addition to the loss of her mother, she expects the initial trauma, the pain, abandonment, and uncertainty she felt upon discovering her mother's disappearance,

to be repeated at any juncture, at any moment, hence, as Ben Xu writes of Ying-ying, an:

> insignificant incident [getting lost during a festival] in her early childhood is remembered as an emblem of her unfortunate life. This is the memory of a survivor of bad times, who has lost her capacity to remember a different life even though she did once experience it. The memory itself has become a psychic defense, which helps to justify her social disengagement, her fatalistic perception of the world as a system of total control, and her fascination with extreme situations and with the possibility of applying their lessons to everyday life. (5

Concurrent with the "psychic defense" system Ying-ying creates for herself, the women of Ying-ying's communal-style family household shape her character, already fragile from the loss of her mother, into that of a submissive, repressed, and insecure young woman, a precursor to the woman Ying-ying's daughter Lena becomes. In support of Ying-ying, Stephen Souris writes, "On the outside she may appear to be shrinking, and she may appear 'hard of listening'; on the inside she has a story to tell that helps explain why she is the way she is. . . . [and this] points out to the reader that greater understanding can lead to greater appreciation and tolerance" (103). Because Ying-ying is traumatized by her mother's abandonment and by the lack of love offered her by her father and extended family, she cannot summon the energy to resist her family's sexist cultural traditions.

Hope Edelman, author of Motherless Daughters, writes, "A daughter whose mother chose to leave her or was incapable of mothering may feel like a member of

the emotional underclass, like a dispensable part of society whose needs the government has ignored"(83). This is an accurate description of both Ying-ying and Lena; mother and daughter feel incapable of obtaining the nurturing essential for their emotional well-being. Ying-ying is voiceless within her family and Lena is voiceless within her own marriage. Edelman continues, "As a result, she [the abandoned daughter] often develops a sense of degradation and unworthiness even more profound than that of the daughter whose mother has died" (83). Because "an abandoned daughter is left feeling angry, resentful, and sad" Ying-ying submits to an inopportune and abusive marriage and later rears her daughter the way she herself was brought up, focusing on Lena's future ability to find a husband, ironically so because Ying-ying herself did not find security within her marriage (Edelman 83).

In the form of storytelling, Ying-ying hands down her abusive legacy to her daughter who fails to create a life in which she is an equal partner with her husband. Instead, Lena remains "a member of the emotional underclass" or "one of the cheapest commodities," angry and degraded by her failure to conquer the feelings of marginalization often faced by Chinese American women in the United States (Edelman 83, Ling 36). Stephen Souris writes, "We realize that Ying-ying's troubled mental state must have impinged negatively on Lena as she grew up, and we sympathize with her for that. But as readers who are privileged to know the inner thoughts of every character, we can balance off that perspective with what we know from Ying-ying's 'Moon Lady' monologue, where we learn about the childhood trauma that has clearly affected her personality" (108).

Souris's theory that Ying-ying's childhood trauma has affected her personality is accurate, yet he leads readers to believe that Ying-ying is mentally unbalanced. In a recent article titled "Feng Shui, Astrology, and the Five Elements: Traditional Chinese Belief in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club," Patricia Hamilton explains that Ying-ying attempts to control fate and counter the bad luck of her childhood through the practice of Feng Shui, which, simply put, is an attempt to channel the negative energies that influence fate through creating symmetry in all aspects of one's life. Hamilton writes, "Ying-ying's compulsion to rearrange furniture does not presage a psychotic break with reality but rather signals that, transplanted to a foreign country where she must function according to new rules and expectations, Ying-ying relies on familiar practices such as *feng shui* and astrology to interpret and order the world around her especially when that world is in crisis" (140). Uncomfortable with her immigrant status, Ying-ying clings to Chinese traditions which are not necessarily useful in negotiating the world once she lives in America. Lena feels real pain at her mother's withdrawal into the obsessive practice of *Feng Shui*, and at her mother's failure to help make her feel as if she is part of an Americanized family. Her mother's sexist expectations for her future cause Lena a great deal of unease during her childhood and early adult life. And Ying-ying's repetitive rearranging of furniture leaves Lena feeling ignored and unwanted. Like Alice Miller, I believe that people are capable of overcoming traumatic childhood situations to break a multi-generational cycle of abuse and to offer their children a happier life, yet due to her life circumstances and mental health issues Ying-ying fails Lena in this regard.

Ying-ying and Lena's counterparts, the other mother-daughter pairs of The Joy Luck Club, each dysfunction in a parallel manner, and like Ying-ying and Lena, other mother-daughter couples negotiate and position themselves through their focus on food. Jing-mei and Suyuan use a discussion of food as a platform for expression of concern over other more germane matters. During a discussion about a rotten crab that Suyuan Woo served for dinner, she comments on her daughter Jing-mei's low self-esteem saying, "Only *you* pick that crab. Nobody else take it. I know this. Everybody else want best quality. You thinking different" (Joy Luck 234).

Bombarded by her mother's story telling, Jing-mei rebelliously tries to redirect her fate by going against the pathways her mother chooses for her. According to Shen, "Another daughter, Jing-mei, adopts a self-defensive strategy against her mother's expectation that she be a child prodigy by disappointing her whenever she can. She does this by getting average grades, by not becoming class president, by not being accepted into Stanford University, and finally by dropping out of college" (142). Shen also writes, "by consistently failing her mother, Jing Mei manages to assert her own will" (240). She refuses to learn during her piano lessons and purposely botches a piano recital, yet all these failures only succeed in enhancing her low self-esteem. She flails against her mother, yet does not realize the cause of their uneasy relationship. She resents her mother's tactless comments, yet does not realize that they have a communication problem.

According to Hamilton, "Incomplete cultural knowledge impedes understanding on both sides, but it particularly inhibits the daughters from appreciating the delicate negotiations their mothers have performed to sustain their

identities across two cultures" (125). Hamilton's assertion that Suyuan's life has been a difficult one is accurate, yet she does not address Jing-mei's pain at being a daughter of a person who herself has had difficulties assimilating into the only community her daughter knows. In addition, Jing-mei has to spend her childhood with a mother who succumbs to a version of T. Berry Brazelton's Ghosts in the Nursery theory, which states that a parent may succumb to the urge to make up for what was lacking in his or her own childhood in his or her own parenting. In this contorted case, however, Suyuan does not use her own childhood as a model to improve her parenting of Jing-mei; she uses the memory of her twin daughters to measure Jing-mei's progress and worth. As disconcerting as it is for Jing-mei to feel Suyuan's constant dissatisfaction, it is doubly shocking for her to learn that, unbeknownst to her, she has been compared to her older sisters throughout her entire childhood.

Jing-mei's story echoes Tan's own life, for each learn only in adulthood that they are younger sisters, that their mothers had to abandon older daughters while still in China. It is only in her adulthood after her mother dies that Jing-mei understands why her family calls her Mei-mei, or younger sister, and after this critical point, Jing-mei comes to believe that her mother is so critical of her because her point of reference is the twin baby daughters she left behind on the road to Kweilin. Because they remain babies in Suyuan’s memory they are remembered as flawless daughters, and Jing-mei, a real and present child, cannot possibly live up to her mother’s memory of her two perfect older daughters, a feeling which is impossible for Suyuan to hide. The twin daughters Suyuan searches for become a symbol of an unattainable perfect daughter, or an unattainable happiness or contentment between mothers and

daughters. Jing-mei laments, “Me, the younger sister who was supposed to be the essence of the others. I feed myself with the old grief, wondering how disappointed my mother must have been” (Joy Luck 323).

Suyuan Woo’s endless search for her lost twin daughters functions as a unique emblem, one that holds a different meaning for each of two parties involved. Suyuan’s lifelong search for her lost daughters, whom she was forced to abandon as she fled Kweilin just before the Japanese invasion, becomes something other than that, it takes on the significance of a search for a satisfactory mother-daughter relation, one that contains a double opportunity for happiness because there is a dual chance, one with each “double image” daughter (Joy Luck 329). From Jing-mei’s perspective, however, the knowledge of Suyuan’s search for her “double image” sisters is deeply hurtful. When Jing-mei learns of her two older half-sisters, she finally understands her mother’s dissatisfaction with her, imagining her mother to have always been thinking of her two perfect daughters, perfect because, in Suyuan’s memory, they never develop beyond their innocent infancy and because being identical twins they are fascinating mirror images of each other. Once she discovers her mother's secret, Jing-mei torments herself with the question, “What had she dreamt all these years about her other daughters? All the times when she got mad at me, was she really thinking about them? Did she wish I were they?” (Joy Luck 320)

Tan continues with the theme of mother-daughter dysfunction in her later novels. I will discuss only briefly Tan's development of this theme in The Kitchen God's Wife and The Hundred Secret Senses. Tradition forces Winnie of The Kitchen God's Wife to obey her violent husband Wen Fu who beats Winnie and their children,

and his family who sell her dowry furniture, move into her family home, and turn in her father to the Kuomintang. Winnie's relationship with her daughter Pearl bears the strain of her traumatic life in China. She slaps Pearl at her second husband's funeral for failure to properly mourn her father, and the sense of dislocation and mistrust the fourteen-year-old Pearl experiences after the funeral cause her to withdraw from her mother until her early forties. Especially significant is Pearl's fear of telling her mother that she has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a degenerative disease of a person's neurologic system. Like many of Tan's daughters, Pearl feels an overwhelming sense of guilt about her relations with her mother. Convinced by her mother's storytelling that a person's actions can control her luck, that one is personally accountable for creating and guiding her destiny, Pearl fears that having multiple sclerosis speaks to her irresponsibility in "Ying-gai," a term Winnie uses when she refers to one's failure to have "altered the direction of fate, [to] have prevented disaster" (Kitchen 29).

Pearl's lament that her mother is "like a Chinese version of Freud, or worse" creates an interesting link among Tan's three novels, and suggests an evolution of Tan's enhanced sense of awareness of the inner workings of her characters. As Tan's writing career progresses, she becomes more aware of the causes and consequences of the legacy of mother-daughter dysfunction. Pearl is uncannily on target when she calls her mother the Chinese Freud because Winnie's belief that "everything has a reason" and that "everything could have been prevented" is Freud's theory in reverse. According to Shengold, "Freud believed that destructiveness and the abuse of power are part of our inherited biological nature, flowing from our bodies to our minds in

the form of instinctual drives" (15). If Winnie's belief that the mind's ability to influence the body is indeed true, Pearl is culpable for her entirely preventable multiple neurosis, as her aunt calls it. Pearl believes her mother will see her multiple neurosis is just that: a disease of the body invited by the waywardness of the mind. Guilt and fear prevent Pearl from telling her mother of her illness, resulting in an even greater strain on their relations and prolonging misunderstanding and dissatisfaction within the mother daughter dyad.

In The Hundred Secret Senses, Tan has given her characters the ability to verbalize the pain caused by maternal abuse as well as by matri-anger and matrophobia, a term Adrianne Rich coined to describe fear of becoming one's mother (Hirsch 136). The progression of Tan's characters' sense of awareness indicates a growth on the part of the writer; abuse Tan previously cloaked by using sets of mothers and daughters to divert readers is spoken of outright in the more recent work. Characters do not hesitate to express dissatisfaction with their mother daughter relation; they talk about their problems; they self-analyze. When speaking of her mother, Libby of The Hundred Secret Senses masks her pain with sarcasm rather than accepting the abusive incidents as ordinary, as do The Joy Luck characters. Libby says:

> "Good ol' Mom. She's the quintessential social worker, totally obsessed with helping strangers and ignoring the homefront. She'd rather keep an appointment with her manicurist than lift a finger to help her kids. Talk about phony! It wasn't that she was pathological, but, you know--." (Hundred 68)

Libby's boyfriend Simon becomes the readers' collective mouthpiece saying, "'Yeah, even benign neglect can hurt for a lifetime'" (Hundred 68).

In The Hundred Secret Senses Tan has taken anti-abuse activist fiction to a new level, one which saves space for reader response within the text, which for all intents and purposes has become, for readers, an opportunity to feel connected to the anti-abuse movement. According to Marina Heung, "the novel's resonant structure and its use of parataxis effectively write the reader into the text as a crucial participant in the making of meaning. . . . This way of engaging the reader as an active constructor of meaning allows the feminist novel to project a community of sisterly readers" (613). Tan's novels inspired me to educate myself about mother-daughter abuse and empowered me to the degree that I chose to write this dissertation about dysfunctional and abusive mother-daughter relationships. Interestingly, the dialogue in this novel echoes the current psychological theory of child abuse, and Shengold cites "intermittent parental cruelty and indifference" as causes of the lesser effects of child abuse (2-3). Thus, the reader's anger at abusive mother-daughter relationships is enabled, causing the reader to look for change both within herself and within her community. Alice Miller's theory of the importance of witnesses ("people who are not afraid to stand up for children assertively and protect them from adults' abuse of power" (Miller, Drama xiii)) for abused children applies to Tan's writing. Miller writes, "If I succeed with my books in reaching a few people . . . they will become enlightened, *conscious* witnesses and advocates of children" (Banished 172). Like Miller's books, Tan's stories are hugely popular and with their wide readership have reached many, many people.

In The Hundred Secret Senses, Kwan, Olivia's half-sister from China fills in for Olivia's neglectful mother. In spite of, or perhaps because of, Kwan's tender nurturing ("She soothed me when I lost a tooth. She ran the washcloth over my neck while I took my bath" (Hundred 11)) Olivia rejects her, unwisely continuing to invest her love in her mother. Once Olivia reaches adulthood and acquires her flippantly analytical stance toward her relationship with her mother, she rejects her mother whom she hates, yet also continues to reject Kwan the mother figure whom she loves. Apparently, her mother's neglect has robbed her of the capacity to accept motherly love. The negative emotions even small acts of nurturing by women bring up for Olivia cause her to shun emotional intimacy with women and cause her to reject Kwan in a manner similar to the one with which her mother rejects her. In her cavalier treatment of Kwan, Olivia becomes a rejecting and withholding person just like her mother, thus continuing her mother's abuse.

Olivia's abusive behavior in her treatment of Kwan epitomizes the cyclical nature of the abuse Tan chronicles in her novels. Because of their own abusive upbringings, their discomfort with their immigrant status, and the ease of falling back upon what is traditional, the mothers of Amy Tan's novels cannot imagine other options for bringing up their daughters, and, thus, the abusive cycle continues.

Filled with the complex emotions that configure mother-daughter relationships, the mothers and daughters of Tan's The Joy Luck Club spend their lives fueled by misgivings, pain, anger, and misunderstanding. Repair to the all-important mother-daughter dyad begins much later--when the daughters are mature enough to see their mothers as people with problems, survivors of great hardships, rather than

just an oppressive, negating force in their lives. Tan's focus on the strife between multiples of the mother-daughter dyad is no accident; her goal is to emphasize the universality of the tragedy of mother-daughter abuse. It is clear that throughout her novels, Tan mourns a loss of intimacy between mothers and daughters that comes not just with the daughters' individuation but because of misunderstandings caused by a culture gap and because of actual words and actions, fear and dysfunction that occurs through Tan's mother's storytelling. Tan's use of the motif of multigenerational dysfunction within the mother-daughter dyad points out the catalyst that begins the cycle: a sexist, oppressive Chinese culture. Tan's novels do more than just illuminate the problem of multigenerational mother-daughter dysfunction, they rally for change, their method: education through a fictional recounting of the problem.

Chapter 3: The Ghost and the Golem: Infanticide as Historically Based Phenomena in the Writings of Cynthia Ozick and Toni Morrison

In this paper, I discuss Cynthia Ozick's The Puttermesser Papers and Toni Morrison's Beloved in which characters commit infanticide. I will argue that the portrayal of child killing in both Jewish American and African American fiction suggests that mothers kill their children to save them from future pain and exploitation, and also that this child killing becomes a resistance to oppression, and a way of refusing to tolerate the abuses of slavery, racism, anti-Semitism, and sexism. I will work with Ozick's The Puttermesser Papers in conjunction with an analysis of examples of the Jewish history of child killing: incidents from the Old Testament and Holocaust survivor narratives in which Jewish mothers recount the circumstances under which they killed their children are examples of this phenomenon. I will use African American slave narratives depicting infanticide as historical background for child killing in Morrison's Beloved. In both novels, the use of the trope of child killing calls upon historical moments when mothers, acting contrary to their beliefs and desires, kill their children to save them from lives so horrible that the mothers consider death preferable. Sophie Lehmann notes a general link between African American and Jewish American texts:

> The term diaspora was originally coined to describe the circumstances of the Jews who lived outside of Palestine after the Babylonian exile. Since then, its application has been enlarged to include any group who has been scattered far from its homeland, particularly with reference to the descendants of Africans who were torn from their native continent and brought to the "New World" as

> slaves beginning in the seventeenth century. The linguistic yoking of diasporic Jews and Blacks is indicative of the common problems they face in trying to create a sense of identity and cultural continuity in diaspora. (Lehmann 102)

While there is a vast difference in the immigration history and cultural positioning of African Americans and Jewish Americans, within Morrison and Ozick's texts I find the particular similarity of two groups of women who are forced to protect their children in an unorthodox way--within the two cultural groups there is a history of infanticide, and in these extreme examples the characters choose death to protect their children from future harm.

Central to my investigation of Ozick and Morrison will be the question of why so many women writers feel drawn to use the trope of infanticide in their writing. Throughout the history of Western literature, mothers have been portrayed as absent, neglectful, psychotic, or overbearing, yet the infanticide I focus on in this chapter is such a spectacularly extreme example of abuse that calling it abuse may not be entirely correct. In the past, mothers often have been depicted as the perpetrators of child abuse, as individuals acting alone, yet contemporary women writers shrug off the constraints of matrophobia, and, in the novels I examine in this paper, portray child abuse as having multiple perpetrators. In my research I have found examples of a history of infanticide literature in cultures across the board and throughout time. In no way are American women writing during the 1990s unique for writing about infanticide, yet they are unique for creating infanticide literature from an American standpoint. So many American women writing during this era draw from the

infanticide literature of their cultural backgrounds and create American texts with infanticide that has drastic repercussions. Morrison draws on the African American history of infanticide literature in slave narratives and Cynthia Ozick alludes to the infanticide literature of the Holocaust when her character is killed. Morrison and Ozick are two examples of Americans writing about infanticide, yet American literature is replete with mention of infanticide from Nineteenth Century women's writing to the up to the moment Art Spiegelman's Maus, a graphic novel depicting the Holocaust.

As writers have begun to recognize forces outside the family such as the religions, cultural traditions, and prejudices of our society as being responsible for the individual and collective abuse, they in turn translate them into stories of cyclic multi-generational abuse. In their writings about collective abuse, Morrison and Ozick make the effort to shift the blame from an evil mother to oppressive community values in order to heighten reader awareness of the origins of abuse.

Ozick, who has dedicated her writing to exploring the question of modern Jewish cultural and religious identity, purposefully has her characters deviate from the teachings of the Torah when Puttermesser "kills" her "daughter," a golem created from soil, water, and a recitation of Kabalistic ritual prayer. A basic tenet of Hebrew thought deems it imperative for the survival of the Jewish people that life be preserved at any cost, no matter how horrible or painful the circumstances. Abraham's willingness to slaughter Isaac at God's command and Moses' exposure are biblical examples of attempted child killing in extreme situations. During the Holocaust, inmates of concentration camps sometimes chose to kill their young

children or abort children they were carrying rather than see them mutilated and murdered at the hands of Hitler's team of *Selektionen*, physicians appointed by Hitler to conduct pseudoscientific experiments on human subjects. In her memoir I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz Dr. Gisella Perl writes, "I delivered women pregnant in the eighth, seventh, sixth, fifth month always in a hurry, always with my five fingers, in the dark, under terrible conditions. . . . No one will ever know what it meant to me to destroy these babies. . . . And if I had not done it, both mother and child would have been cruelly murdered (82). An example in American literature of a character choosing death for a child during the Holocaust is Sophie of William Styron's Sophie's Choice. Sophie chooses immediate death for her daughter, her favorite child, rather than let her suffer in a concentration camp. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos compares Sethe's actions to Sophie's writing that each character selects her daughter to die before her for, "For Sethe, like Sophie, to kill her daughter is to kill her own best self, to kill her best and self-gendered fantasy of the future. The act is like killing time itself, especially its redemptive gifts, which the daughter, as a potential mother, symbolizes" (53). This is also the case when Puttermesser kills Xanthippe. In killing her daughter Puttermesser kills her "self-gendered fantasy" for the future, her chance to use her ideas to create a better New York City, a microcosm in which she tries out her ideas before unleashing them on the macrocosm of the world, for if one can turn around the festering and squalid "Gotham City" one's abilities to create harmony are infinite. Demetrakopoulos writes, "*Beloved* is, on an historical and sociological level, a Holocaust book, and like much Holocaust literature, it marvels at the indifferent and enduring beauty of nature as a frame for the worst human

atrocities" (54). For Ozick, Puttermesser's ritual killing of Xanthippe suggests an act of desperation and rebellion and an enactment of anger similar to that of the child killing mothers of the Holocaust toward their oppressors, as well as pessimism about the future of the next generation and a lack of faith in social reform.

A phenomenon present throughout African-American slave narratives, and a tri-generational cycle within Sethe's family, infanticide among slaves typically occurs because of what Ruoff calls "economic paternalism," the ability of slave masters to sell their own children away from their mothers to endure unknown and perhaps worse hardships and horrors of slavery under another master. Discussion of this practice occurs in Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl in which Jacobs claims she would rather have her children dead than enslaved: "I thought to myself that, God being my helper, they [my children] should never pass into his [slave master's] hands. It seemed to me I would rather see them killed than have them given up to his power" (Gates 407) and, "Alas, what mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying child to life! Death is better than slavery" (Gates 392). Four women in Beloved choose death for their children rather than let them endure slavery. The character of "Sethe" herself is modeled on an historic example: Margaret Garner who "with the tacit sympathy of her sexagenarian mother-in-law, cut the throat of one of her four children and tried to kill the others to save them from the outrages of slavery that she had suffered" (Bell 9). Like Garner, Sethe kills her baby to prevent her from being reenslaved, sold, and "dirtied" by her master. For Morrison's character Sethe, the idea of freedom is connected to the idea of control over one's body and one's maternity, and, indeed, her idea of self is centered on her

ability to care for her family. Sethe's hope for freedom and peace is destroyed when she is raped by Schoolteacher's white nephews whom he orders to "milk" her while he takes notes for his "scientific observation" of slaves. Taking place during a time termed the Age of Scientific Racism, Schoolteacher's cruel "research" is similar to the "medical research" of the *Selektonian* during the Holocaust, causing its victims ongoing trauma for the rest of their lives. For Sethe, her stolen breast milk is a symbol of her loss of ability to nurture her child and the loss of her ability to be the person she wants--a mother, who can provide for, and by doing so, protect her children.

Sethe succumbs to the patriarch-as-rapist, Houston A. Baker Jr.'s words for "a vast arena of coerced sexual coupling, a prodigal fathering of stock" by "white masters" (186). Sethe is raped by "white masters," the white boys who steal her breast milk. In Flash of the Spirit Robert Thompson uses Yoruban art to explain the symbolic importance of breastfeeding in the African culture. He writes:

> Thus Yoruba art abounds with images of men or women proffering a vessel. Witness a thunder god scepter-image of a naked kneeling woman supporting her breasts, with both hands. This is a sign of giving--"This milk shall be the sustenance of my children. (13)

When the two boys steal Sethe's breast milk, they not only deprive her of the ability to feed her own children, but also they deprive her of her ability to nurture in a more general sense, and, left without a parent's capacity to nurture and protect, she despairs. Sethe is so depressed and angered by this loss that she decides to take action to prevent this from ever happening to her own children, and so, when

approached by slave catchers, she kills her own daughter. Creating her future by taking complete and ultimate possession of her children, Sethe's only way to protest, to enact her rage and her desires, is to "write in white ink" to use Cixous' terms for a woman's invisible protest. Sethe's invisibility because of her social status, her inability to verbalize a protest and have it heard, causes her to "write in white ink," to transform her what Morrison terms “motherlove” into a force within herself capable of killing what she considers to be her "best thing," her daughter (Morrison 155). Sethe’s intense “motherlove” causes her to consider her third child Beloved her “best thing” even after it comes clear that Beloved is a sinister creature. Coincidentally, the actual preparation of ink is a task Sethe is skilled at and she blames herself for preparing the very ink Schoolteacher, a white character engaged in the demeaning and unscientific “science”phrenology uses to record his data on Sethe and the other slaves at Sweet Home and to take notes on the crime committed against Sethe. Sethe’s writing in “white ink,” however, using her “motherlove” to get breast milk to her babies, her absolute conviction that she alone is responsible for her four children, and that she alone can give them nutrition, causes her to use her powerful “motherlove” as a protest, as a way of refusal to abide by laws created by whites for their own benefit. Sethe’s act of “motherlove,” her “writing in white ink,” when she says her piece by killing her “crawling already?” baby, a name that denotes pure adoration and love for the child, is a crime even though Sethe tries to protect her children from enslavement. Suggs writes, “Sethe sought to deny the law ‘s agency by removing from its purview the objects of its attention” (Suggs 291). In addition to being punished for her crime, she is censored by her community of former slaves

("You just can't up and kill your children" (Morrison 301)). While Sethe is forced to pay for her crime according to the laws present in Cincinnati, Ohio of the day, the people of her community uphold their own laws, their own code of social accountability and justice, and they choose to show their disapproval of her taking a life by not singing until she is far down the road on the way to jail. Ella is one member of the community who "understood Sethe's rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated" (Morrison 301-2).

Not only does the loss of milk cause the loss of Sethe's ability to feed her child and to mother, but also Sethe's sense of herself is diminished by the rape that takes place at Sweet Home. The nurturing and love that a mother lavishes on her infant during breastfeeding are some of the benefits to both mother and baby during this time of intense bonding. A mother cut off from nursing her baby and hence prevented from continuing all of those loving nursing moments would most certainly despair due to the damage done to both by a forced weaning process. Kathleen Huggins, author of The Nursing Mother's Companion, writes:

> Ideally, complete weaning occurs when both the baby and mother are ready for it….Whether weaning is initiated by the mother or is a mutual undertaking, feelings of sadness are bound to arise as the final days arrive, marking the end of the precious months spent together nursing. (Huggins 184-5)

And, according to Norma Jane Bumgarner, author of Mothering Your Nursing Toddler, "The mother whose nursing comes to a traumatic end needs care and support

as she adjusts to and comes to accept her loss" (Bumgarner 285). In addition, Bumgarner writes:

> Emotionally, most of us at one time or another during weaning experience a sense of loss . . . . If the weaning is rapid, the change in hormone levels may trigger a depression in some mothers. Some of us wonder for a long while if we have lost our status as the irreplaceable caretaker for the child, though of course we have not. (Bumgarner 287-8)

In addition to the violence of the crime itself, Sethe has intense feelings of loss that go along with a traumatic weaning, and feelings of anguish that go along with the traumatic event she has endured. Sethe shuttles between what Cathy Caruth, in her book Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History calls ". . . the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). Caruth claims that it is what is ". . . not known in the first instance--[that] returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). From the moment the rape takes place until eighteen years later Sethe is unable to put aside the trauma of the event. All those years later, she forcefully tells Paul D that the damage done to her by schoolteacher and his boys occurred during the rape rather than the beating when she says "And they took my milk!" (Morrison 20) The rape remains in the foreground of her thoughts and influences all of her decisions. The combination of the trauma of the rape itself and its aftermath, the trauma of a forced weaning process, in spite of the fact that it is temporary, cause Sethe to make a highly controversial choice when forced to decide between reenslavement or death for her baby daughter. Caruth believes what is unknown about the initial trauma returns to haunt, and it seems that

this is a partial motivation for Sethe's actions. She fears for her daughter in the sense that she does not want her enslaved and that she does not want her to ever experience rape. According to Pamela Barnett:

> Sethe kills her child so that no white man will ever 'dirty' her, so that no young man with 'mossy teeth' will ever hold the child down and suck her breasts. . . . for Sethe, being brutally over-worked, maimed, or killed is subordinate to the overarching horror of being raped and 'dirtied' by whites; even dying at the hands of one's mother is subordinate to rape. (418-19)

Sethe's reasons that she would rather kill her child than see her enslaved, raped, and experimented with, as she herself was. To Sethe, there is no option but to kill her daughter. Initially, she feels that if she were to lash out at the oppressor, she herself would be killed or jailed and rendered unable to care for her children, however, in the final scene she makes a different choice. Critics have dubbed Sethe's choice to pummel the person who seems to be her attacker rather than take her children's lives a redemptive act. Given her fierce "motherlove" and her experience seeing the women of her community, her family even, prevented from mothering their children, she chooses to be a childless mother rather than leave motherless children. We can't forget that Sethe does not single out Beloved for the killing, rather, she kills her first because she is the favorite, attempting to kill Denver next, and saving her two boys for last. Sethe's girls have the dubious honor of being first because they are the children Sethe most identifies with because of their gender. There is no question that Sethe's crime stems from love for her children. When they are reunited, "Sethe lay in bed under, around, over among but especially with them all. . . . She kept kissing

them. She kissed the backs of their necks, the tops of their heads and the centers of their palms" (Morrison 110).

In For Your Own Good, psychologist Alice Miller sets forth the theory that abuse works in a cyclical fashion. She writes, " . . . those children who are beaten will in turn give beatings, those who are intimidated will be intimidating, those who are humiliated will impose humiliation, and those whose souls are murdered will murder" (232). One might be tempted to oversimplify Sethe's situation and use Miller and Leonard Shengold's idea of soul murder to show that Sethe's soul is murdered by the institution of slavery, and she in turn murders, yet much more can be brought to a discussion of Sethe and her desperate act. Aside from having a problematic upbringing (dubbed by one critic as being "a too quiet childhood") and being a slave, the trauma that Sethe experiences before Beloved's birth and the subsequent collapse of Sethe's family and her ability to mother, the loss of her maternal role and self-identification, are all reasons for Sethe's actions.

The sexual abuse of an African American woman by white men has historical significance in Beloved. Baker writes of Linda Brent's efforts to stave off the sexual advances of her master: "The central relationship in Brent's narrative is, in fact, between an implacable male sexual aggression (Dr. Flint as master) and a strategically effective female resistance and retreat (Linda Brent as slave)" (Ruoff 185). Bernard Bell discusses the issue of the patriarch-as-rapist in Beloved: "the implied author and the dramatized narrator / protagonist, Sethe, want Beloved and the implied reader to understand that, far worse than Beloved's grisly death" is the debasement of black women by white men (13). Sethe explains that her primary

motive for killing her baby daughter was to protect her from being raped and defiled by whites. She says:

> That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing--the part of her that was clean. (Morrison 308)

One could see this as a narcissisism, but I think in a society where the mother lives in constant fear of the child with whom she most identifies, a daughter, being taken away, there is little emotional room for individuation on the mother's part.

To Sethe, who spent her first two decades as a slave, possession of one's body is a novelty, and the idea of her children losing the feeling of being in complete possession of themselves is terribly upsetting, and she vows to prevent it.

Pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton dubs a parent who has the desire to grant her children everything she felt she lacked during her own childhood as having "ghosts in the nursery." Jennifer FitzGerald unsympathetically calls "her [Sethe's] excessive investment in mothering . . . an impossible attempt to make up for her own loss as a daughter" (FitzGerald 677). For Sethe, the desire to "bring her milk" to her nursling takes precedence over all others, and contrary to FitzGerald's assertions, it is in no way a negative desire. Wyatt writes of "Sethe's self-definition as maternal . . . a specifically female quest powered by the desire to get one's milk to one's baby"

(Wyatt 475). Her instinct to provide her infant with milk is strengthened by her own childhood losses and by the losses her community has faced. If Sethe can have a fulfilling nursing experience with her own daughter, her sense of herself as a mother able to provide for her children will be complete. Morrison writes of Sethe nursing the infant Denver, “When the nursing was over and the newborn was asleep—its eyes half open, its tongue dream-sucking” and of Sethe nursing the baby Beloved “Finally she lay back and cradled the crawling-already? girl in her arms. She enclosed her left nipple with two fingers of her right hand and the child opened her mouth. They hit home together” (110). Sethe dreams of being able to protect and provide for her family: "I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide" (Morrison 162). In addition, her repair of a tri-generational cycle of trauma to mother-daughter relationships will have contributed in a small but significant way to the repair of the community. Keeping her children with her is paramount to Sethe because she is determined to prevent her children from repeating her own childhood experiences.

Sethe's dependence on her maternal self-image stems from her loss of her mother, "For Sethe was nursed only two or three weeks by her mother, a field slave branded with a circle and cross under her breast, before she was turned over to Nan, . . ." (Bell 12). One of the strongest currents in Sethe's life is the loss of mothering she suffers when her mother is forced to return to work in the fields just weeks after Sethe's birth. Sethe was one of many slave babies turned over to a wet nurse, for during slavery, "black infants were routinely removed from their mothers after a week or two and nursed by a slave woman whose work it was to tend all the children, while

the mothers were sent back to the fields to avoid jeopardizing productivity" (Bonnet 48). Bonnet discusses the far-reaching effects of this common practice:

> It is, as a matter of fact, the disruption of the bond between mother and child that is the most striking, actually paradigmatic, manifestation of the very common practice of separating slave families. Because the mother-child link is the primal human bond without which, as the text amply suggests, the self cannot come into being, it can be considered as the condensed form, the epitome of all family ties. Since the thematic core of the novel is the separation of mother and daughter--be it that of Beloved as mythical child from her African mother or that of Beloved as the historical daughter of the main protagonist--with the disastrous consequences it entails, one may assert that the central motif of the narrative is the role played by family in the development of the self. Sethe's being prevented from being a real mother . . . (Bonnet 48)

Just as Sethe is prevented from being a "real" mother, she is prevented from being a "real" daughter because her own mother was prevented from being a "real" mother to Sethe. Because she is turned over to a surrogate mother so soon after her birth, infant Sethe and her mother are denied the time to cement their mother-child bond. As Sethe later describes her interactions with her mother; "She must of nursed me two or three weeks--that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was. . . . She didn't even sleep in the same cabin most nights I remember" (Morrison 75-6). Sethe's family relations and ties are almost nonexistent, and the weakened family bonds and resulting weakened African

American community and individuals are what the institution of slavery thrives upon. Sethe confesses her desire to be a daughter to Beloved: "like a daughter which is what I wanted to be" (Morrison 250). Sethe is desperately seeking nurturance through parenting her children. In spite of Sethe's limited interactions with her mother, Sethe worships her longingly from afar, holding her up as the unattainable grail of family happiness. Even though Sethe has had limited interactions with her mother ("who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones . . . " (Morrison 38)), she feels a terrible rejection and loss when her mother is hanged for trying to escape--without her. She cannot conceive of a mother who would leave her daughter behind while trying to find a better life for herself. FitzGerald discusses Sethe's problematic mother-daughter relationships writing, "Because slavery denies parental claims, Sethe insists upon her role of the good mother. . . . Practices which signify motherly devotion activate memories of her own babyhood" (FitzGerald 200).

For Sethe, the symbol of good mothering is to be available to nurse the child on demand, for she herself was deprived not only of her own mother's milk but also of having enough of her wet nurse's milk. Sethe says:

> I'll tend to her as no mother ever tended a child, a daughter. Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. I never had to give it to nobody else--and the one time I did it was took from me--they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby. Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own.

> I know what it is like to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left. I'll tell Beloved about that, she'll understand. She my daughter. The one I managed to have milk for and to get it to her even after they stole it. . . . (Morrison 246)

Fitzgerald writes, "This daughterly discourse articulates a psychic trauma of infantile abandonment. Slavery severed Sethe's bond with her mother before she had developed a separate identity; consequently, her sense of self and of the boundaries to that self is dangerously weak" (FitzGerald 677). Sethe vows to be a different kind of mother to her own children; and her lost relationship with her mother causes her to take extra care when it comes to feeding and protecting her children. Perhaps it is her mother's flight without her, leaving her *behind*, that causes Sethe to send her children *ahead* of her in the wagon to Ohio. To Paul D Sethe recounts her careful plans for escape from slavery that included detailed instructions for the women in the wagon who were to care for her baby. She says, "Nobody was going to nurse her like me. . . . I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it" (Morrison 20). Wyatt discusses the nearly impossible event of a nursing mother being away from her baby for a few days:

> Sethe would not compromise with absence, overlooking the potentially life-threatening lack of food for her baby 'for a few days' to insist on presence: the milk would be 'there,' and the mother would be 'there with it.' The standpoint of nursing mother precludes separation and the substitutions that any separation would require. (Wyatt 476-477)

Put in simpler terms by Paul D, "Men don't know nothing much, but they do know a suckling can't be away from its mother for long" (Morrison 20). Sethe fears that her baby will forget how to nurse, become nipple shy, or start a nursing strike, a condition which causes a baby to refuse to nurse from its mother's breasts if her mother has been away and missed more than a few nursing sessions or if another option is introduced such as being nursed by another lactating woman or offered milk from any other source. However, because Sethe is driven to escape slavery she feels she has no option other than to send her three children on ahead to Baby Suggs.

Sethe's lack of a mother plagues her throughout her life and very likely influences her plan for her children in the face of danger. Karen E. Beardslee believes that one saving grace for Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent) is that, unlike Sethe, she benefits from the presence of her grandmother in her community. Jacobs' grandmother Marthy keeps watch over her granddaughter and functions as a senior female family member--she is not a mother but she is more involved than a typical grandmother--and Jacobs feels her presence and is able to face the trials of her life knowing there is an adult family member who cares about her. Beardslee writes:

> Because Linda was separated from her mother early in life, Marthy's presence in the neighborhood affords Linda a certain amount of protection, as well a much needed role model. For instance, although Marthy fails in her efforts to purchase her children's freedom, her undaunted attempts to do so instill in Linda the African concern for the next generation's ability to define themselves while keeping the ancestors' dreams, visions, and overall culture alive. (Beardslee 39)

Marthy's presence and influence enable Jacobs to persevere in her efforts to fend off her master's sexual advances and to strive for family togetherness. Hope Edelman writes of the importance of the maternal grandmother in a woman's life:

> The grandmother affirms the existence of the granddaughter, even more so than the grandsons. And you could see the granddaughters mimicking their grandmother's actions, and absorbing their ideals. When you think about that, you realize that grandmothers have traditionally raised granddaughters to ensure the integrity of the tribe. We're so preprogrammed and hardwired for this. (Edelman, Mother 27)

Sethe on the other hand doesn't have any relationship with her mother or grandmother on which to model her relationship with her daughters. One of the most important role models in her life becomes her mother-in-law Baby Suggs. While not a mother or grandmother to Sethe, Baby Suggs is, however, an older, experienced woman with Sethe's best interests in mind. She teaches Sethe to value one's children above a relationship with a spouse, for during slavery "men and women were moved around like checkers" (Morrison 29). To Baby Suggs, "'A man ain't nothing but a man, . . . But a son? Well now, that's *somebody*.'" (Morrison 29) Malmgren discusses the phenomenon of prizing one's children above all else:

> The key love relation in this particular historical context [slavery] is the maternal one; the novel consistently foregrounds the relation of mother and child and the dangers and delights of mother love. Morrison has admitted elsewhere an interest in this relation: "One of the nice things that women do is nurture and love something other than themselves--they do that rather nicely.

> Instinctively, perhaps, but they are taught to do it, socialized to do it, or genetically predisposed to do it--whatever it is, it's something the majority of women feel strongly about. But mother love is also a killer." (Malmgren 101)

The actual lines from Beloved read, “Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer” (Morrison 155). Here, Morrison misquoted seems to oversimplify Sethe's deed and sounds reductive and matrophobic, yet, readers of her novel are treated to Morrison's careful construction of an argument in favor of Sethe in spite of the fact that her "motherlove was a killer" because it is not "carefree" (Morrison 162). Critics have misconstrued and divided Morrison for their own purposes, yet anyone reading the novel will understand that Morrison means "killer" in the colloquial sense of "difficult," and that what is not "carefree" about motherlove for Sethe at that moment in her life is that she feels she is too old and tired to care for a baby and because she is thinking about the difficulties of “having a baby once more. Needing to be good enough, strong enough, *that* caring—again” (Morrison 155).

Fisher, who writes in reference to Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, discusses the anguish slaves suffered at seeing their family members sold away from them:

> The central psychological and social evil of slavery is the separation of families: the selling of children or wives or uncles or fathers to separate buyers and with such sales, the permanent severing of family ties. . . . All the central images of horror in the novel involve the snatching of a child from its mother's arms, the division at a sale of the members of a family. (Fisher 101)

Fisher's explanation of the horrors of the callous division of slave families speaks to a slave's efforts to keep a family together.

Baby Suggs is one such parent who has been faced with the loss of her family to the system of slavery. When Sethe moves into 124 with Baby Suggs, she benefits from having an older woman, a mother surrogate, to guide her, and Sethe loves her. Eighteen years after Baby Suggs' death, Sethe misses the mothering Baby Suggs lavished upon her: "She wished for Baby Suggs' fingers molding her nape, reshaping it, . . . " (Morrison 105). However, Baby Suggs' example may be detrimental to Sethe, for she claims, untruthfully, to have held herself back from loving her children. Baby Suggs has endured the same agonizing loss of her children that Sethe faces. She has repeatedly had her young children sold away from her, and, as a result, she has been denied the opportunity to mother, nurture, and protect. Baby Suggs has eight children, seven of whom were sold away from her. Halle, Sethe's husband, is the one child whom Baby Suggs was able to keep with her for twenty years and "who gave her freedom when it didn't mean a thing" (Morrison 29). Bought freedom becomes meaningless to Baby Suggs after she has lived through the loss of "her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, [who] were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye" (Morrison 29) and has lost track of her other six children. Once free, her plans for resurrecting her family fail, and she mourns for her lost children once more.

Demetrakopoulos believes Baby Suggs' death is caused by her sadness at her loss of her ability to grandmother when Sethe kills Beloved, but I believe that her sadness also stems from her lost chance to vicariously mother her grandchildren, to have a second chance to see children of one's own reach adulthood the way she was unable to do with all but one of her own children. Morrison writes:

> The last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own—fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked. Did Patty lose her lisp? What color did Famous' skin finally take? Was that a cleft in Johnny's chin or just a dimple that would disappear soon's his jawbone changed? Four girls, and the last time she saw them there was no hair under their arms. Does Ardelia still love the burned bottom of bread? All seven were gone or dead. (Morrison 163-4)

Demetrakopoulos writes, "Baby Suggs basically shrinks herself into death when she experiences American culture's denial of and intent to destroy her daughter-in-law's mothering; and, with the annihilation of Sethe's motherhood, her own grandmothering is also obviated" (52). In her grandchildren, Baby Suggs sees a second chance to mother children, and when that chance evaporates because her neighbors, with whom she has previously held a close bond, purposely fail to warn her that slave catchers are coming to her house, she loses her sense of maternity and with that her sense of self. Nancy Chodorow observes in her book, The Reproduction of Mothering that women "come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego

boundaries" (Chodorow 169). During the twenty-eight days Sethe lives with her children at 124 Baby Suggs comes to identify with Sethe as a maternal caretaker for her daughter-in-law and son's children, and so she has a great deal invested in their well-being. Stuckey writes of the African tradition of children being reared by a group of women rather than just one woman, which could be one reason Baby Suggs is so eager to mother her grandchildren and why she is so personally devastated by the events of that terrible day. Parallel with this tradition is Chodorow's idea of women easily slipping into the role of mother to another woman's children, and Baby Suggs' anguish and subsequent decline speak to her loss.

Jones' stance toward Sethe's mothering style is critical. She believes that Sethe has been all consumed by her mothering role to the point where she has been unproductively overbearing. She claims, "In Sethe's act, blood and breast milk, rage, pride, and love become one. Like Odysseus, who cries "Nobody" and must become "Nobody," Sethe loses herself in her mother role" (Jones 617). It is not atypical for a parent to be consumed by his or her offspring and the parenting that the child requires, and Sethe's commitment to her children is something other than overprotectiveness--she is in a state of constant fear for the unity of her family because of the time and circumstances in which she lives. Malmgren too is overly critical of Sethe's parenting strategies:

> At one point Sethe says that she 'wouldn't draw a breath without her children' (203). It is this conflation of Self and Other that underwrites Sethe's justification of her actions: "The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful magical best

> thing--the part of her that was clean" (251). The language Sethe uses here suggests that she has both appropriated and depersonalized her children. (Malmgren 104)

I disagree with Malmgren's statement that Sethe depersonalizes her children any more than any other parent does--she loves them, and if Sethe has appropriated her children, she has done so for their protection, for Sethe is rearing a family during the time of slavery which could be likened to a traumatic time of war. Sethe's intensely protective feelings for her children are often viewed by critics such as Jones, Krumholz, and Malmgren as all consuming and ultimately destructive, yet I see Sethe's protectiveness as an expression of the deepest and most pure form of a love--the love a mother has for her children--that is challenged by the institution of slavery. According to Krumholz, "Beloved is Sethe's 'ghost,' the return of her repressed past, and she forces Sethe to confront the gap between motherlove and the realities of motherhood in slavery" (400), yet I am tempted to believe that any revelation Sethe could have about her own mothering experience would be pointless for she is without her child. For Sethe, there is no comfort in the knowledge that she made her tragic decision because of the injustices of slavery, rather, she is a mother whose favorite child, whose "best thing" is dead. Demetrakopoulos writes, "For the mother, the dead child is maternity *in potentia*, the mother truncated" (54). For Sethe, there is no longer a mother-daughter dyad to understand and perhaps improve upon; her motherlove can only be expressed through memory and mourning, for as Jones writes, "without her child, there is no future, no possibility for living and for change . . . " (619).

In Mother Without Child Elaine Tuttle Hansen writes, "The 'good' mother is positioned so that she stands in opposition to the quintessentially 'bad' mother, a woman so dangerous that she causes the death of her own child and is willing to see a child murdered rather than give up the irrational struggle for possession" (23). According to Hansen's idea, then, Morrison constructs Sethe as the "quintessentially 'bad' mother" who longs to be vindicated, and we can see that this is true in the second section of Beloved in the many conversations Sethe has about her reasons for the killing. Jennifer FitzGerald, approaching Sethe's motherhood from the opposite stance, writes in her discussion of the good mother, "It conceives of the (usually biological) mother as so instrumental to the child's well-being as to allow her no separate interests" (FitzGerald 671). It is not atypical or surprising when a mother is concerned for her own safety for fear of what will become of her children if she is sick or hurt. Almost all mothers worry at some point about the future of their children without a mother to care for them. What Malmgren refers to as "selfishness," (103) and "This identification of her selfhood with the fates of her children" (103) is merely typical concern for one's children's well being. FitzGerald is critical of Sethe's need to be something beyond the "good mother," yet Sethe's desires are neither vain nor frivolous. Lost time with her mother has created a sense of urgency for Sethe with regards to her children, and the constant fear that they will be taken away from her leaves her with the need to be the *ur*-mother or the mother whose sole purpose is to nurse, feed, and protect her children while she has them with her.

Sethe's traumatic life experiences are catalyzed by the threat of capture and return to slavery. It is, in good part, because of this unsettled emotional state that she kills her baby daughter. There are many factors that influence Sethe's spur-of-the-moment decision to kill Beloved, but the strongest motivation for Sethe is the fear that she will be unable to protect her children just as her mother was unable to protect her and that Sethe's own daughter will be faced with the same traumatic experiences Sethe has endured. According to Judith Herman, author of Trauma and Recovery, "Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning. . . . Traumatic events . . . confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror. And evoke the responses of catastrophe" (33). Given this description of trauma and with the knowledge of Sethe's behavior, one could postulate that Sethe suffers from what Herman and the psychiatric community describe as post-traumatic stress disorder. Sethe's behavior and thought process are rife with indications of her constant state of "terror and rage" (Herman 42). Because "Small, seemingly insignificant reminders can trigger these memories [of the trauma], which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event" Sethe is in a hypercharged emotional state when she reacts to the sight of schoolteacher and the slave catchers coming up her street (Herman 37). The sight of Schoolteacher piques Sethe's memory of the rape and arouses her protective fight or flight instinct. Rushdy believes that Sethe is trying to "outhurt the hurters" (577) when she kills Beloved, and Jones claims that "the victim becomes the victimizer" (616), but I believe that Sethe is merely reacting to her instinct to protect her daughter. Barnett is of the same opinion:

> Sethe passionately insists that she protected her beloved daughter and also herself from 'undreamable dreams' in which 'a gang of whites invaded her daughter's private parts, soiled her daughter's thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon' (251). For Sethe, being brutally overworked, maimed, or killed is subordinate to the overarching horror of being raped and 'dirtied' by whites; even dying at the hands of one's mother is subordinate to rape. (Barnett 419)

Sethe's belief that she must protect her daughter from a dangerous and degrading life causes her to choose death for her daughter. Barnett writes, "For Caruth, the core of trauma stories is the 'oscillation between *a crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story and the unbearable nature of its survival' (7). Sethe's infanticide manifests that correlative crisis as certainly as any story of trauma can: she has survived what she prevents her daughter from surviving" (Barnett 420). To Sethe, there is no end of slavery in sight, and at nineteen years old, Sethe has experienced tremendous physical and mental suffering and emotional deprivation, yet she has no knowledge of how far time and the kindness of others can carry a person toward recovery. Because of her inexperience, she believes death to be more comfortable than both the initial trauma and the recurring images of the trauma with which she lives. Malmgren writes:

> Central to the issue of maternal love, at the ethical heart of the novel itself, is the tragic action that Sethe takes against her children, her loved ones, an action that she feels was "right because it came from true love" (251). How finally do we judge this action? Morrison herself has been forthcoming but

> deliberately ambiguous about this aspect of the novel: "It was absolutely the right thing to do," she tells an interviewer, "but she [Sethe] had no right to do it" (cited in Rothstein C17). This sort of categorical and logical illogic is echoed in Sethe's own justification: "if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her." (200) (Malmgren 101)

Kristin Boudreau sees Sethe actions as caused by disorientation brought about by the "torture" she has suffered under the institution of slavery. She believes that all, ". . . the characters in Morrison's novel have no access to the methods of ordered narrative. Their language, their reasoning powers, even their sense of self have been dismantled by the process of torture" (Boudreau 453). One could use Boudreau's idea in conjunction with Herman's idea of post-traumatic stress syndrome to explain Sethe's actions, yet this seems reductive to me. I believe that Sethe makes a *conscious* decision that day in the woodshed, that she is acting upon her motherlove and desire to *protect* her children and upon her understanding of her world, rather than acting because she is unable to reason.

Sethe and Putttermesser do the unthinkable, they end their children's lives, because of several key factors; the oppression each endures acts as the catalyst for the killing. Powers sees the occurrence of similar ideas in Morrison and Ozick's work. She claims that a sense of one's history and one's community become one's code for life decisions and given that, "Sethe's murder of her own child primarily reveals the murderousness of the society --both black and white--in which she lives. Similarly, Rosa's [of Ozick's The Shawl] obsession with the past does highlight the shallow

sense of self and community that is operative in other characters in the book" (Powers 90). One can also attempt to understand Sethe and Puttermesser's actions from Irene Reti's stance which is "Oppression does not make people better; oppression makes people oppressed" (Reti 18). Sethe, refusing to let her daughter live an oppressed life, says she kills her children because she loves them "'I couldn't let her nor any of them live under schoolteacher. That was out'" (Morrison 200). While Sethe sacrifices her time with her daughter to protect her from being oppressed, Puttermesser kills her golem/daughter in protest of the general oppression of women.

The historical events and literary background behind the text are important issues in the discussion of Beloved. Harriet Beecher Stowe's character Emmeline kills her child because she fears for her child whom she knows will be sold away from her. And, in addition to referencing Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Morrison uses the story of Margaret Garner's life in her novel. According to Rushdy, "Margaret Garner chose death for both herself and her most beloved rather than accept being forced to return to slavery and have her children suffer an institutionalized dehumanization" (Rushdy 569). Morrison replays Garner's agonizing decision when Sethe kills her baby daughter, for like Garner, Sethe chooses to kill her most beloved child, her toddler-aged daughter, first. Jean Wyatt discusses Jacobs use of the narrative as "a text of courage drawn from a mother's love for her children" when Jacobs writes, "I was resolved that I would foil my master and save my children, or I would perish in the attempt" and "Every trial I endured, every sacrifice I made for their sakes, drew them closer to my heart, and gave me fresh courage" (Wyatt 475, Jacobs 84, 89-90). In addition to demonstrating her courage

and determination to keep her family together, Jacobs is famous for her statement of purpose, that she would rather kill her children than see them taken away and sold.

This statement is easily understood as a protective maternal instinct, yet when Sethe, a woman in the same circumstances as Jacobs, is confronted with losing her children and acts on her instinct, her choice becomes suspect and controversy ensues. Lorraine Liscio writes, "Slave . . . women's preponderant concern was to save their children and retain control over their reproductive power" (Liscio 34). One way for slave women to manage both these objectives was to assume total control over their children's lives by deciding whether they lived or died. Wyatt believes Morrison intends to make a statement on a grand scale: "Beloved also has a collective identity: she represents a whole lineage of people obliterated by slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the Middle Passage, the 'Sixty Million and more' of the novel's epigraph" (Wyatt 474). If it is apparent that Beloved represents all Africans enslaved by whites, than it should be obvious that Morrison intends to make the statement that death would have been preferable to the subjugation and enslavement of that period.

In a monograph written in 1938, Mahatma Ghandi sets forth his idea that German Jews should resist Nazi violence by challenging the Nazis. He writes:

> If I were a Jew and born in Germany and earned my livelihood there, I would claim Germany as my home as the tallest gentile German may and challenge him to shoot me or cast me in the dungeon. I would refuse to e expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment. And for doing this, I should not wait for the fellow Jews to join me in civil resistance but would have confidence that in the end the rest are

> bound to follow my example. If one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered, he or they cannot be worse off than now. (Ghandi)

Sethe's belief that death cannot be worse than being dragged back into slavery by Schoolteacher and the Nephews who come to 124 to claim her causes her civil resistance. She chooses to confront death because as Ghandi writes, "For the God fearing, death has no terror" (Ghandi). She refuses "to submit to [any more] discriminating treatment," (Ghandi) and thus takes a stand against slavery and its degradation by setting out to kill those who are to be enslaved.

While Ghandi's idea of civil resistance works quite well in a discussion of Sethe's actions in the woodshed, I feel that I must take a moment to mention here that Ghandi's ideas for the Jews of offering oneself to be put to death or "suffering voluntarily" as a civil resistance and death as "a joyful sleep to be followed by a waking that would be all the more refreshing for the long sleep" (Ghandi) would not be in keeping with Jewish belief or Jewish law. According to Jewish law it is always better to live and a Jew is required to keep him or herself alive at all costs. Jews uphold this law for two reasons. Optimism governs the first reason--there is always hope that tomorrow will bring salvation, and pessimism governs the second--if we lose even one person the continuation of our religion will be jeopardized. In addition, Jews do not believe in an afterlife. Death is not a peaceful rest but is final and permanent state of nothingness and there is no return to this earth or any other place. Hence, had Ghandi known that by Jewish law a Jew is

required to live and that, for Jews, the concept of afterlife is nonexistent he would not have set forth the idea of civil resistance through an offering of oneself to the Nazis.

In Sethe's background there is both a family and community history of infanticide. Patricia Bell Scott believes "the ambivalence of slave women about motherhood that violates their personal integrity and that of their family" (Bell 9) to be one of the causes of Sethe's tragic choice. Several mothers in the novel discuss infanticide through exposure when their babies have been the results of rape or sexual abuse. Pamela Barnett writes, "And three women in the novel--Sethe's mother, Baby Suggs, and Ella--refuse to nurse babies conceived through rape" (Barnett 419). Nan also tells Sethe that she is her mother's special child, the only one of her mother's children her mother nursed and let live. Nan tells Sethe that her mother left children fathered by the crew from the Middle Passage to die from exposure. Sethe says, " . . . because I was the one she didn't throw away" (Morrison 247) and Nan says, "'Without names, she threw them, . . . You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never'" (78). Krumholz writes, "Sethe was the only one of her mother's children that her mother did not kill, suggesting the historical rather than moral impetus of the act" (Krumholz 407). While Sethe must have been thankful to be the child her mother let live, the knowledge that her mother had participated in the deaths of her siblings surely was chilling. A generation later, Denver has the opportunity to experience the same ambivalence toward her mother thinking, "I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it"

(205) and Denver and her brothers make up "die-witch! stories with proven ways of killing her [Sethe] dead" (Morrison 23).

Within Sethe's community, other women besides Sethe's mother admit to having killed their children. One such person is Ella, whose master and his son sexually abuse her throughout her puberty. She "consider[s] love a serious disability" and refers to the master and son as "the lowest yet" (Morrison 314). Ella refuses to nurse a baby "a hairy white thing" fathered by her master. It is surprising that this character does not approve of Sethe's choice saying: "She understood Sethe's rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated" (Morrison 314-5). Morrison's characters, approving and disapproving, supporting and turning against Sethe, represent the variance of opinion of readers of Beloved. In the novel, Morrison uses an introductory debate technique, which is to present and refute arguments against the thing of which one is attempting to convince an audience.

Sethe's materniy is severed so abruptly partially by her lack of community support. Once she finds her way to 124, in spite of all her previous losses (her husband, her milk), she feels the happiness of being part of a family and part of a community for the first time in her life. Like Ozick, Morrison uses images of the female body in her text to emphasize the cyclic arrangement of mother-daughter-granddaughter relations:

> Foregrounding the theme of motherhood, Morrison divides the text into twenty-eight unnumbered mini-sections, the usual number of days in a woman's monthly menstrual cycle, within three larger, disproportionate

> sections. Within these sections, Sethe experiences twenty-eight happy days of "having women friends, a mother-in-law, and all of her children together; of being part of a neighborhood; of, in fact, having neighbors at all to call her own" (173)" (Bell 10).

However, Sethe's days of happiness are short lived, because when, for inexplicable reasons, the community turns against Sethe and her family, she is forced to make a hasty and tragic decision. Jones observes:

> Brought buckets of blueberries by Stamp Paid, she [Baby Suggs] and Sethe make a feast for the entire community, and the satiated community becomes suspicious of the Suggs family. . . . The community does not warn Baby that the slavecatchers are coming to her house and, thus, participates in the murder of the child. (Jones 617)

Bell explains that "When the community perceives excessive pride in Sethe and Baby Suggs, as illustrated by the former's "stand offishness" and the latter's extravagant [as perceived by the community] blackberry party, it feels insulted and rejected--which is why no one from the community warns them about the slave catchers' approach" (Bell 14). Moody theorizes, "Realizing that white men could not have made it to her home on Bluestone Road without being seen by her neighbors, and thus that she is without communal support, . . . Terrified by the heavy scent of her neighbors' disapproval, and determined against recapture, Sethe resolves to slay her children" (Moody 639-40). When because ". . . nobody ran on ahead; why nobody sent a fleet-footed son to cut 'cross a field. . . . to say some new whitefolks with the Look just rode in" (Morrison 193) Sethe understands that her community has left her

to fend for herself. Without her community behind her she feels there is no safe place for her and that she has no option but to murder her baby. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos writes, "Sethe attempts to return the babies to perhaps a collective mother body, to devour them back into the security of womb/tomb death much as a mother cat will eat her babies as the ultimate act of protection" (Demetrakopoulos 53). There is an example of this same sort of retraction of offspring into the safety of mother within the novel. Morrison uses a pig eating her piglets to show Sethe's mental fortitude: " . . . and when a sow began eating her own litter [she] did not look away then either" (Morrison 14). Stamp Paid and Baby Suggs try to make sense of the community's meanness toward Sethe and Baby Suggs, and they come to decide that the reasons range from envy over Sethe's feat of saving herself and her four children from slavery, jealousy over the fact that Sethe "now had the full benefit of Baby Suggs' bounty and her big old heart," and their incomplete knowledge of Sethe's background (Morrison 193). FitzGerald writes:

> In a process akin to that described by psychoanalyst Alice Miller, those who have suffered feel very uncomfortable in the presence of those who (apparently) have not; the freedom of the latter [Sethe] reminds the former [community] of the pain which they have been able to survive solely by repression; the only means to externalize this pain is to inflict it on the fortunate and as-yet pain-free Sethe. As a result, the community fails to warn her of the approach of schoolteacher and the slavecatchers and later, after the murder and arrest, deprives her of the communal 'mothering' which it would otherwise have offered" (FitzGerald 682).

The community withholds its "communal mothering" from Sethe because of this feeling that they have suffered and that Sethe does not appear to have suffered enough. This scapegoating, or choosing one of their own on whom to unleash their frustration, is yet another reminder of the effects of the institution of slavery. The community's backlash against Sethe is reminiscent of the phenomenon of Holocaust prisoners who took on the violent characteristics of S.S. guards--because the black community members suffer injustices committed by the white community, they unleash their fury on a member of their own community who seems to be least like them.

Like Sethe, Ozick's Puttermesser is depicted as experiencing alienation from her community throughout her life, and like Sethe she has difficulty attaining happiness, finally finding it for the briefest of periods in mothering. Puttermesser experiments with parenting by creating and destroying "her child," a golem, which is "a being who was thought to be magically created and whose conception developed from the exegesis of the Kabbalistic work, *Sefer Yetsirah* or *Book of Creation* . . . " (Kauvar 43). Leah, or Xanthippe, as the golem names herself after Socrates' wife, resembles Puttermesser herself in mind and body. This is the case not only because the nature of a golem is to know everything its creator knows, but also because "Puttermesser imagined daughters" who replicated the young Puttermesser's academic achievements, and the golem is Puttermesser's prototypical offspring (Ozick 36). In Puttermesser's case, the killing of her golem/daughter has a history prompted by biblical attempts at child killing and by child killing due to the atrocious conditions of the Holocaust. The killing itself occurs as a result of Puttermesser's

desire to save New York City from the ravages of her creation and to symbolically avenge wrongs done to Jewish Americans and to women. Finally, Puttermesser's dismantling of "her child," the golem she creates to revivify New York City, represents a destruction of herself, for everything that she is or knows she has poured into the golem.

Interestingly, Sethe and Puttermesser's "daughters," the ghost and the golem, are very much alike in their appearance and presence. They offer their "mothers" the emotional sustenance each mother needs at that time, but that codling comes at a price. Both Beloved and Xanthippe come into being for no real purpose other than their own destructive program. Puttermesser's Xanthipe is an outright golem, physically created by Puttermesser who follows the textbook recipe to cook up a golem. Sethe's Beloved, a creation or recreation of her mind, is a ghostly being with the special powers and physical attributes one often sees in a golem. Both "daughters" initially present to fulfill their mothers' wishes quickly turn destructive and ultimately are put out of commission through rituals enacted upon them.

Ozick has felt the pain of being marginalized because of her gender. She describes her early awareness of gender discrimination in an interview with Elaine Kauvar, saying, "'I became a feminist when I was five and a half years old, when my *bobe* (grandmother) took me to the *cheder* (the room or school where Hebrew is taught) and there was a very . . . ancient rabbi. . . . He said to my *bobe* in Yiddish: *Nem ir aheym, a meydl darf nisht lernen* ("Take her home, a girl doesn't have to study")'" (Kauvar 384). It was not until Ozick had proven to the *shammes* (teacher) her intelligence and desire to learn that she was allowed to remain in the class, yet

Ozick believes the knowledge that she was not welcome initially because of her gender did lasting damage to her psyche and self-esteem. She says, "'You never really recover from early futility and worthlessness.'" (Kauvar Interview 385) Not only has Ozick felt discrimination because of her gender, but also, she has felt unwelcome because of her Jewish heritage. Arlene Fish Wilner recounts Ozick's experience with sexism in a graduate level class at Columbia where Lionel Trilling "seemed unable or unwilling to distinguish her from the only other female in his . . . class" (127) and Ozick herself writes of this experience in an essay called "We Are the Crazy Lady." In an interview with Kauvar, Ozick says of her elementary school years, "'I disliked school; I was inferior there. And it was very strange to me to have two lives like this: on the school side, where I was almost always the only Jew, and in *cheder* where I was almost always the only girl.'" (Kauvar Interview 385) For Ozick, repair of this early damage came much later. She says, "'In that school [Hunter College High School] they told you you were a Hunter girl, a member of an elite, and this began to have an effect.'" (Kauvar Interview 385) In creating Puttermesser, Ozick means to instruct the reader about the difficulties women, particularly women of minority status, face in their struggles for success in academics, the professional world, and in life. Puttermesser's brilliant mind, her education, her passion for knowledge all mimic Ozick's, while her personal struggles with anti-Semitism and sexism are representative of every woman's personal struggles. The character's sensitivity to feminist issues creates her social conscience. So aware of issues of gender equality is Puttermesser that " . . . as a feminist, she was

careful never to speak of 'man's' nature. She always said 'humankind' instead of 'mankind.' She always wrote 'he or she' instead of just 'he.'" (Ozick 24)

Burstein describes the Jewish writer as the "cultural outsider" and, indeed, Ozick has felt marginalized for most of her conscious life (Burstein 85). So much a factor is this feeling of being the "cultural outsider" in Ozick's life that she attempts to repair this injustice by creating a character who undergoes the same discrimination, the same trauma to her self-esteem. Puttermesser feels the sting of the all-pervasive anti-Semitism, and, as a result, she hates what she perceives to be her "Jewish appearance" and those images that remind her of her ethnicity. Ozick writes:

> Puttermesser had a Jewish face and a modicum of American distrust in it. She resembled no poster she had ever seen: she hated the Breck shampoo girl, so blond and bland and palemouthed; she boycotted Breck because of the golden-haired posters, all crudely idealized, an American wet dream, in the subway. Puttermesser's hair came in bouncing scallops--layered waves from scalp to tip, like imbricated roofing tile. (Ozick 4-5)

According to Sarah Blaecher Cohen, "Puttermesser and her Jewish colleagues are subject to 'polite anti-Semitism'" at the law firm at which Puttermesser lands her first job out of law school (Cohen 88). The partners in this firm treat Puttermesser to a farewell "anthropologist's meal" at which "they feign interest in the rites of her tribe" (Ozick 27). In the bureau of Taxation and Finance at which Puttermesser finds her next job, she is prevented from attaining her deserved promotions and is ultimately fired by her superiors because of sexism within the department. Ozick writes, "Turtleman had shoved her into the lowliest ranks of Taxation. It was an unlikely

post for a mind superfetate with Idea; Puttermesser felt the malignancy behind this shift" (Ozick 35). The combination of anti-Semitism from the "partners" and the sexism Puttermesser must contend with within her department force Puttermesser to look elsewhere for meaning in her life. Puttermesser, who had previously taken pleasure in education and work, begins to search for another avenue to self-fulfillment.

The difficulties Puttermesser encounters with respect to her gender and ethnic heritage cause her to search for a connection to her community. Peter Kerry Powers writes, "Her [Puttermesser's] parents have retired to Florida. She is without connection, and specifically without connection to a living Jewish community or memory" (Powers 82). Puttermesser connects to her heritage and to her community by studying Hebrew from a Hebrew primer, by fantasizing a bi-weekly lesson with her dead Uncle Zindel, and by imagining daughters who are created in her image. According to Cohen, "She yearns for some meaningful connection with her past. Since the tedium of her work has caused her Old World Uncle Zindel to vanish from her fantasies, she longs to have a Jewish daughter to take his place" (Cohen 92). Ozick writes of Puttermesser, "She imagined daughters. It was self-love: all these daughters were Puttermesser as a child. She imagined a daughter in fourth grade, then in seventh grade, then in second-year high school. . . . . *O infelix Dido*, chanted the imaginary daughter, doing her Latin homework at Puttermesser's new Danish desk in the dark corner of the little bedroom" (Ozick 36). Puttermeser’s dreams and longings for a daughter are like Sethe’s musings and longings for her dead daughter. Both women are able, by the sheer force of their longing, to conjure up enough

momentum in themselves to bring their fantasies to life. Sethe's fantasies of Beloved allow her to finally make peace with her act of civil resistance and with killing what she initially perceived as the best part of herself and Puttermesser's dreams of daughters allow her to compartmentalize the injustices happening in her own life and to allow her to have hope for the next generation. Puttermesser's hope is that her daughters, who are every bit as smart as she is and just as well educated, will have a chance for a life without the gender and cultural discrimination Puttermesser faces because they are part of a later and more enlightened generation.

Like Sethe dreaming of and remembering the infant Beloved, Puttermesser overtly dreams of daughters. And, like Morrison's breastfeeding theme, Ozick's text is replete with women's issues such as ovulation, pregnancy, and birth imagery. Puttermesser's subconscious has acted out her conscious desire for a daughter and caused her, in her imagination, to take Hebrew lessons with an imagined shammes, a fictive version of her Uncle Zindel who teaches her the Hebrew alphabet by using images that command Puttermesser's attention. He says, "First see how a *gimel* and which way a *zayen*. Twins, but one kicks a leg left, one right. You got to practice the difference. If legs don't work, think pregnant bellies. Mrs. *Zayen* pregnant in one direction, Mrs. *Gimel* in the other. Together they give birth to *gez*, . . . " (Ozick 16). "Twins," "pregnant bellies," and "give birth" all of which originate from Puttermesser's own mind, for the *shammes* is her own fantasy, after all, all point to Puttemesser's disappointment with her childless status at forty-six years old and her desire for a daughter. Cohen describes Puttermesser's discomfort with her ascent into middle age when she writes:

> Much as Puttermesser tries to dissociate herself from the aging women attorneys, she can't dissociate herself from her aging apartment building. Indeed, Ozick treats it as the humorous objective correlative for the aging Puttermesser. Its state of disrepair corresponds to Puttermesser's physical disrepair: "Without warning the pipes dried up for the day; you could try to run the faucet and nothing would come out. Or the lights would fail; the refrigerator fluttered its grand lung and ceased." (Cohen 100)

Puttermesser's aging former apartment building represents Puttermesser's irreparable, aging body. "The pipes dried up" symbolizes the impending loss of Puttermesser's reproductive capacity, "the lights would fail" suggests Puttermesser's loss of ability to reason, and "the refrigerator fluttered its grand lung and ceased" represents Puttermesser's taking of her final breath and dying. Puttermesser's sense is that the time in which she will be able to reproduce is limited, and according to Ozick, "She knew she would never marry, but she was not yet reconciled to childlessness. Sometimes the thought that she would never give birth tore her heart" (Ozick 36).

Hope Edelman writes of the hand-me-down shame daughters and granddaughters of immigrant women carry with them and of their feeling that women must reproduce to be considered useful members of society. This predicament is similar to the one Puttermesser finds herself in. Her colleagues discriminate against her because she is Jewish and a woman, and her professional achievements seem not to be important in Puttermesser’s own mind when compared to Puttermesser's lack of a child. At forty-six years old, Puttermesser's childless status saddens her, yet she is a character who believes she thrives on the life of the mind. She has not made space in

her life for a spouse, but carries on a romance with literature and learning; words and ideas, the issue of this relationship, are Puttermesser's children.

During an interview with Elaine Kauvar, Ozick says of the ten years she spent writing Trust, ""Other people's books and other people's children," at a certain point when I was writing and writing away on Trust and not publishing anything and having all my eggs in that basket and having no other eggs that were operative'" (Kauvar 386). Like Ozick, Puttermesser anxiously postpones having children so she can reproduce intellectually. However, for Puttermesser, the fear that she will grow old and die without having had children to carry on her ideas and without having accomplished her goals are intertwined. She believes that she needs offspring to help her carry out her *raison d'etre*, her "PLAN for the Resuscitation, Reformation, Reinvigoration, & Redemption of the City of New York" (Ozick 67), and it is because of the creation of her golem/daughter Xanthippe that she feels a new urgency in enacting her PLAN. Having a daughter to protect gives Puttermesser a new sense of purpose and the inspiration she needs to become the activist that she has dreamed of being. She carries out her PLAN to create a Utopian city in which she will protect and nurture Xanthippe.

All of Puttermesser's Hebrew lessons, dreaming of daughters, and a new interest in container gardening are not without purpose. Puttermesser, without conscious understanding of her actions, is preparing herself to create a golem or a humanlike creature created from soil, water, and Kabbalistic incantation. In her plant pots she gathers the soil necessary to mix with water to create the clay from which she will shape the golem's body in her own image, and, by self-study, she learns the

Hebrew necessary to read the Kabbalah and to recite the incantation necessary to bring the golem to life. Puttermesser "dragged in great clay urns and sacks of vitamin-rich soil" to her apartment, and "summoning reason, . . . to move around and around the bed" where the inanimate body of the golem lay (Ozick 26, 37). Just prior to the golem's creation, in her apartment, Puttermesser nurtures seeds and plants as if she is nurturing a pregnancy. Ozick writes of this new phase of Puttermesser's life, ". . . . Puttermesser, who was once afflicted with what she called a black thumb, and who had hitherto killed every green thing she put her hand to, determined now to be responsible for life"(Ozick 26). Puttermesser's "biographer" says, "It reminded Puttermesser of her mother's towering rubber plants on the Grand Concourse," (Ozick 26). Puttermesser's nurturing of her plants reminds her of her mother's nurturing of plants and of her daughter, Puttermesser herself. Hope Edelman writes of the value of a mother's nurturing to generations reaching further than her own. And Nancy Chodorow theorizes that infants seem to be able to learn and store the style and practices of care they receive from their own mothers and use this as their own style when they have their own children. She writes, "Psychoanalytic theory . . . argues that the foundation for the mother's participation in such a relationship is laid in her early relationship to her own mother" (90). Edelman comments on Chodorow:

> Psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow, in her landmark 1978 volume *The Reproduction of Mothering*, makes a case for the grandmother-mother-granddaughter mothering sequence when she claims every infant internalizes her earliest memories of child care, which lie dormant for decades until she needs to pull them up and refer to them--completely at the unconscious level--

> when she has a child of her own. . . . some of what we commonly refer to as "maternal instinct" may instead be residual imprints our mothers and grandmothers left behind. (Edelman 210)

Ozick comically uses Puttermesser's incorporation of her mother's efforts at nurturing her plants as a style of nurturance for her own offspring to suggest that something in Puttermesser's maternal instinct is awry. Puttermesser's does not use her body to produce offspring, rather, she uses her mind. The study of Hebrew (self-taught while lying in bed) and the gathering of the soil just as Puttermesser's mother did in her apartment on the Grand Concourse all become preparation for the final act of the Kabbalistic ritual of circling the bed and "summoning reason" to bring her golem-daughter to life. The creation of the golem is Puttermesser's way of creating offspring, or as she views the purpose of a daughter, of creating a vessel to carry on her ideas.

Puttermesser's study of Hebrew enables her to utilize the Kabbalah, or the text filled with Jewish mysticism, the text which contains " . . . the secret traditions about the inner meaning of Jewish life and practice that first emerged in twelfth-century France and Spain and eventually spread throughout the Jewish world" (McGinn viii). In spite of Puttermesser's conservative education, she surprises herself by utilizing the magical practices set forth in the Kabbalah. In an essay called "The Fourth Sparrow: The Magisterial Reach of Gershom Scholem" Ozick writes, " . . . Kabbalah is a kind of Einsteinian mysticism--the brilliance of its inventions is precisely the brilliance of an original physics. It is no easy, amoral occultism, rather the vision of a universal moral restitution willed so acutely that only an alteration in the perception of the

cosmos can account for it" (Ozick Art 142). For Ozick, the question of whether creating a golem is an act of competition with God (" . . . a man [woman] who creates a golem is in some sense competing with God's creation of Adam; in such an act the creative power of man enters into a relationship, whether of emulation or antagonism, with the creative power of God" (Scholem 159)) is akin to her question of whether creating art and literature is an act of idolatry. Burstein discusses Ozick's constant questioning of her status as an observer of the commandments versus her status as a writer:

> All these works (Ozick's) explore the problems art brings to Jewishness and Jewishness brings to art--problems linked by Ozick's preoccupation with idolatry. Idolatry, the 'abomination' forbidden to Jews by the second commandment, threatens all artists, even Jewish artists, because of the nature of their minds and work. This is the tragic nexus from which conflict often rises in Ozick's stories--this knot of the artist's inevitable implication to sin (Burstein 86).

During God's seven days of creation, "At a certain stage in his creation Adam is designated as 'golem.'. . . Adam was said to be 'golem' before the breath of God had touched him" (Scholem 161). And any person's attempt at a similar act of creation, whether it be creating a human-like being or creating art and literature, is, in some schools of thought, akin to idolatry. Scholem, who is considered the highest authority on the Kabbalah, writes, "To the Hasidim the creation of a golem confirmed man in his likeness to God; here thanks to the daring amplification of the inscription on the golem's forehead, it becomes a warning; the real and not merely symbolic creation of

a golem would bring with it the 'death of God'" (Scholem 192). Puttermesser's creation of Xanthippe, her name for the golem, is another instance of Ozick's pondering her question. Clever is her use of a golem, whose creation is itself an act of idolatry, to discuss whether her own creation of the story is itself idolatry. Cohen comments, "Talmudic commentators have therefore designated *golem* to mean 'something unformed and imperfect.' They have even used the word 'to refer to a woman who has not conceived' (Goldsmith 16). Thus Puttermesser, a woman who has not conceived, is a golem herself who, in turn, creates a golem" (Cohen 94). Ozick ponders the question within the text writing, ". . . but who, Puttermesser sometimes wonders, is the true golem? Is it Xanthippe or is it Puttermesser? Puttermesser made her: that is clear enough. But Xanthippe made Puttermesser mayor, and Mayor Puttermeser too did not exist before. . . . Puttermesser sees that she is the golem's golem" (Ozick 79). Ozick, herself an idolator, creates a golem to discuss whether the fictional creation of a golem is idolatry.

The critics whose ideas I have incorporated into this chapter generally acknowledge Xanthippe to be Puttermesser's "daughter." In spite of the fact that Xanthippe is a non-human being made of clay, Puttermesser believes her to be a daughter of tellurian spirit. Puttermesser and Xanthippe call each other mother and daughter, and according to Puttermesser's "biographer," the golem calls Puttermesser "My mother" right from the start (Ozick 41). Xanthippe, a creature who, in the tradition of golem, is born of her creator's mind, knows everything she knows and carries forth what she holds most dear--her ideas. In an interview with Kauvar, Ozick

says, "'Though I claim human feelings, for me Idea counts as another mode of feeling.'" (Kauvar Interview 396).

I believe that in the realm of Ozick's satire Puttermesser does kill a creature that in fact can be considered her daughter. During Xanthippe's coming into being, Puttermesser circles the golem seven times in a life-giving ritual that is reminiscent of a pregnant woman walking during labor. Ozick writes of the moments preceding Xanthippe's "birth": "Puttermesser moved to one side of the bed, then circled back around the foot to the other side. She put on her slippers; summoning reason, she continued to move around and around the bed" (Ozick 37). Just after Xanthippe becomes viable, she acknowledges Puttermesser as her creator, her parent:

> The thing wrote: "I did not enter. I was formed. Here you spoke the Name of the Giver of Life. You blew in my nostril and encouraged my soul. You circled my clay seven times. You enveloped me with your spirit. You pronounced the Name and brought me to myself. Therefore I call you mother." (Ozick 42)

Ozick has saturated her description of Xanthippe's coming into being with such birth imagery as "blew in my nostril," something a mother would do to encourage a newborn to breathe, that I believe it is clear that Ozick intends Puttermesser and Xanthippe to represent a mother-daughter dyad, and that she intends Xanthippe to be the daughter in her own image, the exaggerated, overzealous replica of herself, that Puttermesser has imagined. In reference to the question of whether Puttermesser can be considered a mother at all--I believe she falls under the category created by Elaine Tuttle Hansen, of mother without child, and of Sara Ruddick's:

> "mock-mother," a type that includes numerous surrogates: "stepmothers, foster mothers, adoptive mothers, child mothers, nurses, old maids mothering their parents, lovers mothering each other, husbands mothering wives, wives mothering husbands, sisters mothering each other, and numerous women and men behaving in ways that could be described as maternal" (Hansen 14).

Basically, any person could adapt to fit into the maternal role, and if this is so, the same must be true of daughters. Puttermesser mothers a creature she considers a daughter, and her golem acts as a daughter to the human, Puttermesser, whom she considers a mother.

Although Puttermesser denies any familial resemblance, Xanthippe has many of her mother's physical characteristics. Puttermesser is responsible for shaping her physical appearance, not genetically as a mother of a human daughter would, but manually by shaping the clay that composes her features. Puttermesser calls Xanthippe, whose features and figure she has shaped with her own hands, "Ugly," and thinks, "The girl did not resemble Puttermesser at all; she was certainly not one of the imaginary daughters," yet she and the golem share physical characteristics (Ozick 38, 37). Puttermeser's lashes are "short, invisible" and Puttermesser notices that the golem's eyes "had no lashes" (Ozick 5, 37). Ozick writes that like Puttermesser's asymmetric "nose [which] had thick, well-haired, uneven nostrils, the right one noticeably wider than the other" and the golem has a "nose and mouth . . . clumsily formed, as if by some coarse hand that had given them a negligent tweak. The Vomerine divider was off-center, the nostrils unpleasantly far apart" (5, 38). Puttermesser's nose, lashes, crooked tooth, and smooth skin bear an unmistakable

resemblance to Xanthippe's, yet Puttermesser vigorously denies any resemblance of Xanthippe to the imaginary daughters who are always replicas of Puttermesser at varying ages. It as if she has lived with her own personal disappointment of being childless for so long that she cannot believe she has actually reproduced, and that she has such a poor self-image that she views as ugly a person who shares her likeness.

Puttermesser and Xanthippe act out, in a mundane sense, a typical mother-daughter relationship. They argue like mother and teenage daughter. In one instance, Puttermesser reprimands Xanthippe, "'You stole money right out of my wallet, spent a fortune on a taxi, and brought home the cheapest sort of junk. If you pull this kind of thing in the house, don't talk to me about the wide world!'" (Ozick 54). The argument about shopping, overspending, and independence is age old and universal. As Puttermesser sees some of her mother's traits in Xanthippe, her household takes a regressive shift in which the golem begins to cook, clean, and shop for Puttermesser almost as if she is the mother and Puttermesser the daughter. Xanthippe says, "'I did everything my mother instructed. I cleaned up the kitchen, made the bed . . . . mopped the whole house, did the laundry, ironed everything, hung my mother's blouses and put my mother's panty-hose into the drawer--'" (Ozick 52-3). Xanthippe's efficiency at managing Puttermesser's household calls up the strange and unsettling shift in a mother-daughter relationship when the daughter begins to exhibit the same competency at caring for herself and others for which the mother previously could count on only herself. Puttermesser's move to Gracie Mansion reminds her of her mother: ("in her dreams her mother is once again rolling up winter rugs and putting

down summer rugs in the wide sunperiled apartment on the Grand Concourse" (Ozick 73)).

Like Puttermesser and Xanthippe, Sethe's relationship with Beloved is that of mother and daughter, yet it is that of a mother and toddler daughter. Unlike Xanthippe who considers her job to be to serve Puttermesser, Beloved is demanding, jealous, and must have her way. Initially, Beloved seems to want to please Sethe, but it becomes clear that Beloved is extremely needy. Soon after Beloved arrives at 124 she tends to Sethe by stroking her neck. Her "fingers were heavenly" and "so cool and knowing" and "mighty cool" (Morrison 115). Sethe is soothed by Beloveds loving and magical touch. However, as she grows, the relationship changes, and Beloved demands care and attention. Morrison writes, "But it was Beloved who made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire. She wanted Sethe's company for hours to watch the layer of brown leaves waving at them from the bottom of the creek" (Morrison 283).

Puttermesser's concerns about harboring a creature created by magical practices are in sync with Ozick's discomfort with creating idolatrous art. Kauvar writes of Puttermesser's coming to terms with her ability to create both a daughter and a PLAN and her decision to utilize her creation, "During her 'introspective stride' up Lexington Avenue, she weighs the golem's future. Despite her crooked tooth--another element of resemblance between the two--the golem persuades Puttermesser to use her and to allow her to 'ameliorate [her] woe'" (Kauvar 46). This is the subconscious reason for Puttermesser's creating the golem. She has a social

conscience that reaches beyond her own problems with anti-Semitism and misogyny. She wants to reform New York City and make it a haven for people of minority/marginalized status. Puttermesser envisions:

> A city washed pure. New York, city (perhaps) of seraphim. Wings had passed over her eyes. Her arms around Rappoport's heavy *Times*, Puttermesser held to her breast heartlessness, disorder, the desolation of sadness, ten thousand knives, hatred painted in subways, explosions of handguns, bombs in the cathedrals of transportation and industry, Pennsylvania Station, Grand Central, Rockefeller Center, terror in the broadcasting booths with their bustling equipment and seductive provincial voices, all the metropolitan airports assaulted, the decline of the Civil Service, maggots in high management. Rappoport's *Times*, repository of a dread freight! All the same, carrying Rappoport's *Times* back to bed, Puttermesser had seen Paradise. New York washed, reformed, restored. (Ozick 64)

Puttermesser is thrilled at Xanthippe's ability to translate Puttermesser's thoughts into a written version of the PLAN. During this time Puttermesser blossoms: she fulfills her dreams of utilizing her intelligence and education to banish social injustice and to create harmony amongst peoples from differing backgrounds. Puttermesser's biographer says, "Her craving was to cleanse the wilderness; her craving was to excise every black instance of injustice; her craving was to erase outrage. In the middle of her craving--out of the blue--she formulated the PLAN" (Ozick 66-7). When Puttermesser wonders at how Xanthippe will execute the PLAN, Xanthippe says to Puttermesser, "'I am the execution of the grandeur of your principles. Grand

design is my business. Leave visionary restoration to me" (Ozick 67). Puttermesser again expresses her hesitancy over making use of a daughter whom she has come to by dishonest and idolatrous means, but Puttermesser is bewitched by Xanthippe's ability to carry out ideas she has been prevented from executing herself due to the anti-Semitism and misogyny she has faced during her school and work years. Now that she has a daughter, she has a reason to strive for a better city. Puttermesser's "biographer" explains that Puttermesser is entranced by the idea of a harmonious and Utopian New York City: "But behind all that there glimmers a loveliness. To Puttermesser's speeding eye, it is like the spotted sudden flank of a deer disturbing a wood. There *will* be resuscitation! There *will* be redemption!" (Ozick 75) Once Puttermesser rationalizes her fall from being devout to that of idolator, Xanthippe begins her work, which is to enact all of the unfiltered and unchanneled ideas within Puttermesser's mind. Thanks to Xanthippe, New York City becomes a *gan edyn* (garden of Eden), a Utopia, with Puttermesser as mayor.

Elaine Kauvar writes of a Puttermesser "who imagines an ideal Civil Service, a complicated *gan eydn*" where bureaucratic waste, a powerful symbol of injustice in Ozick's novel, is unheard of (43). Puttermesser creates a female golem—most are male--because she wants to drive home her point that women, who possess at least half of all good ideas, are prevented from achieving their full potential by sexist bureaucrats. Only Xanthippe, a woman whose ideas are Puttermesser's own, will have the ability, and this is clear from the golem's larger-than-human physical stature, to carry out Puttermesser's "PLAN For the Resuscitation, Reformation, Reinvigoration, & Redemption of the City of New York" (Ozick 67). Puttermesser's

golem is naturally female because Puttermesser dreams of a daughter like herself to carry out her ideas. The golem knows everything she knows and carries out all of Puttermesser's ideas and her every whim, which is Puttermesser's mistaken belief of what daughters are like. Puttermesser does not acknowledge the painful fact that daughters grow up, they individuate, they strike out on their own. Foolish and unrealistic is the person who considers a daughter to be there to "serve [her] brain," yet Puttermesser is a person with a mission; she has been a target of misogynist and racist bureaucrats enough times that she is bent on bringing about social reform (Ozick 67). Puttermesser begins a life of extreme gratification through vicarious living when she creates Xanthippe, for Puttermesser's offspring accomplishes everything Puttermesser dreams of doing. Because Xanthippe is created knowing Puttermesser's ideas, she types up Puttermesser's "PLAN," gathers thousands of signatures to put Puttermesser on the ballot for mayor of New York City, and tirelessly carries out Puttermesser's PLAN to create a *gan edyn* out of New York City.

All mother-daughter dyads undergo difficult changes as the daughter individuates and grows older, and Ozick uses these shifts and finally the cessation of her mother-golem/daughter pair to create a character without hope. Puttermesser expresses her mixed feelings about Xanthippe's growth: "Then Puttermesser remembered that it was in the nature of a golem to grow and grow. The golem's appetite was nevertheless worrisome--how long would it take for Xanthippe to grow out of over one hundred dollars' worth of clothes? " (Ozick 63) One trait typical of golems is that at the same time that the golem grows larger than life its destructive tendencies increase. Elaine Kauvar writes, "But what she should have seen in

Xanthippe's increasing size is a golem's penchant for turning against her creator, forcing her to destroy her own creation. . . . The first letter, an apology for the golem's misbehavior, discloses Puttermesser's wish to procrastinate, to avoid undoing 'the other, who is no different' (*L*, 145)" (Kauvar, Notes 404). Scholem writes of a golem's nature to become destructive:

> This golem has prodigious strength and grows beyond measure. He [she] destroys the world, or in any case does a good deal of damage. It seems to be the name of God that enables him to do so. But it is also, and in at least equal degree, the power of the tellurian element, aroused and set in motion by the name of God. Unless this tellurian force is [sic] held in check by the divine name, it rises up in blind and destructive fury. (Scholem 202)

Like Xanthippe, as Beloved's size becomes larger than life, or larger than a human adult, her destructive tendencies increase. Paul D describes Sethe's house as being in the extreme disarray children create when at play: "A rope too short for anything but skip-jumping lies discarded near the washtub; and jars and jars of dead lightening bugs. Like a child's house; the house of a very tall child" (Morrison 318). Stamp Paid speaks of Beloved's growth saying, "But from the way they describe it, don't seem like it was the girl I saw in there. The girl I saw was narrow, this one was big. She say they was holding hands and Sethe looked like a little girl beside it" (Morrison 312). As each "daughter" grows—grows larger rather than grows up the way a human daughter would--the mother is overpowered by the physical and emotional force of the daughter.

As Beloved increases in size she becomes increasingly emotionally destructive and sexually insatiable. Beloved uses her powers to coerce Paul D into secret daily sexual encounters. Paul D describes his despair at Beloved's stalking, "She came, and he wanted to knock her down" (Morrison 136). He says to Beloved, "'When good people take you in and treat you good, you ought to try to be good back. You don't . . . Sethe loves you. Much as her own daughter. You know that.'" (Morrison 137) Paul D speaks of his unhappiness at Beloved's bewitchery, "If schoolteacher was right it explained how he had come to be a rag doll—picked up and put back down anywhere any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter" (Morrison 148). Like Xanthippe, and in the manner of a golem, Beloved becomes sexually insatiable as she grows.

Puttermesser has failed to keep Xanthippe in check, or, in other words, she has not been able to fulfill her duties as a parent. Not only does Xanthippe become a giantess, but as Xanthippe's sex drive escalates she flies into a promiscuous frenzy and takes as sexual partners all Mayor Puttermesser's male advisors. Puttermesser's biographer writes, "Sex! Sex! The golem wants sex! Men in high politics! Lofty officials! Elevated bureaucrats! . . . The prisons are open again. The press howls. Mayor Puttermesser is crushed. The golem has destroyed her utterly" (Ozick 87). Cohen writes of the link between Xanthippe's promiscuity and the unleashing of Xanthippe's evil tendencies:

> As Puttermesser overreaches herself, so does the golem. . . . Xanthippe grows more formidable in size and sexual desire. What was whimsically comic becomes grimly Dionysian. Libidinal orgies with Rappoport unleash her

> *yetzer ha-rah*, her evil instinct. The city she previously redeemed, she now proceeds to destroy. (Cohen 96)

It is interesting that Xanthippe asserts herself by choosing to be the opposite of her parent, for we have repeatedly been told by Puttermesser's biographer that Puttermesser is not all that interested in sex. Puttermesser's biographer explains Xanthippe's promiscuity by writing, “The rampaging energies of Xanthippe's eruptions, the furious bolts and convulsions of her visitations--Xanthippe, like Puttermesser herself, longs for daughters! Daughters that can never be! . . . Yet Puttermesser weeps. The golem is running over the City" (Ozick 88-9). Once Xanthippe has destroyed Puttermesser's career as mayor and has destroyed her *gan edyn* and reduced the city to its former squalor, Puttermesser realizes that she is without alternative. She must undo the life-giving spell she used to create Xanthippe.

Beloved, too, becomes destructive and must be destroyed. Morrison writes, Then the mood changed and the arguments began. A complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe” (Morrison 283) and “When once or twice Sethe tried to assert herself—be the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best—Beloved slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a windowpane” (Morrison 285). As Beloved grows stronger and Sethe weaker, the townspeople decide to take action against the ghost in the form of an exorcism. Similar in format to the destruction of a golem, the women use words and prayer to banish Beloved who vanishes into thin air. Morrison writes:

> A woman dropped to her knees. Half of the others did likewise.
>
> Denver saw lowered heads, but could not hear the lead prayer—only

> the earnest syllables of agreement that backed it: Yes, yes, yes, oh yes. Hear me. Hear me. Do it, Maker, do it. Yes." (Morrison 304)

Beloved's demise is as abrupt as Xanthippe's ultimate undoing, and their loss is mourned by their mothers, Beloved's loss is mourned by Sethe as much as Xanthippe's is mourned by Puttermesser.

Like all golems, Xanthippe is destined to destroy what she has created and those who have created her. Puttermesser believes she is killing Xanthippe to keep her from destroying New York City, but an ulterior motive may be to keep her from individuating, i.e. to keep Xanthippe from having ideas that do not originate from Puttermesser's own brain, and to keep her from the sexually voracious being she has become and that Puttermesser is not. Out of these three possibilities, I believe the ideas are most important to Puttermesser for they Puttermesser's true daughters, and they are what she, obsessive reader of the New York Times, letter writer, idealistic civil servant, consider to be her legacy. The ideas are housed in Xanthippe, and it is those ideas to which Puttermesser mourns putting an end when she kills her golem/daughter. Kauvar underscores the importance of ideas to Ozick and her knowledge of Socrates' thoughts on this subject writing:

> The connection between ideas and children is made by Socrates when he describes ideas as the 'offspring born' of one's 'own soul' and himself as the midwife; he likens the knowledge of the midwife to the 'tending and harvesting' of plants . . . .Simulating the activity ascribed to midwives by Socrates, Puttermesser then acts as the midwife to the offsprings of her own soul--a golem and an ideal Civil Service. (Kauvar Uses 133)

Gershom Scholem writes the idea of creating a golem is connected to "the ideas of the creative power of speech and of the letters" (351). Puttermesser's killing of her creation is representative of Puttermesser's loss of hope for social reform: her position as mayor of New York City will come to an end and with it the chance to make the sweeping changes to bureaucratic waste that Puttermesser abhors as the thieves of funds meant for the education and sustenance of the poor. Puttermesser mourns Xanthippe's death as the loss of an opportunity to continue to right social injustices carried out on women and people marginalized because of their ethnic background.

While Puttermesser makes the plans for dismantling Xanthippe, she mourns the loss of her golem/daughter. Ozick writes, "But Puttermesser weeps because she knows the golem's tellurian element must be contained, . . . because she knows she must dismantle her creation" (Kauvar CO's Fiction 142). Cohen explains, "Therefore, Puttermesser, . . . has no alternative but to return the golem to dust. . . . Puttermesser, the new mother, must deprive her new daughter of life and the procreation of her own daughters" (Cohen 96). Once Puttermesser kills Xanthippe, she loses her daughter and her chance to nurture granddaughters. Like Baby Suggs, she is deprived not only of her ability to mother, but her ability to be a grandmother and to vicariously mother grandchildren. The cessation of Puttermesser's family line signifies her loss of faith for a more equitable society for future generations. With Xanthippe's death comes the death of what is most important to Puttermesser--the death of "the offspring of her own soul," her ideas, and of her long dreamed of daughter to carry out and carry on those ideas.

As soon as Puttermesser begins to undo the spell she used to create her golem, she mourns the loss of her daughter. Ozick writes of Puttermesser's grief, "Xanthippe without a soul! Tears came to Puttermesser, her heart in secret shock [sic]. She was ready to disbelieve" (Ozick 88). As Puttermesser recites the Kabbalistic incantation and completes seven circles around Xanthippe, both rituals necessary to dismantle a golem, Xanthippe is able to speak for the first time, and uses childlike wiles and charm to plead for her life. "'O my mother,' Xanthippe said, still looking upward at Puttermesser, 'why are you walking around me like that?'" (Ozick 98) And, in Ozick's description of the spell, "The fifth cycle was completed; still the golem went bleating in her little bird's cry. 'Life! Life! More!'" (Ozick 98) Xanthippe's attempt to manipulate Puttermesser's emotions by calling her "my mother" and by asking Puttermesser to let her live works, though briefly. Although "Puttermesser, circling round the torpid Xanthippe in her shroud of white velvet, could not help glancing down into the golem's face. It was a child's face still" (Ozick 98) and even though she is "ready to disbelieve" [my emphasis] she does not lose her resolve. She completes her circles around Xanthippe, recites the incantation, and scrapes the *aleph* from the golem's forehead.

In a self-searching autobiographical essay called "A Drugstore in Winter" Ozick writes of herself:

> Your hair is whitening, you are a well of tears, what you meant to do (beauty and justice) you have not done, papa and mama are under the earth, you live in panic and dread, the future shrinks and darkens, stories are only vapor, your

> inmost craving is for nothing but an old scarred pen, and what, God knows, is that? (Ozick Art 305)

This melancholic statement of purpose is particularly sad, for in creating a text which showcases the inequalities of minority women, Ozick has created "beauty" and has inspired her readers to seek "justice." Ozick's expresses the belief that she has not fulfilled her purpose in life or her promise to herself to honor her parents and their faith here and in the fictive ending of The Puttermesser Papers. Cohen writes, "Ozick ends 'Puttermesser and Xanthippe' on a note of lamentation, with the forty-seven-year-old Puttermesser mourning the loss of her golem daughter and the impossibility of a renovated New York" (Cohen 98). Puttermesser's killing of Xanthippe represents Ozick's idea that equality for women and people of marginalized status is unattainable, and that her attempt within her medium to enact social change has failed. Essentially, this is true, for The Puttermesser Papers is a difficult novel, one filled with references to Socrates, the Kabbalah, and the bible. Perhaps she has not been completely or immediately successful in reaching a large audience with this particular novel, but her larger body of work, including her most recent novel The Heir to the Glimmering Throne, has earned her recognition as one of the brilliant thinkers of her generation. Ozick's fear that permanent change is unrealistic stems from the impossibility of her situation, one which affects all writers, the fact that writers themselves are not privy to their influence on their readers, and the lack of immediate visible results of their activist texts.

Ozick and Morrison use infanticide as a motif for a refusal to accept the social injustices that plague each of their ethnic groups. Ozick's Puttermesser kills

Xanthippe and Morrison's Sethe kills Beloved to suggest to readers that injustices do not have to be tolerated, and that these two mothers made their choices not because they were "killers," but because they loved their daughters beyond measure. These two mothers loved their daughters more than they love themselves, to the point that they would rather have them dead than let them fall into a situation out of their care and where they were destined to be mistreated by the sinister world at large. The act of killing, in the mothers' view, benefits the daughters by protecting them, the motif of child killing protests the injustices seemingly endless generations of women have had to endure. As Puttermesser's imaginary Uncle Zindel says, "'But by us--what we got? A *messer*! *Puttermesser*, you slice off a piece butter, you cut to live, not to kill. A name of honor, you follow?'" (Ozick 15) Puttermesser does what Zindel says of her, she cuts to live, not to kill when she dismantles Xanthippe. Ozick's "biography" of Puttermesser might well be considered a treatise of how to live or how to avenge the wrongs done to women and Jewish Americans and to Jewish American women especially. Through Puttermesser's name, her intelligence, her ability to suspend disbelief and conjure up a golem and to kill it, Ozick calls for women to make the difficult decisions that are the start of the slow improvement of their oppression. As Puttermesser says, "'A person should see himself or herself everywhere,' . . . 'All things manifest us.'" (Ozick 36).

In spite of the variance of ideas about who or what Beloved is, most of the critics concur Beloved "demonstrate[s] . . . that beyond transgression lies regeneration" (Bonnet 44), "embodies the power and beauty of the past and the need to realize the past fully in order to bring forth the future, . . . " (Krumholz 401), and

"stands as the implied author's brightest ray of hope for black and white sisterhood" (Bell 11). Sethe's anguish over her courageous act turns, with the visitation of Beloved's ghost, the appearance of Paul D, and the intervention of the women of her community to Sethe's desire to "to uncover some remnant of dignity, some kind of hope" (Reti 22). Like Ozick, who struggles to make sense of a world filled with pain and perversity, Morrison understands that "All things manifest us" (Ozick 36) and, like Puttermesser, when Sethe kills Beloved, she does so to save her daughter and to benefit her community through protest, she "cuts to live, not to kill" (Ozick 15).

Chapter Four: A Mother's Complicity: Incest in the Works of Jane Smiley and Edwidge Danticat

I devote Chapter Four to a discussion of the trope of sexual abuse and the struggle for adequate maternal nourishment of daughters in Jane Smiley's A Thousand Acres and Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory. In each novel, mothers fail to provide proper protection and nourishment, conjoined failures that follow the daughters for their entire lives. In these two novels, a shocking crime is committed against the daughters: incest is perpetuated and validated by the victims' mothers, themselves entrapped in their community's insistence on reproducing women's subordination. Ginny and Rose, the daughters in Smiley's novel, are sexually assaulted by their father Larry while their mother complicitly keeps the family secret, and Sophie, the daughter in Danticat's novel, is sexually assaulted by her mother Martine. In both novels, the mothers' participation in the cultural traditions of the community causes their complicity. Ginny and Rose's mother warns two neighborhood friends about Larry's abusive potential before she dies from cancer[2], but stifled by a community in which an outward appearance of prosperity is paramount and the status of women is similar to the "breeder" cows and hogs of the farms, she does not take action to protect her daughters. In effect, she is conditioned to do just the opposite; both the men and women of the community are trained to hold their peace in the face of injustice. Sophie's mother, following the Haitian tradition

[2] The women of Zebulon County live within a cancer cluster caused by drainage ditch runoff of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. A disproportionate number of these characters die from breast, ovarian, and uterine cancer, and suffer repeated miscarriage, yet the members of the community remain largely ignorant of the research conducted on their cancers.

of what Danticat calls a "virginity cult," is herself the perpetrator of mother-daughter incest.

How does one explain the complex occurrence of what is clearly sexual abuse when Sophie's mother "tests her" in Danticat's Breath Eyes, Memory? The testing is a Haitian tradition, and, because of socialization over many generations, the community has become immune to its destructive nature. This phenomenon is explained to Sophie by her mother Martine who says, "When I was a girl, my mother used to test us to see if we were virgins. She would put her finger in our very private parts and see if it would go inside" (Danticat 60). Sophie, a self-conscious and psychoanalyzed character, describes the testing as causing emotional symptoms typical of sexual abuse, such as an eating disorder and sexual dysfunction. She relates her pain to us saying, "I hated the tests. It is the most horrible thing that ever happened to me. When my husband is with me now, it gives me such nightmares that I have to bite my tongue to do it again" (Danticat 123, 156).

Sophie's mother Martine lives with the memory of a traumatic past as well. At fifteen she was raped by one of the Tonton Macoutes who occupied her village, and as a result of the rape she became pregnant with Sophie. Danticat intends readers to read sexual abuse as the marginalization of Haitian women. Linked with a story about the disappointment Haitian parents feel when a girl is born to them, and with the rape that occurred when Martine was a teenager, Sophie's sexual testing represents injustices to Haitian women caused by long-standing misogynist traditions, the oppression of women by the patriarchal Haitian society, and the brutality of a society caught up in the turmoil of military occupation.

In Smiley's text, there is no question for readers that Ginny and Rose are sexually assaulted by their father. Because of the silences and competitiveness within the community, and the oppression of women in fictional Zebulon County, Iowa, Larry's incest seems far less shocking than Sophie and Martine's mother-daughter incest. In terms of their community, Larry's incest seems not to be shocking at all. Ginny and her sister Rose speak with wonder about their mother's role in the incest. In an extreme example of denial and self-deception they protect the memory of their mother, and come to believe that, cowed by Larry's physical and psychic strength, their mother could not make the effort she should have to protect them from their father's sexual advances. Ginny learns from a neighbor that her mother suspected Larry's abusive potential, yet was unable to ascertain her daughters' safety. Mary Livingstone says, "'Ginny, your mother wasn't afraid for herself. She was never afraid for herself. She had true faith. She was afraid for you. For the life you would live after she died . . . . She knew what your father was like, even though I think she loved him . . . . She was most worried about you. She used to say, "Ginny won't stand up to him"'" (Smiley 91-92).

Mrs. Cook may have had her reasons for not challenging Larry's abusive ways but ultimately it is a parent's duty to protect her offspring no matter who creates danger. In an incestuous family the mother's power is depleted, and according to Waldby:

> Wald and Herman also emphasize the powerlessness of the mother within this particular family configuration . . . For many women there is also a very real economic imperative. . . . Despite all these factors

> militating against them, many mothers do act to protect their daughters in any way they can. However, the existence of 'collusive' mother is undeniable; Herman accounts for this by describing the extreme oppression of many mothers in the family where incest is ongoing: 'Maternal collusion in incest, when it occurs, is a measure of maternal powerlessness.' (34) (98-100)

Mrs. Cook is powerless to protect her daughters by her own means as well as powerless to ask others for help. The competitiveness of the farming community renders its members silent in the face of their own problems. Only during illness do they seek the help of their community.

For Ginny's mother the only way to protect her daughters after her death was to ask her friend to look in on them. Mary Livingstone, alive, but as immovable as a stone as her name suggests, turns out to be as impotent a guardian as Mrs. Cook was. She completely fails in her promise to Mrs. Cook to even look in on the girls or have a conversation with them. Possessed as they are by Larry, they are unreachable and off limits to neighbors and friends.

Rather than treat Ginny, Rose, and Caroline as people with feelings and emotional needs, Larry commodifies his daughters, and as Rose says, "We were just his, to do with as he pleased, like the pond or the houses or the hogs or the crops" (191). Nakadate writes of an interview with Smiley:

> Smiley has said that Larry Cook's consummate paternal villainy emerged from her 'longstanding dissatisfaction with an interpretation of *King Lear* that privileged the father's need over the daughters'.

> Right before I [Smiley] started the novel, I felt a growing sense of a link between a habit of mind that perceives daughters and children as owned things. I felt, viscerally, that a habit of mind exists in our culture of seeing nature and women in much the same way.' (Nakadate 163)

It is this connection between the ownership of women and nature that Smiley uses to illuminate Larry's particular cruelty and abusive makeup. Nakadate asserts:

> Larry's possessive mindset and mindless abuse of his daughters are signaled in his tendency, especially when challenged, to address and claim each as 'my girl'--a verbal habit he shares, revealingly enough, with the daughterless Harold Clark, whose facile use of the phrase reveals its cultural embedded ness. (The sisters' troubled emotional development and bewildered capitulation to Larry's proprietary behavior are revealed in their continuing to call him 'Daddy,' even as adults.) (Nakadate 169)

This possessive mindset is also exemplified by his dictatorial role in his daughters' marriages, their behavior both in public and within the family, and in his ownership of the land his children farm.

The realization that their community prefers to hide rather than remedy any sort of irregularity becomes a catalyst for the sisters to seek self-reliance and revenge. In Ginny's case that means a life off the family's farm, while for Rose, rejecting the pesticides and practices of her family's high yield farm and rebelliously embracing organic farming during the high yield farming-focused 1970s with her lover Jess is a

defiant act and seems like change enough. The children of high-yield farmers appear traumatized by the use of pesticides and the lack of respect farmers have for the environment and Rose, inspired by Jess' ideas of organic farming, becomes an organic farmer herself attempting to undo the damage from the heavy load of pesticide Larry has dumped into the land.

In the months before their mother's death from cancer, Ginny and Rose fall victim to their father's sexual abuse which they continue to endure for five additional collective years. According to Herman:

> The most striking [similarity amongst families in which incest takes place] was the almost uniform estrangement of the mother and daughter, an estrangement that preceded the occurrence of overt incest. Over half the mothers were partially incapacitated by physical or mental illness or alcoholism and either assumed an invalid role within the home or were periodically absent because of hospitalization. Their oldest daughters were often obliged to take over the household duties. (Herman 267)

During Mrs. Cook's illness Ginny and Rose care for their mother in the house and become surrogate wives for Larry, taking over the household chores, childrearing, and becoming sexual surrogates. Herman asserts, "Many of the daughters effectively replaced their mothers and became their fathers' surrogate wives. They were also deputy mothers to the younger children and were generally given some authority over them" (Herman 270). This is the case for Ginny and Rose. They are given charge of

their younger sister Caroline whom they parent from age five until she leaves home for college.

Even before sexual abuse begins, Ginny learns not to expect her mother to protect her from her father. When she is a small child of five, Ginny loses her shoe backstage at the school play and knows Larry will punish her severely. Instead of protecting her daughter from Larry's overly harsh physical punishment, Mrs. Cook colludes with Larry saying, "'Virginia, come out from behind there. Out into the middle of the room. He's right. You shouldn't have lost your shoe'" (Smiley 183). Mrs. Cook's initial attempt to protect Ginny fails because of Larry's threat to Mrs. Cook. He tells his wife, "There's only one side here, and you'd better be on it" (Smiley 83). According to Waldby, "Judith Herman places emphasis on the relationship between the 'normal' and the 'incestuous' family, attributing the high incidence of incest to the power that all fathers exercise in the family, but particularly where the father is domineering" (Waldby 98). Larry's physical domination over his family seems to suggest the impending sexual domination of his daughters. Waldby further contends:

> This individual masculine desire for sexual domination over females is compounded by the propertarian nature of heterosexual relationships. Ward say[s] of incestuous fathers that ' . . . they are not aberrant males. They are acting within the mainstream of masculine sexual behavior, which sees women as sexual commodities. . . . The fact that many fathers do not behave in these ways towards their

daughters . . . does not alter the fact that they could.' (36) (Waldby 100)

Another suggestion of Larry's abusive potential and domineering behavior is an incident during which he needlessly kills a fawn. Herman writes, ". . . many survivors describe being forced to witness the sadistic abuse of animals" (Herman, Trauma 98). Ginny reports seeing her father crush a fawn in the field with a mowing machine even though it would have been possible and even easy for him to drive around it. Larry's domination of the household and its members, the farm, the land and its animals sets the stage for the incest that begins during his wife's illness.

Apparently, the incest that plagues the Cook family is not an unusual occurrence in farming communities. According to Deborah Fink, author of Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, "farm women had little or no supportive 'communities,' and that they accepted not only loneliness, but lifelong, unassisted hard labor, and--most shocking--tyrannical, abusive behavior from fathers and husbands, with grim stoicism. . . . Including sexual abuse of wives and children, by family farmers."

The effects of the incest are different for each of the daughters. While Rose is never without her consciousness or memory of the incest Ginny represses the incest completely. She lives her married life oblivious to the damage the abuse has caused her. Herman writes:

> All of the abused child's psychological adaptations serve the fundamental purpose of preserving her primary attachment to her parents in the face of daily evidence of their malice, helplessness, or

> indifference. To accomplish this purpose, the child resorts to a wide array of psychological defenses. By virtue of these defenses, the abuse is either walled off from conscious awareness and memory, so that it did not really happen, or minimized, rationalized, and excused, so that whatever did happen was not really abuse. (Herman, Trauma 102)

Ginny uses what psychologist Leonard Shengold calls "mind-fragmenting operations" to maintain the "delusion of good parents" (26). Ginny has no memory of the incest until Rose cruelly enlightens her. She has compartmentalized the experience so completely that she does not believe Rose until she returns to her old room, has a flashback of the incest, and realizes the truth. Ginny says, “I screamed in a way that I had never screamed before, full out, throat-wrenching, unafraid-of-making-a-full-and-drawing-attention-to-myself sorts of screams that I made myself concentrate on, becoming all mouth, all tongue, all vibration” (229). Once Ginny has memory of the abuse she begins to understand the sex abuse survivor symptoms she has lived with most of her adult life.

Much of Ginny’s time as a farmer’s daughter and as a farmwife is spent growing, preparing, and eating food. In fact, one important subtext of the novel is food. Ginny is a member of the “Cook” family of farmers who farm the land without respect for the environment and its inhabitants both human and animal, for Larry Cook farms by high-yield conventional farming methods which destroy land, kill wildlife, and ruin people's health. Sexual abuse and food are companions in A Thousand Acres and Breath, Eyes, Memory, and that both novels contain copious eating, feeding, and eating disorder imagery suggests that in spite of providing

daughters with adequate meals, the mothers fail to emotionally nourish their daughters. Danticat and Smiley both use the overfeeding of the self to represent the surfeit of sexual attention or the suffocating symbolic stuffing of the gut to represent an unwelcome presence in the vagina. Sophie's bulimia and Ginny's pesticide poisoning induced miscarriages each taint their relations with their spouses and represent a purging and a way of expelling the toxic byproducts of incest.

According to Kellman, ". . . the characters in *A Thousand Acres* are almost always either cooking or eating; food is the language by which they communicate among themselves and by which the author divulges mysteries of character, plot, and theme" (436). Many of Ginny, Rose, and Sophie's interactions with their families revolve around the growing, preparing, and consuming of food and in Sophie's case the purging of food is an important indicator in her life. Kellman explains, "The surname that Smiley chooses for her protagonists--Cook--emphasizes the salient role she assigns to dining. Their family business is agriculture, the production of crops and livestock for human consumption" (Kellman 436). Food and the family's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the meal becomes a barometer for these women to measure how they feel about themselves and their day and how others feel about them. What is being gobbled at the table or vomited into the toilet speaks multitudes in these novels and becomes an apt vehicle of self-expression.

Kellman notes that Jess, a neighbor's son, comes to organic farming because the slaughtering of his pet steer traumatizes him. He writes, "Plagued by childhood guilt over Bob the Beef, a, champion steer he raised for slaughter, Jess has secret plans to convert Harold Clark's five hundred acres into a gentle organic farm. Like

his Shakespearean antecedent Edgar, Jess, too, in effect declares: 'Thou, nature, art my goddess,' adopting a gracious garden as his model for nature, not a bloody jungle red in tooth and claw" (Kellman 438). Rose, converted by Jess' talk of a new, green way of farming, eagerly embraces organic farming.

Apparently, nowadays, more women than not prefer to farm without the use of pesticides. According to a New York Times article, "Almost 15 percent of American farms are run primarily by women—a sea change from 1978 when the number was 5 percent. On organic farms, according to the Organic Farming Research Foundation, the number is 22 percent" (Moskin "Women" NYTimes "Women" F1). Nancy MacNamara, a farmer, says, "We had the rise of feminism at the same time as the rise of organic agriculture and the 'back to the land' movement, . . . People—especially mothers—started to want to know where their food is coming from" (Moskin "Women" NYTimes F6).

Rose, farming during this time of change, begins to farm her father's land and she controls the land absolutely; she chooses a green or regenerative way of life. For a time, she becomes an organic farming vigilante, which is her way of making a strong statement as to what she will and will not allow to enter her body. Nothing artificial, nothing poisonous or dangerous. However, in spite of her sincere efforts to purify herself and her family by farming organically and following a vegetarian diet, she cannot rid herself of the toxins Larry has inflicted upon his land and on his entire domain, and she is filled with a bilious anger at her family and her fate.

Like Ginny's miscarriages, Rose's breast cancer—indeed the farm resides in the heart of a cancer cluster—is caused by the pesticides widely used by the

environmentally compromised farming of her father's generation. Because she has been poisoned by the food and water of the farm, that which is supposed to sustain, kills instead and renders her unable to mother her daughters into their adulthood. Rose's cancer, as are Ginny's miscarriages, is symbolic of the poisoning of an entire family by incest; toxins inflicted upon them by Larry both actual and metaphorical cause her inability to feed her children, to nurture them, just as Ginny's body, overcome and rendered dysfunctional by pesticides, is unable to nurture and sustain a baby.

According to Kathleen Flynn, New York Times editor, "The recent craving for organic food has something to do with the feeling that we are living in an unclean, fallen world. Organic food is good for us in the sense that sustainable agriculture is good for the earth, where we all have to live, but I think it is crazy to think that eating organic food is somehow more healthy, as if we can help living in a world full of artificial substance, breathing the polluted air, etc. People want to get back to nature, but we no longer live in unspoiled nature, nor can we." In spite of Rose's obsession with organic farming and vegetarianism, it is not possible for her to return to a pure state by eating cleanly just as it is not possible for her to return to an un-incested state and cancer-free. For almost two decades Ginny represses her memories of being an incest victim. It is not until she sets the stage for the memory to reappear by lying down in her childhood bed that she remembers Larry's molestation, and what she remembers is significant, for Ginny's memory of Larry is of "feeling him suck my breasts" (Smiley 228), a maternal nursing image juxtaposed with Ginny's desire to have children. Perhaps in this situation Larry is an incubus sucking the life giving

properties from Ginny along with the "milk" of his pseudo nursing. Ginny's one evil nursing child—Larry—sucks the life from her while hoarding her milk and preventing her from being able to carry and nurse children. Kirby writes:

> It is Jess who introduces into rural Iowa the hip, vaguely leftist, environmentalist-vegetarian perspective of the distant urban world. Ginny's series of miscarriages and Rose's breast cancer, they learn from Jess, are probably attributable to anhydrous ammonia and especially pesticides, leaching into the Cook's water supply through their farm's magnificent tile/cistern system. (Kirby 594)

If there is green farming—sustainable agriculture that is good for the earth—there is the hope that women will be able to have children and hope that those children will be healthy. According to a Becker a writer for The New York Times, "By the time Raccoon River winds through the western hills here,[Dedham, Iowa] passing corn fields and livestock pens before reaching Des Moines miles to the east, it is so polluted the city has to put it through a special nutrient filter to meet government standards for drinking water" ("New Attention" NYTimes 20). This is the water used to hydrate and sustain the food American children and their parents eat each night at dinner and it is this same undrinkable water that poisons Ginny, Rose, their mother, Jess' mother, and countless others in their community. "In a state with no national parks or forests, which keep the land in its natural state, the Iowa countryside has been awash in fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and animal wastes, some politicians, scientists, and environmental groups say" (Becker "New Attention" NYTimes 20). The soil contains contaminants to this day.

Nakadate contends the possession of the land leads to a deadly possession of its inhabitants as well. He writes, "The Cook's Iowa farm is contested territory, under assault by agricultural chemistry and technology, and the bodies of Smiley's female characters become contested objects within that territory" (Nakadate 167).

Rose complains of this very thing. She likens Larry's lust for productivity at the expense of the environment and community health to his sexual lust at his daughters' expense. She tells Ginny:

> "I see taking what you want because you want it, then making something up that justifies what you did. I see getting others to pay the price. . . . Do I think Daddy came up with beating and fucking us on his own? . . . No. I think he had lessons, and those lessons were part of the package, along with the land and the lust to run things exactly the way he wanted no matter what, poisoning the water and destroying the topsoil and buying bigger and bigger machinery, and then feeling certain that all of it was 'right' as you say." (Smiley 302)

It is not surprising or wrong that Larry acquired tools of his trade that were state of the art for his time; it is his encompassing cruelty and drive for possession that are so despicable. Rose's words speak to her anger at how having an incestuous father shaped her life and " . . . her steadily increasing awareness of environmental degradation at the hands of agriculture and technology, . . " (Nakadate 8).

For Ginny, "Her father's devotion to both size and thrift--'the purchase of more land or the improvement of land already owned'--is inseparable from what Ginny remembers as 'his lust for every new method designed to swell productivity'"

(Nakadate 161-2). Yet the corruption of our food suggests our inability to nourish our children. For mothers nursing or mothers feeding their children table food during this era more is not better, quality tops quantity. Organic ingredients, heirloom varietals, grass fed dairy and beef cows, and range animals have come to be far more desirable than foods containing processed ingredients or foods laced with pesticides.

Olson asks, "What does Smiley mean by constantly placing her characters in front of a plate--especially when that plate is so often filled with bland, stick-to-the ribs food? 'Reflections on a Lettuce Wedge,' gives us lots of hints. Here, she argues that Midwesterners don't demand better food because they have 'internalized' an '"Anything is good enough for me" attitude'" (Olson). "However, as Smiley says, these meals where 'ingredients' are 'juxtaposed but not allowed to mingle' represent 'despair incarnate' ("Reflections"). The lack of flavor suggests zestless living--a hunger for something more satisfying than say the farm and the life on the farm. Neither is adequate to nurture and sustain the life of the mind.

In the novel, toxins are a metaphor for Larry's oppression. It's not just the new wave of sustainable agriculturally minded farmers that are concerned with toxins. Some of the townspeople are as well. Marv Carson, the town banker, visits Ginny one day and tells her about his strange and obsessive routines of riding his body of toxins (Marv says, "My main effort now is to be aware of toxins and try to shed them as regularly as possible"(Smiley 29)). It seems that the townspeople are obsessed with what they put into their bodies. In addition to the obsession with eating, cooking in itself deceptively routine, proves to be a source of both power and oppression. According to Olson:

> Initially, the oldest daughter, Ginny, dutifully plays the role of family hash-slinger and views herself as a minor player next to the men who tend the profit-making cornfields and pigs. But as she awakens to her own self worth--and to the realization that her father has slept with his own daughters, that her sister Rose has slept with her lover, and that the men in her family have sacrificed their integrity, their wives, and their children for their land--cooking food and serving it becomes her means of asserting power and gaining freedom. (Olson)

Readers see Ginny's desire for change peeking through when fresh rosemary—brought to our attention by a Rose's daughter's query "What're those little sticks on them"-- appears in the potatoes at a family dinner (Smiley 101). Many of Ginny's preferences and predilections are status expressed through food. Ginny's care of Rose and her family consists of cooking for them while Rose undergoes treatment for breast cancer, and her expression of dislike of the food at a community dinner shows her dissatisfaction with the townspeople whom she finds unsophisticated and falsely sweet. She says, "Carrot bread and oatmeal might have been welcome at that buffet" and she notes "Somebody's big beautiful green salad, but with a sweet dressing"(Smiley 217-8). Ginny's feelings about married life are made known to us by her thoughts about food. She has fond memories of her tenth anniversary dinner and she cooks a conciliatory meal for Ty. If Ginny's memory and self-expression are intertwined with food and cooking imagery, it seems logical that her pandering to her father takes the form of fussing over his meals. According to Jacobs, "Under

conditions of sexual violence, the needs of the father are at the center of the daughter's emotional life, as he imposes his will and his emotional demands onto the victimized child" (Jacobs 133) and this is why both Ginny and Rose cater to Larry worrying over his health and safety. In a telling scene in which Ginny runs back to her house to get eggs for Larry's breakfast, we are shown how fearful Ginny is of her father's displeasure. She says, "My choice [to get eggs from her own house] would show him something about me, either that I was selfish or inconsiderate (no eggs) or that I was incompetent . . . " (Smiley 114).

If pesticides damaging the land and our food hamper our ability to nurture our children, Jess' cleansing regimen of organic farming represents a fresh start for Ginny and Rose. The idea that land tainted by years of anhydrous ammonia and other toxins can indeed be purified suggests hope for the remaining Cook family which consists of Rose's daughters and Ginny. Smiley makes it clear that Rose's cancer and Ginny's infertility—as evidenced by her repeated miscarriages—results from toxic pesticides in the drainage ditch runoff, yet readers construe, and perhaps this is Smiley's intent as well, Ginny and Rose's symptoms to develop as a result of Larry's abuse and the metaphorical toxins within the Cook family.

Thus, the poisonous pesticides on the farm serve as a trope for the poisonous incest that infiltrates the family—that blights and scars the Cook daughters. In a comment that makes it seem as if the novel is one long tome of activism against traditional farming methods Smiley says:

> "I do think that people tend to use the earth better if they take delight in its fruits. Eating is one of the sensuous things we do many

> times a day, day after day, year after year. Eating is our oftenest repeated connection to our agricultural roots. . . . We can resist having our appetites dulled in the name of the countless mouths one single American farmer and all his machinery, petrochemicals, and sacrificed topsoil are alleged to feed. The future begins at dinnertime."
>
> (Nakadate 16)

While the dining table has been, for Ginny, Rose, and Caroline, the center of family life, once Mrs. Cook dies, motherloss becomes the organizing force, the determinant, or the catalyst for the disconnection they feel from their peers, and it becomes the enabler or the force that frees their father's abusive maelstrom. Hope Edelman describes her own experience with motherloss saying, " . . . my mother's death had been the most determining, the most profound, the most influential event of my life. It had become my organizer, the focal point of my identity and the standard to which I compared and contrasted all the other stresses of life" (Edelman Motherless xix). Edelman believes her experience to be typical of women's experience with motherloss. Her formal and informal bereavement groups provide comfort and connection for her motherless subjects.

Ginny, Rose, and Caroline do not have access to the comfort of other women with similar family history. Edelman reports of her bereavement groups, "Through frank and detailed conversations, we found similarities among ourselves we'd never noticed in other female friends: a keen sense of isolation from family; a sharp awareness of our own mortality; the overall feeling of being 'stuck' in our emotional development, as if we've never completely matured" and because Ginny and Rose

never fully mature, it is as if their development as daughters has been arrested at the point of their mother's death, for they engage in the competitive behavior reminiscent of high school girls' behavior such as poaching boyfriends and backstabbing each other (Edelman Motherless xix). They continue to carry on with the housework and family life as they know it because that is what is expected of them. Their mother was not warm and jolly and did not create a happy household; while she cared for her children the joy of family seems to have been hampered by Mrs. Cook's coolness and Larry's looming presence and tendency to have abusive outbursts. Because of the tone of their family interactions the sisters are never able to behave warmly to each other and they never really know having a loving connection with a sibling.

While Ginny never knows the comfort and pleasure of a group of female friends, indeed her lifelong isolation from the company of women is as much as a result of her mother's death and her father's initial control over Ginny's social life as it is a result of lack of proximity to peers. Herman writes:

> It is by now a commonplace that families in which child abuse occurs are socially isolated. . . . It is often enforced by the abuser in the interest of preserving secrecy and control over other family members. . . . Their abusers may forbid them to participate in ordinary peer activities or may insist on the right to intrude into these activities at will. The social lives of abused children are also profoundly limited by the need to keep up appearances and preserve secrecy. (Herman, Trauma 99)

Larry prevents Ginny and Rose from taking part in peer activities such as dating, and they purposely hide Caroline's participation in the school play from Larry.

Edelman's experience with motherloss is a theoretical palimpsest, a multilayered text, which enables one to understand the complexities of the Cook daughters. Edelman contends, "An adolescent's relationship with her mother offers hints to how she'll interact with her as an adult, but because my mother died when we were both so young, I don't know how our relationship might have evolved. My memories of her interactions with my grandmother are the only clues I have" (Edelman Mother 92). Ginny, Rose, and Caroline, each deprived of their mother-daughter relationship early in life, suffer from the loss of their relations with her in their adult life as well. As adults, the sisters have no mother to guide their interactions with each other, they have no mother, empathic or otherwise, to offer advice, and finally and most damaging they have no mother to affirm their memories of sexual abuse and no mother to question and to blame for her lack of protection. Ginny speaks of never getting a chance to demystify and to know her mother as an adult. She says, "My mother died before I knew her, before I liked her, before I was old enough for her to be herself with me" (Smiley 93). Ginny's longing for a future with her mother is understandable but perhaps Ginny would have been disappointed with an adult-adult relationship with her remote mother and perhaps her mother's take on the incest would have been unsympathetic and unsatisfying for Ginny.

Ginny's disappointment that she never got the chance to know her mother as a friend or confidant, in a woman-to-woman relationship, is not abated by connection to a surrogate. She has no grandmother, aunt, or neighbor to engage in transference;

rather, her option is to turn to her sister Rose for comfort. The corrupt family dynamic has rendered siblingship impossible. Edelman writes:

> Of the four types of matriarchs, the Autocrat is the one who tends to do the most psychological harm to family members. Her daughters typically suffer from low self-esteem and look to external sources for validation. Their inability when young to form secure attachments with these withholding mothers may later transform into compulsive or addictive behaviors they rely on to satisfy their longing for attachment. Or they may expect their own children to be the loving mothers they never had. (Edelman Mother 154-5)

Rose's behavior as a mother is similar to her own mother's behavior—she becomes an autocrat—and cannot relate to her children or sister as anything other than that. Ginny, on the other hand, longs for children to fulfill her desire for a loving mother. Ginny's desperation for children, and her miscarriages are an especially poignant part of the novel. One feels she would be a loving parent in spite of her drive to fulfill her own need for love. Ginny's ability to nurture is surprising considering the parenting she received. Although parenting of her sister Caroline after their mother's death afforded Ginny practice rearing girls, her interactions with her nieces are caring if a bit hesitant. According to Edelman:

> Women in a family pass their mothering practices from one generation to the next, like stations in a bucket brigade. . . . From these studies [of this phenomenon], we know that mistreatment of children, harsh parenting practices, and hostility toward children are often passed

> down from generation to generation, and those of us whose mothers grew up in extremely repressive or abusive households have felt the trickle-down effects of our grandmothers' behaviors, sometimes suffering at the hands of mothers who never received the nurturing they needed. (Edelman Mother 207)

Ginny's inadequacies as a first time parent and as a mother to Caroline are not surprising, for she was a teen surrogate mother with no experience, no knowledge of warm and nurturing parenting, and without a mother of her own. She and Rose perfected the day-to-day household and farmwife tasks which included young animal and child rearing, but in their care of Caroline, they offered her pale love rather than real warmth, and Caroline faults them for what she considers to be harsh treatment. Ginny's discussion of her role in Caroline's upbringing after the death of their mother, and Caroline's anger about the "niceties of [her] upbringing" (Smiley 245) suggest an inadequacy in their mother's parenting which speak to Ginny's inability to provide Caroline with love. Ginny describes Caroline as " . . . an agreeable child, not difficult to do for. She played with her dolls that had been our dolls, ate what was put in front of her, listened when she was told to put away her doll clothes or keep her dress clean "(Smiley 63). She speaks about childhood behavior rather than gushing about Caroline's achievements or skills.

With the Cooks for parents Ginny's role models are far from exemplary. At first impression, Mrs. Cook seems to be the stereotypical farmwife, and Ginny and Rose feel betrayed by what they see as their mother's collusion with their father's physically abusive domineering ways. Alice Miller theorizes that abusive people

have an uncanny ability to find each other and become co-parents. Perhaps Mrs. Cook's fear of Larry caused her to maintain an aloofness she considered cohesive with his style of parenting, perhaps she too was prone to abusiveness and she found a partner with whom she had similar parenting style, or perhaps she had not received proper nurturing and was not able to offer that to her daughters.

Ginny reminisces about her mother saying, "As a mother, her manner was matter-of-fact and brisk . . . . She bottle-fed Caroline, and I'm sure she bottle-fed us, in spite of the fact that farmwives never willingly take on extra work, and her demeanor during the feedings was rather impersonal as I later recalled it. There was no melding with the child into symbiotic fleshy warmth" (93). Ginny's view that bottle feeding is less nurturing and personal than breastfeeding and that her mother's style of bottle feeding is even more impersonal than other mothers' is telling. She reports that even her mother's "housedresses, were structured and public-seeming" (Smiley 93) which suggests a businesslike lack of warmth and a paucity of positive emotion in the Cook household.

According to Edelman:

> In the average family of women, certain behaviors and characteristics appear to repeat more often than others. These include the amount of affection shown toward children; the degree of mother-daughter autonomy; the ability to promote structure among children; disciplinary practices; the tendency toward neurotic behaviors; and the capacity for empathy. In addition, nearly all these studies indicate what may seem obvious: that affectionate mothers usually raise

> psychologically sound daughters. Similarly, mothers who are anger-prone, irritable, nervous, depressed, anxious, or unable to form emotional connections with their children are more likely to raise daughters who are less capable of supporting and responding to their children when they become parents themselves (Edelman Mother 207-8)

Ginny's mother's lack of emotionality drives Ginny's first unsuccessful attempt at parenting Caroline; however, she is able to summon up much warmer feelings for her nieces.

Families everywhere are shadowed by sexual abuse, often with complicitous or abusive mothers. Because mothers nurture and protect, using the mother as a symbol of failure is a strong statement for a writer to make. Perhaps, for a child, having an abusive mother is the most damaging thing that can happen, for there is no one to offer protection, no one to turn to in a time of trouble, and the world is a dangerous place if not even mother is safe. Smiley, with her tainted food/tainted family imagery, and Danticat with her tainted virginity/tainted country imagery make use of the trope of sexual abuse to say that the worst has happened to us. Our communities, land, and government have been irreparably damaged never to return to their original state.

In Breath, Eyes, Memory virginity testing is at the forefront of the novel; therefore, it will be useful to take time to examine the history of sexual testing. In a chapter called "Hymenologies: The Multiple Signs of Virginity" Kathleen Coyne Kelly writes of Jeanne d'Arc and the women charged with determining Jeanne's

virginity as she waited for her first audience with the King in Poitiers in 1429. Kelly writes:

> Jeanne's squire Jean d'Aulon testified that 'the said Maid was seen, visited and privately looked at and examined in the secret parts of her body, but after they had seen and looked at everything which ought to be looked at in such a case, the aforesaid lady [Yolande] said and related to the king that she and the said ladies found that she was certainly a true and entire maid, I whom could be found no corruption nor mark of violence.' (Kelly 17)

Another society Kelly describes as having a virginity fetish is ancient Israel. Kelly explains:

> female virginity—was highly valued in ancient Israel, albeit only as a temporary state before marriage. In fact, it seems that the Israelites and, later, the Jews of the Talmudic era, esteemed female virginity enough to attempt to verify its presence or absence—if, that is, the handful of chastity-testing narratives recorded in the Pentateuch and the Talmud reflect actual tests administered to women and are not simply literary inventions. (Kelly 19)

In both these instances the test is visual rather than manual the way the Haitian tradition calls for, and therefore there is no "corruption" or "mark of violence" created by the actual test. If a mother can break her daughter's hymen with her finger during the test, the test itself is a perversion of the intention, a poorly thought out conundrum which barely masks the subtext of maternal possession of one's daughters. Haitian culture is by no means the first to engage in the practice of sexual testing, but the testing is so ingrained within the Haitian culture that it takes a

psychologically intelligent Americanized character to point out the injustice of the tests. Both visual and manual virginity testing are farcical, and "Physicians even admit it is difficult to accurately check for virginity" (Singer).

During Sophie's adolescence and teen years, Martine sexually abuses or incests her daughter by repeatedly testing her virginity. Martine's vigilante testing of Sophie speaks to her need to control Sophie entirely, to jealously possess her daughter body and soul. Martine's proselytizing to Sophie that they are twin souls or marrassa, a Haitian folklore I will discuss in depth later in this chapter, results in a regression to a pre-indivuation state and an enmeshment that Sophie grapples with throughout her early adulthood as she takes possession of her body through bulimia, self-mutilation, sexual intercourse, and motherhood. As the novel evolves, so does Sophie. She finds a second chance at individuation through emotional and physical distance and psychological counseling which enable her to begin a sort of exchange system in which she trades the damaged pieces of her soul for what is fresh and untainted.

As antiquated as virginity testing may seem to Americans, the practice abroad continues to make the news. One reporter writes of the Turkish culture's obsession with virginity, "What is clear is that the centuries-old moral code that gave rise to virginity testing--the premium placed on the chastity of an unmarried girl--remains widely accepted in this Muslim nation [Turkey], crossing economic and class lines" (Couturier). "'Being a virgin bride signifies a woman's purity and her loyalty to the family,' said sociologist Dilek Cindoglu, who has researched virginity testing in Turkey. In Turkish society, 'patriarchal control over women's bodies has been reproduced through honor and shame codes' " (Couturier).

In South Africa the anguish of girls forced to undergo virginity tests is apparent, and the “recent suicide attempts by five girls seeking to avoid a forced virginity examination . . . has sparked a public outcry. . . . The five girls involved in the suicide attempts, ages 12-16, took rat poison and then jumped into a water tank rather than face the tests" (Couturier).

Sophie resorts to equally drastic measures to “exorcis[e]” the evil events of the past. She says, “it was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire” (Breath 203) and when Sophie frees herself from the testing by breaking her hymen with the pestle, she likens it to "breaking manacles, an act of freedom" (Breath 130). Breaking the manacles of the testing is akin to breaking the manacles of her people oppressed by military occupation. Another journalist theorizes, "Some women's rights advocates here [South Africa] maintain chastity testing borders on child abuse. It turns testers . . . into sex police, they argue. Girls' privacy, dignity, and rights are violated during exams held in public places" (Singer).

According to Chancy:

> It is because she has internalized the ideology of female inferiority that Sophie's mother is capable of abusing her daughter. Taught to despise the female body for itself and to covet it only as a means by which to acquire a male mate, Sophie's mother commits incest against her daughter, rationalizing her behavior as necessary to her daughter's survival. (Chancy 121)

In the twisted thinking of a depressed and mentally ill person Martine believes her actions will keep Sophie safe, and the Haitian cultural oddity of the virginity cult serves as a rationalization for the testing.

Finally though, Martine too obtains freedom from the virginity cult perpetuated by generations of her family. Their observance of the testing ritual and Martine's rape, the defining event in her life, have caused deep fear, guilt, and self-loathing in Martine from which she seeks to free herself. Like the five girls who chose to jump into the water tank and like Sophie's act of self-mutilation she decides that the only way to free herself is through physical means, and in this case it is suicide that liberates Martine.

"Social worker and therapist E. Sue Blume notes in *Secret Survivors* that. . . . Incest often manifests itself in a manner consistent with gender socialization: for a man, the abuse is generally overtly and directly sexual; for a woman, it may be more emotional, more focused on relationship and bonding, or perhaps manifested through care of the child's body, her primary domain' (7)" (Chancy 121) which is precisely what happens in Martine and Sophie's case. Martine claims her tests *protect* Sophie's virginity, yet the only way they can do so is to instill a fear and loathing in Sophie of her own body. Danticat shows:

> through this aspect of her text the extent to which the subjugation of women has led to one mother's sexual oppression of her own daughter. The effect of this subjugation is that the mother believes that she is taking care of the child's body when she is in fact subjecting it to [sic] the very abuse from which she is hoping to save it. (Chancy 122)

It is both sad and farcical for Martine to believe she is *protecting* Sophie, for the test is not a preventative measure against Sophie's sexual activity; it is only useful for an after the fact discovery. Contemporary child rearing practices encourage parents to let children explore and feel ownership of their bodies and to teach them that sexuality is a natural and physiological part of being human.

Another cultural condition that facilitates Martine's testing of Sophie is the folklore of marassa or twin souls. Martine insistently and ritualistically describes the pleasures possible for a mother and daughter whose souls are identical and intertwined. Sophie, ever the dutiful daughter, remains unconvinced that she wants a soul identical to her controlling, sexually abusing, and mentally out-of-sync mother. Chancy explains the connection between the idea of the marassa and the sexual testing saying: "Martine, who wants to make sure that Sophie remains sexually 'whole,' persists in describing her acts of sexual abuse in terms of a spiritual 'twinning' of souls. Presented as a ritual enacted between mother and daughter through the generations, the 'testing' that scars Sophie for life is a product of the suppression of female sexuality and the codification of women's bodies as vessels for male gratification in marriage." (106)

The Cacos perpetuate this ritual, although none of the women in the family has ever married, in what Danticat terms a 'virginity cult'" (Chancy 121). Further, Chancy says:

> . . . Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) demonstrate[s] the extent to which Haitian women have been rendered invisible in a society itself typified through their sexualization and

> denigration. In this sense, the 'othering' of women within Haiti is the means by which the privileged classes attempt to legitimate the myth of a Haitian national identity anchored in male martyrdom. Sexuality, in both novels, serves as a pivotal symbol of Haitian women's attempts to formulate empowering identities. . . . *In Breath, Eyes, Memory* these mores are self-imposed and are, further, imposed by women on other women from one generation to the next. (Chancy 106-7)

In an interview with Danticat, Shea says, "In Breath, Eyes, Memory, Martine tells Sophie about 'The *Marassa* . . . two separate lovers [who] were the same person, duplicated in two.' Then, there is also this concept of 'doubling,' which Sophie does when Martine tests her. . . . " (Shea "Dangerous"). Compartmentalization of abusive acts is a typical behavior for a sexual abuse survivor to have had. Danticat says:

> "*Marassa* is actually part of the African tradition where there are twin deities. In the tradition of the Ibegi in Africa, twins are considered very special, in some cases to be very powerful. If one of the twins dies, the other will carry an effigy. . . . Going back to the mother-daughter relationship, the idea is that two people are one, but not quite; they might look alike and talk alike but are, in essence, different people." (Shea "Dangerous")

Danticat says:

> Sophie is saying, 'I'll gain strength. This is my body, but I will go somewhere else. The core of me is somewhere else.' In her case, she thinks of pleasant things--she imagines being in Haiti. . . .

> Doubling acknowledges that people make separations within themselves to allow very painful experiences, but also the separation allows people to do very cruel things. (Shea "Dangerous")

Sophie dissociates from the testing and gathers strength by imagining Haiti and her loving aunt Atie while Martine uses the doubling to suppress the knowledge that virginity testing is painful and damaging to the person being tested. We know that Martine experienced the same humiliation and trauma as Sophie does during the testing because of Atie's description of her and Martine's mother Ife testing the two Caoco sisters. Atie commiserates with Sophie telling her, "Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body" (Breath 20).

Chancy writes:

> Sophie's mother never comes to terms with the fact that the man who raped her in her late teens robbed her of her sexual autonomy; she perceives herself as 'damaged,' incapable, in fact, of being Erzulie, because she is no longer 'virginal,' or 'chaste,' a status the Caco women associate with social mobility. It is through marriage that freedom from poverty, and endless toil, can be achieved; marriage, however, is an institution that, historically, has been socially constructed in such a way as to benefit men and deny women their autonomy. (Chancy 123)

But Atie has come to realize through her own failed relationship that social mobility has to do with education and with literacy. Even thought Atie is the one who remains in Haiti she is the progressive and liberated sister who understands virginity's limited

usefulness to women and does her part to break the multigenerational cycle of her family's virginity cult by not testing her surrogate daughter Sophie, by offering Sophie comfort, and by participating in a non-traditional relationship.

In spite of Martine's knowledge of the emotional pain caused by the testing, she says, "The one good thing about my being raped was that it made the *testing* stop. The testing and the rape. I live both every day" (Danticat 170). Yet she continues to test Sophie while believing in her deluded state that she is caring for her daughter and elevating her emotional life by creating a marassa. Chancy writes, "The image of her mother as her *marassa* only serves to terrorize Sophie and alienate her from her identity, which becomes both sexualized and demonized in its association (by the mother) with *vodou*" (Chancy 124).

During the testing Martine terrorizes Sophie by criticizing her choice of partner telling her: "The love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea. You would leave me for an old man who you didn't know the year before. You and I we could be like *Marassas*. You are giving up a lifetime with me. Do you understand? There are secrets you cannot keep" (Danticat Breath 85). Martine jealously tries to keep Sophie for herself rather than let her have a relationship with Joseph a much older man.

Children grow up and individuate, and it is selfish and wrong to try to keep them for one's self. Parenting is a stewardship, not an ownership, and to selfishly guard children is not in their best interests. Martine tells Sophie that she cannot keep her body to herself just the way she and Atie were not able to control "this body" (Breath 20). According to Russell, "In those situations where the perpetrator shows

symptoms of depression or other forms of psychological dysfunction, the daughter's empathic response may lead to her revictimization in adulthood, a pattern commonly found among survivors (Russell 1986)" (Jacobs 140).

This is the case for Sophie but her sympathy for her depressed mother-other causes not a revictimization but a continued victimization, for after a break with her mother the two become as inseparable as ever—like the Marassas Sophie's mother describes in her manipulative stories. In an interview, Danticat says:

> "Often, mothers and daughters are friends, but they can't have an intense relationship as with a friend you can have a fight with. It depends upon what the issues are in your family, whether there are a lot of barriers to overcome. When parents come from another country and are living in a place where their role is so different, then they have extra barriers to this friendship because you have not only generational problems but these cultural things." (Shea "Dangerous")

"Danticat uses the symbol of the *marassa*, the cult of twins in *vodou*, to highlight the divisions that are created between women who have been brought up to deny their sexuality. In invoking *vodou* traditions, she strives, moreover, to disassociate them from their prevalent use as tools of state control during the Duvalier years of terror. Danticat also makes use of the principles of *pale andaki*, a practice of code switching particular to Haitian Creole, to underscore the complex dimensions of Haitian women's survival in varied social contexts" (Chancy 120).

"Therefore, Creole speech can take on double and even multiple meanings. The information it conveys can vary considerably according to the social context. The

diligent use of contradictory explicit and implicit references, for instance, is a highly esteemed art which Haitians call *palé andaki*" (Fleishmann 109).

It may well be that Sophie is the first woman in her family to vocalize her rejection of the testing—possibly because she is the first woman in her family exposed to American cultural ideals and norms—i.e. my body is my own property and a person's sexuality is that person's own business. Previous generations may not have had the voice, the experience of knowing different cultural traditions as Sophie has, and they may have been aware that they did not have a sympathetic audience for their complaints. Ultimately, though, Sophie is unconvinced by Martine's faulty reasoning and, according to Chancy, "Through the 'testing,' Sophie loses her mother a second time and instead of becoming her twin becomes her victim" (Chancy 126).

As an example of a healthy mother-daughter relationship, Sophie's Aunt Atie loves Sophie as a daughter yet she does not impose herself upon Sophie. Even with Aunt Atie acting as surrogate mother to Sophie there is none of the merger, enmeshment, or emotional incest one finds in Martine's treatment of her daughter.

Martine's deep need to partake vicariously of Sophie's life is caused by her continual struggle to erase the memory of the rape and by her desire to restore herself to the virgin status her family has taught her to worship. It is no wonder that Martine is cowed by the idea of virginity, for the Goddess Erzulie, a powerful figure in Haitian culture, binds the idea of romantic love with virginity.

When Martine tells Sophie that they are *Marassas*, that they are exactly alike, she " . . . strengthens the bond between perpetrator and victimized child; the child perceives the abuser as her only family ally, with whom she empathizes and from

whom she receives nurturing. Out of such empathic attachment, she seeks refuge with the parent who violates her," (Jacobs 137). Sophie does not turn to Atie, who had been a loving and protecting mother to her during her childhood, but she does tell her grandmother how destructive the impact of the abuse has been on her life. Grandma Ife takes responsibility for her part in perpetuating a generational cycle of sexual abuse and apologizes to Sophie saying, '"My heart, it weeps like a river,' she said, 'for the pain we have caused you'" (157). Further, the cyclical nature of abuse insures its continuation throughout the generations. Ife's admission and Sophie's vow to never test her daughter mark the end of the sexual testing in the Caoco family. Some current women writers choose childlessness for their characters which, in abuse narratives, symbolizes breaking the cycle of abuse. Other women writers choose motherhood for their characters, but stress the necessity of anti-abuse awareness, child development education, and constant vigilance against lapses into abusive parenting.

The link between sexual abuse and eating disorders is a documented phenomenon. My research led me to a surplus of information. According to the current literature, "Girls who are sexually abused are more prone to depression, panic attacks, eating disorders, drug use, and suicide" (Wright 77-8) and "The findings indicate that sexual and physical abuse are both risk factors for the development of bulimia nervosa" (Welch 633). Additionally, "The link [between eating disorders and sexual abuse] was considered plausible because certain features are commonly shared by patients with eating disorders and those who have been sexually abused, including low self-esteem, shame, and a negative attitude towards their bodies and sexuality

(Oppenheimer, Howells, Palmer, & Chaloner, 1985)" (Welch 634). And, even more specifically, "More recent studies have suggested that a history of childhood sexual or physical abuse may be more common in a subgroup of those with bulimia nervosa who respond poorly to treatment (Fallon, Sadik, Saoud, & Garfinkel, 1994; Gleaves & Eberenz, 1994)" (Welch 634). Sophie, in fact, has not made a complete recovery through psychotherapy. She continues to have sexual abuse survivor issues such as sexual dysfunction. She also struggles with bulimia throughout the novel.

According to Chancy, Sophie reacts to her relocation to her mother's house in New York and her distress over leaving her beloved Aunt Atie by exhibiting a predilection for her future eating disorder. Too well behaved and too desirous of pleasing Atie to make a fuss over leaving Haiti, Sophie expresses herself through a display of non-appetite the morning of her departure for New York. Chancey writes, "Sophie, however, knows her mother only as an absence; she reacts to her dislocation by withdrawing from the world which until this time had seemed so familiar, so unchangeable. When she is told that she will have to leave Haiti for her mother's New York, she says: 'I could not eat the bowl of food that Tante Atie laid in front of me. I only kept wishing that everyone would disappear' (14). Only later do we learn that her inability to eat the bowl of food is symptomatic of what will become a cycle of bodily abuse; once she is in the United States--a place her mother describes to her as a sort of paradise--Sophie becomes bulimic" (Chancy 122). Herman writes of sexually abused children, "Though the child has rationalized the abuse or banished it from her mind, she continues to register its effects in her body. The normal regulation of bodily states is disrupted by chronic hyperarousal. . . . Bedtime may be a

time of heightened terror rather than a time of comfort and affection, and the rituals of bedtime may be distorted in the service of sexually arousing the adult rather than quieting the child. Mealtimes may be similarly be times of extreme tension rather than times of comfort and pleasure. . . . Unable to regulate basic biological functions in a safe, consistent, and comforting manner, many survivors develop chronic sleep disturbances, eating disorders, gastrointestinal complaints, and numerous other bodily distress symptoms" (Herman, Trauma 108).

In a discussion of bulimics, Cooper writes:

> . . . bulimia is an attempt by the bulimic to identify boundaries between herself and her mother--an attempt at separation and individuation. The bulimic feels overwhelmed by another person, her mother, and symbolically enacts regaining control of herself and her life by the ingestion and rejection of nourishment, and her nourishing mother. The most sophisticated attempt at such explanation has been in object-relations theory. (Cooper 179)

Clearly, a bulimic woman's infancy contains a missing piece or step in this process during which something has gone enough awry to cause the woman to have misaligned autoerotic satisfactions and to feel no timely relief of frustrations by self-comforting. D. W. Winnicott's idea of the good enough mother stresses the developmental necessity of the infant failing to have all her needs instantly met. Because the infant must incorporate this "maternal failure" (10) the infant begins to develop a "growing sense of process" which marks "the beginnings of mental

activity" and the employment of autoerotic satisfactions "and the ability to relieve, fantasize, and daydream" (10).

According to Cooper, ". . .vomiting and its after-effects can act as a substitute for the expression of these feelings. The process and after-effects involved can mimic the expression of her negative feelings and ensuing catharsis" (Cooper 190).

Because Sophie's self-regulatory processes are misaligned she relieves feelings of dysphasia(emotional or mental discomfort or agitation often associated with the moods of eating disorders) by creating an even larger umbrella of dysphoria where the masking feelings are so unpleasant that the original feelings seem mild by comparison (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/**Dysphoria**). Ellmann states, "It is true that hunger depends on its context for its meaning, but it is also true that *self-inflicted* hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself. It de-historicizes, de-socializes, and even de-genders the body . . . " (Ellmann 14). In essence, feelings of dysphoria are eased by the disembodiment resulting from bulimic behaviors.

Herman writes:

> The normal regulation of emotional states is similarly disrupted by traumatic experiences that repeatedly evoke terror, rage, and grief. These emotions coalesce in a dreadful feeling that psychiatrists call 'dysphoria' and patients find almost impossible to describe. It is a state of confusion, agitation, emptiness, and utter aloneness" (Herman, Trauma 108) In addition, Herman writes, "Many survivors report that they developed the compulsion to self-mutilate quite early, often

before puberty, and practiced it in secret for many years. (Herman, Trauma 109)

Sophie experiences dysphoria, and, later, she self-mutilates by using a pestle to break her hymen, and also by bingeing and purging. Herman writes, "Self-injury is intended not to kill but rather to relieve unbearable emotional pain. . . . Purging and vomiting . . . become the vehicles by which abused children attempt to regulate their internal emotional states. Through these devices, abused children attempt to obliterate their chronic dysphoria and to stimulate, however briefly, an internal state of well-being and comfort that cannot otherwise be achieved" (Herman, Trauma 109). Breath's Haiti section reemphasizes the cooking-as- love theme prevalent in the novel. Cooking symbolizes family harmony when Sophie assumes a caretaking conciliatory role when she shops and cooks a Haitian-style meal for her family, which consists of women only. It is after this meal that Grandma Ife expresses her sadness and regret for the role she played in the abusive tradition of sexual testing and it is after this dinner that Sophie wills herself to exercise rather than vomit in an attempt to use this apology and compassion to break her bulimic cycle.

The primary reason for Sophie's functionality is because Sophie has the benefit of two supportive women in her life. Tante Atie, who cares for her in Haiti until she is twelve years old, is so loving that Sophie writes a mother's day poem with a daffodil to Atie "my mother" (Danticat 3) and Grandme Ife who remains a protective matriarch through family crises. Sophie is lucky to have had these maternal substitutes. Their love enables her to be a loving mother to her own

daughter Brigitte. However, Sophie is badly traumatized and left wondering at her "supportive adult's'" inability to fully protect her.

According to Edelman, who leans heavily on Alice Miller's theory of the enlightened witness:

> Two key factors appear to be critical for interrupting a negative parenting pattern. The first is the ability to express anger and resentment toward the rejecting mother during childhood and forgive her as an adult. The other is the early presence of a nurturing, supportive adult who compensates for a mother's shortcomings and helps a child develop the empathy and self-esteem she needs to one day be an attentive mother herself. (Edelman Mother 208)

Cooper writes:

> Because of Western socio-religious history, bulimia has been seen as a loss of control. However, I shall argue that it is in fact the method used by the bulimic for keeping control over elements of her life, which she considers, would be destructive, disruptive and frightening if expressed. . . . whereas anorexia is a position taken in order to say something loudly and publicly, bulimia is a position taken in order *not* to have to say something. (Cooper 175-6)

Sophie uses the control involved with bulimia as a manipulation to keep herself from being symbolically raped by a Tonton Maccoute as her mother was and to keep her body from being invaded by her mother and tests. If she can control her weight, her

food intake, then she creates the fantasy that she can control all foreign bodies that enter her body.

According to Ellmann, “perceiving food as something flowing into her, rather than something actively consumed, [the patient] fears she will be raped by what she eats, invaded by the other and defiled" (Ellmann 44). If food flows into Sophie at least she has the power to expel it, something she is unable do with her mother’s hands or symbolically with her mother’s rapist for she is unable to change history. Sophie binges and purges as a result of her sexual abuse survivor issues and she continues to confront her problems with sex in psychotherapy and a women’s sexual abuse survivor group.

Wanting to be a good wife she never tells her husband Joseph the trauma of their every sexual encounter for fear that he will not view her as a whole woman. While Ginny speaks of a few brief moments of sexual satisfaction within her marriage, what Sophie describes is abysmally painful one-sided pleasure: her sexual abuse survivor issues cause her to think of each sexual encounter as a performance for her husband’s pleasure.

According to Mary Pipher, "Many issues arise with dating. For example, girls who have been assaulted often learn to block out the experience of being sexual. When they want to be emotionally present, they may find that impossible. Sexual touch may trigger a dissociative reaction" (Pipher 229). After sex she binges and purges to relieve feelings of revulsion and anger that accompany her one-sided sex life. After having hidden her performance anxiety and lack of enjoyment from Joseph for so long, she is afraid to reveal her dysfunction.

According to Cooper, "Bulimia allows the expression (with ensuing catharsis) of forbidden rage, resentment, fear and other negative feelings, which are the product of demands made on the bulimic by others. The physical and emotional states achieved after a vomiting episide [sic] become very positively valued and the bulimic comes to crave them" (Cooper 191). This is why Sophie vomits after having sex—she feels residual rage at having something in her vagina—anything at all—even something that could potentially be pleasurable reminds her of her mother's fingers during the sexual testing. Because Sophie needs the dissociative state induced by vomiting to escape from the pain of the sexual testing memory she tries to expel her mother's presence in her vagina by vomiting nourishment, by purging the symbolic breast milk that is a mother's initial source of nourishing her infant in an effort ". . . to cleanse herself of her violation" (Chancy 126) and as a " . . . rejection of the controlling mother by rejection of notional breast (her nourishment), unwillingness to accept adult female sexuality with all that it implies and a desire to remain in a period of Freudian-type infantile sexuality" (Cooper 178).

Sophie's refusal to accept her adult female sexuality is most apparent in her obsessive care of her body. In addition to the binging and purging symptoms of bulimia she is scrupulous about her diet and obsessive about exercise. Sophie says, "I hate my body. I am ashamed to show it to anybody, including my husband" (Breath 123) and in an attempt to transform her body to its pre-pubescent asexual appearance, or how her body looked pre-sexual abuse she engages in the practices of bulimia and obsessively exercises to lose weight. She sees body fat as making her womanly and a womanly woman is subject to random attacks by men or a womanly woman is subject

to the intrusions of testing.[3] In a discussion of bulimia, Ellmann says, "This is soul food: but the binge-purge cycle of bulimia also emulates angelic eating, because 'the substance of food is prevented from changing into the substance of the body.' Victoria Shahly, another psychoanalyst, has argued that bulimics are acting out the very principle of metaphor. Just as metaphor 'is a way of "saying" something without actually saying it,' so bulimic vomiting provides 'a means of "eating" food without actually eating it.' According to Shahly, bulimics are 'possessed' by the metaphor of food, because they are compelled to take it literally, translating all their impulses into digestive terms" (Ellmann 48). Sophie's bulimia is a continual repetition of her statement that she will no longer allow her mother to sexually abuse her. Sadly, though, Sophie's obsession with her former sexual abuse and her bulimia stands in the way of her happiness.[4]

That Sophie has a child is a gesture of optimism—that the abuse will not continue into the next generation of daughters. In an interview, Danticat poses the question, "'So am I a political writer? I do my share of protesting, but I'm not in the forefront screaming. I'm maroonage.'" (Shea Traveling 49) Maroonage is an act of resistance covertly done to protect oneself. Danticat's novel is most certainly an act

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[3] " . . . the desire to appear unattractive to men is connected to anxiety and guilt over earlier sexual abuse" (Bordo 96).

[4] Bordo writes, "Paradoxically--and often tragically--these pathologies of female 'protest' . . . actually function as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produced them . . . . Yet, each hour, each minute that is spent in anxious pursuit of that ideal . . . is *in fact* time and energy diverted from inner development and social achievement" (Bordo 105). Naomi Wolf would agree with this statement on a broader-reaching level-women's pursuit of beauty diverts time, energy, and resources from career, family, and intellectual achievement.

bell hooks termed “writing back.” Just as Danticat speaks out through her finely tuned writing, education is all important in her novel.[5]

Sophie’s aunt Atie struggles to teach herself to read and write, and she is the enlightened character of her generation. In an interview, Danticat says, "What happens if the mother is not there? Then we mother ourselves, or we look for that in somebody else" (Shea "Dangerous"). Sophie finds her mother in Atie, and then again, after many years and many hardships, through understanding and forgiving her biological mother.

In an interview, Danticat says:

> "People who grew up without their mothers for one reason or another and then find themselves reunited with them--this is a very strong theme in the lives of Haitian women my age who were separated from their mothers early on. Mine was immigration, but for others it was worse. It's not so much the relationships but the circumstances that shaped the fabric of the relationship. What interests me most is the separation and healing: recovering or not recovering: Becoming a woman and defining what that means in terms of a mother who may have been there in fragments, who was first a wonderful memory that represents absence." (Shea "Dangerous")

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[5] Chancy contends, "Throughout the novel, education, and more specifically, literacy, are posited as the only means to salvation; ironically, access to literacy is connected to a life of exile; . . . Resisting this movement, the older generations, represented in part by Sophie's grandmother, cling to their sense of Haiti's 'glory days,' an invisible African past that is textualized in the novel through the oral folk tales the older generations tell to the younger ones" (Chancy 121).

Echoing Danticat's sentiments about finding a way to recover, " . . . Smiley says she wants the Cook family women 'to not be destroyed by what [their] father has done to [them]'--but 'to go into the future making lives for themselves' (37)" (Olson). Danticat and Smiley project an optimistic sentiment through their characters. In spite of wrongs done to them, in spite of their communities collusive efforts to subordinate women, Ginny and Sophie are able to overcome sexual abuse and oppression.

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