MAKE ROOM FOR MOTHER: A STUDY OF MOTHERHOOD AND THE MATERNAL INSTINCT IN 20th CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2010

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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In writing the maternal, or the 'mother,' the authors in this dissertation have undermined the existence of a mold, as it were, of maternal behavior, the maternal instinct, and of the act of mothering. That is, the roles that the women play in the works I discuss here problematize the assumption that there even exists any universal 'coda' or standards of behavior by which all mothering practices should abide. Writing mothers in such a way works to denaturalize the association of the feminine to the female in language. What this will hopefully result in is a rethinking of essence in writing the maternal.

My project examines the ways in which, through language, the often universally delineated function of mother as woman, representation and institution is splintered, so to speak, to reveal wider open spaces that have yet to be analyzed.

Here are several mothers who come to the experience of mothering from very different vantage points. I have chosen seven twentieth century works of fiction, autobiography, and biography. By investigating the manner in which each author treats the role of the mother in the text, I forge a relationship between them. Jeanette Winterson, Audre Lorde, Jamaica Kincaid, Sibilla Aleramo, Jane Lazarre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean Nathan each write from very disparate cultural circumstances as well as within various genres of literature, yet there is a certain continuum in each author's approach in narrating the maternal. That said, my project is a piecing together of many moving parts, and so it is necessary to offer some cultural context for each author.

One of the questions I try to answer pertains to who controls the narrative's trajectory? Is it the writer (narrator) or the subject? In this case the subject is usually the mother. That is, can a narrator daughter ever claim agency over the narrated mother in the text? I will also discuss the notions of *genre* and *gender* as they relate to the roles of women and power in language. To scrutinize the behaviors and language of mothers, daughters, mother figures, and maternal love is to consider whether or not

there is such a thing as a female/maternal *essence* or *nature*.

My arguments are informed, in part, by two major works of philosophy and gender studies. Luisa Muraro's *l'Ordine simbolico della madre* and Christine Battersby's *The Phenomenal Woman*. I use these, among a few other critical works, to anchor certain arguments surrounding what I speculate are the authors' intentions in writing the maternal as fluid and flexible. My choice of texts and the claims I make also challenge some of the theoretical positions that Muraro and Battersby take, namely Muraro's stance about the role of language and the potentiality that language has to precisely identify and represent the mother.

For clarity's sake, it is important to note that the maternal figures rendered here are both fictional characters created via literature (as with Winterson's Dog Woman) as well as real life women whose lives have either been first person narrated (as in the case of Jane Lazarre, Sibilla Aleramo) narrated via the daughter (as we see with Jamaica Kincaid, Simone de Beauvoir, and Lois Gould,) and finally, via a third party narrator, as with Jean Nathan's work on Dare Wright.

What I will argue throughout this dissertation is that language and literature have the authority to expose the notion of the *maternal instinct* as a tyrant of a postulation, seeming to be rooted as much in behavior and society as it is in biology. Further, when we see behaviors by the mothers in these works that might otherwise be deemed a perversion of the mothering instinct, it is important to reconsider that the mother here serves more so as a trope, or, to clarify, a manifestation of language and culture, than actual tangible figures. As such, these mothers' maternal instincts, if you will, often take the shape of a conceptual chasm, and are frequently unreflective of reality. In this way, I claim, the entire notion of a maternal instinct is a construct in need of rethinking.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my son, Graham Francis Hudson, for his exquisite existence and unconditional love. Graham, you are the single source of inspiration that sees me through each day, and are by far the most amazing project I have ever seen to completion, with this dissertation coming in a close second. This is an insufficient payback, but thank you to my parents Bing and Bo Brown for their unrelenting encouragement and support. I will find some way to repay you for your excellence!

The guidance from my committee advisors, Eugenia Paulicelli, Steve Kruger, and Clare Carroll, has been invaluable. Eugenia, I wholeheartedly appreciate your leading my dissertation committee. Your critical feedback has contoured my thinking in such a positive way. You have a unique ability as a teacher to suggest instead of insisting. Thank you.

There are also several people who have greatly assisted me along the way, whether intellectually, logistically, or emotionally. Thank you to: Lawrence Hudson, Jeanne Koehler, the Tishman Speyer mailroom miracles, Claudia Raiken, my fabulous doula, who provided me with the postpartum focus I needed, and the rest of my family and friends who had to hear about this topic for almost an entire decade. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

The women writers in this project offer their reader diverse portrayals of motherhood. That said, it is not enough that I present them simply as part of an already established framework of literature on motherhood and the maternal instinct. Instead, I work to resituate them in a completely different cadre. What interests me the most is that these authors not only perform, via their characters, ways of mothering that open up space for discussion about what acts are considered 'motherly,' but more importantly they give voice and offer agency to the sharply defined reality that is

mothering, motherhood, and the maternal. They, in short, invent another strain of motherhood altogether. In so doing, the questions of duty and desire are begged, and the notions of gender and genre are rethought. To elaborate on this point, it is very often the act of writing which serves as the only successful method attempted by the women at finding solace and achieving independence. Through close analytic and critical readings of works of autobiography, biography, and fiction, I will explore narratives that privilege the figure of the mother and reveal the possibilities of redefining the phenomenon of maternal representation.

My overall intention for this dissertation is threefold. Firstly, and most importantly, my aim is to illustrate, via a selection of twentieth-century literature, the vastness of maternal subjectivity by arguing that, while there undoubtedly does exist maternal love, it is neither always unconditional nor necessarily instinctual, as it is often enabled by sociological, biological, and psychological conditions. Secondly, I'll analyze the complex dialogic of maternal experience with kin, spouse, society, and self. It is

my final object to allow my textual analyses help render suspect the trite and clichéd nature of the phrase "maternal instinct." It is my premise that no one version of the maternal phenomenon is to be eclipsed by another. That is, whether celebrating the beauty of maternal unorthodoxy, as in the novel *Sexing the Cherry,* exploring the effects of maternal neglect, as in *Mommy Dressing,* expressing repressed rage, or working to excavate maternal origins, as in *Zami,* these works demonstrate the gamut of truths that reveal the maternal experience when severed from circumscribed conditions.

As varied works of literature, these texts operate on different levels of attentiveness to the figuring of the maternal. When resituated in the reframed context, which is the context of motherhood as a trope and a potent fabrication however, they represent an acute and subverting response to maternal narratives that, as Jane Lazarre suggests in *The Mother Knot,* are "not altogether wrong, but leave out half the truth."[1] Each chapter will ultimately question what types of acts and performances "might be maternal, without falling into

[1] Jane Lazarre, *The Mother Knot* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1976).

essentialism, which might judiciously represent the mother's contradictory double position."[2]

My study here implies that there exist other, perhaps adverse, transgressive emblems of motherhood that do not reify, but rather threaten the symbolic and cultural propulsion to reify a sense of fixity therein. And as a non-fixed entity, it is language, both written and oral, which will serve as the means for both a rewriting and furthering of maternal myths. The women writers I've situated in dialogue here raise questions which work to counter mainstream patriarchal discourse, and in so doing suggest other ways to sift through the often predetermined character of the maternal. This dialogic of the 'maternal' versus the 'essence of' the maternal is precisely what Christine Battersby's 1998 philosophically based work *The Phenomenal Woman*[3] confronts head on.

Battersby begins by presenting the figure of the woman as a dual operation. "In the history of western metaphysics," Battersby says, "woman is phenomenal in a

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[2] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 189.

[3] Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman. Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

double sense. She's something wonderful, amazing, astonishing, and peculiar. But she's also just a surface deviation, mere 'appearance'; unrepresentative of that distinctive, underlying 'essence' of humanity that philosophers have associated with 'truth'.[4] She emphasizes first and foremost the need to find a new *metaphysics* to take the female subject positioning, not as superior, or exclusive, but simply as the norm. Her assertion that "the only way to move forward is to move beyond firm identities" cautions all future theorists of metaphysics never again to speak of essence or ontology without realizing 'woman' as "central to the notion of personhood and self."[5] Yet when women are mothers, issues of self and identity change and render an experience not yet altogether understood. Battersby is firmly rooted in this project as a major voice of opposition to essentialism with the claim that "any talk of essence or ontology is anti-feminist in operation or intent."[6]

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[4] Battersby 1.

[5] Battersby 16-17.

[6] Battersby 15.

Manifesting a great deal of resistance to 'maternal norms' (if such a phrase can be said) in each respective work, the narratives here privilege the agency of the mother, and make a clear distinction, as does Adrienne Rich, between the potentiality of giving birth versus the ability and willingness to mother. Not the central focus, but applicable to the works nonetheless, is that fact that in virtually all of these works, the father figure is either absent, exists solely in memory, or operates as a kind of backdrop, accessorizing the family instead of completing it. From being a non-person to a berated figure of little worth, the father will be discussed within the framework of a centralized maternal subjectivity. Also, in *The Mother Knot*, *Une mort tres douce,* and *Mommy Dressing,* it is the mother figure that provides the ultimate impetus for the creative process. In *A Mother Knot,* Jane Lazarre seems to be working out her ambivalence toward the essentialist model of motherhood in a very candid and impressionistic way by recounting the story of her coming to motherhood. Her son's birth is certainly the impetus for the writing process, but quite differently than in Simone de Beauvoir's *Une mort tres douce.* Here, Beauvoir's writing is directly

inspired by her actual mother, not a 'figure' nor a 'notion,' but the actual woman herself. As she witnesses her mother's body and mind deteriorate, she questions ever so determinedly the business of a maternal essence. And lastly, in Lois Gould's *Mommy Dressing,* the writing isn't as much inspired by mother as it takes the form of a cathartic exercise in order to more or less purge herself of the mother. All of the works mentioned above nonetheless legitimize efforts to dissolve the archetypal markers that constitute rarely seen renderings of the maternal as well as problematize, defy, and even alter the conventions that contain narratives of maternal consciousness, thus opening up plenty of space for much needed, discursive articulation on the topic.

Sociologist/psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow concludes, at the very end of her book *The Reproduction of Mothering* that "biology and instinct do not provide adequate explanations for how women come to mother."[7] For Chodorow, instinct serves as a fraudulent discourse for women. In other words, instinct is that esoteric

[7] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 25

phenomenon which is supposed to link women to eternal duties of the flesh. It is therefore entirely comprehensible then that this discourse is frequently negated, no?

Through the creative process, that is, through language and the act of writing, the identity of the mother, then, is assumed not ascribed. As such, the question of the maternal is elucidated by neither faithful adherence to, nor utter disregard for, the cultural and social mythologies surrounding the maternal. Represented as the loving virgin, the obsessive hysteric, the negligent abuser, or the absent 'non-maternal' mother, all such renderings highlight one general truth: that there exists a considerable dichotomy between what it is to mother and what it is to speak about mothering, a caveat Adrienne Rich speaks of as experience vs. institution.[8]

Before laying out the synopses of each chapter, it is important to understand that narratives focusing on maternal identity and subject formation which go beyond

[8] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born-Motherhood as Experience and Institution (* New York: Norton, 1995).

Oedipal patterns will undoubtedly focus largely on developing alternate women-centered mythologies, at the center of which one can locate the mother figure as the means and the end, for better or worse. Here, the origins of civilization are certainly not the primal struggle between father and son, but are instead by and large between mother and daughter or, as in the case of Jeanette Winterson's Dog Woman, mother and son.

My first chapter will be *Mapping the Matrix,* in which I will use Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Audre Lorde's *Zami.* This chapter will juxtapose the concept of the maternal as a theoretical subject of sexual difference with the corporeality of motherhood as portrayed by the mother figure in each work. Separate from the practice of empowering the maternal through the use of metaphors, in the two works discussed in this chapter, it is also physicality which facilitates agency. Whether or not the figure of 'the' mother is part of a material reality for any one subject, the fact remains that it is always 'a' woman, 'a' mother, who enables genealogy and ultimately allows anyone of us to reference, yearn for, or even reject a particular

'origin'. Further, it would be impossible to speak of origins without introducing the work of Luisa Muraro, who has made the claim that we stabilize an 'original' relationship with the matrix of life by integrating our childhood with our present experience. Muraro's 1991 *L'ordine simbolico della madre* serves as a very useful starting point for beginning the discussion on Winterson and her very special brand of mothering.

Jeanette Winterson's novel *Sexing the Cherry,* at the helm of which is a tour de force named Dog Woman, is about a woman in possession of power, strength, a son, and also fear. Dog Woman's son begins the novel with his own birth as a starting point; "My name is Jordan. This is the first thing I saw."[9] Through the Althusserian act of calling himself a name, it is as if Jordan, the son, has summoned himself and linguistically establishes himself as an individual outside of time and space. Jordan then immediately invokes the mother figure, yet her name remains a seemingly irrelevant component. This is interesting because later on, Jordan's mother, aka Dog Woman,

[9] Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing The Cherry* (London: Random House, 1989), 9.

begins her side of the story by saying "I had a name but I have forgotten it."[10] Jordan speaks of her simply as "my mother" as he recalls the details of his, albeit figurative, terrifically fabled birth. About his mother, he says, "she scooped me up; she tied me between her breasts whose nipples stood out like walnuts. She took me home and kept me there with fifty dogs and no company but her own."[11] While she possesses superbly protective 'maternal' instincts, she firmly maintains that she did not need a man to become a mother: "I would have liked to pour out a child from my body but you have to have a man for that and there's no man who's a match for me."[12]

Not only tracing matrilineage, but praising it, and revitalizing its potency is what, in large part, binds Winterson and Lorde's texts. The mother in *Zami* resembles, narratively and mythically speaking, Winterson's Dog Woman. Lacking, and not concerned by this lack, any appropriated womanly or maternal charms, so to speak, these women, as rendered in the works,

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[10] Winterson 11.

[11] Winterson 10.

[12] Winterson 11.

possess powers that exceeded typical powers ever attributed to a female, let alone a mother. Most importantly, they are both gifted with the power to conceal the fact that being a woman in each text's cultural and historical context has its obvious limitations. In fact, Lorde writes that as a child, she thought her mother "had a great deal more power that she actually had. Invested in this image of herself, [she] took pains, I realize now, to hide from us as children, the many instances of her powerlessness."[13] Likewise, Dog Woman's son Jordan, right before setting off on his big adventure across the sea, states "I want to be like my rip-roaring mother who cares nothing for how she looks, only for what she does. She has never been in love, and no, never wanted to be either. She is self-sufficient and without self-doubt."[14]

In both Winterson's and Lorde's texts we have a vision of mothering that is not explained away in metaphoric, archetypal, or Freudian terms. At best, it can be

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[13] Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (California: The Crossing Press, 1982), 17.

[14] Winterson 101.

described as visceral and in short, an overt challenge to the traditional system of representation that supplies the stuff that comprises the well-marketed and mythic brand of motherhood. In my next chapter *In the Flesh- Motherhood as Political Occupation* I delve into exactly what this stuff is that comprises the brand of motherhood that many of us might buy into.

In Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born, Rich* asserts that we "need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own flesh."[15] In the second chapter I study Sibilla Aleramo's *Una Donna* and Jane Lazarre's *The Mother Knot* for signs that these women recognize this *imagined world* as paramount to their own survival. My arguments in chapter two will also further Adrianna Cavarero's notion that "the corporeal always and everywhere seeps back into political discourse, revealing itself indeed as that discourse's foundation."[16] Corporeality, embodiment and selfhood will be at the core of this comparative discussion,

[15] Rich 285.

[16] Deanna Shemek, introduction to *Stately Bodies: literature, philosophy, and the question of gender. Relating Narratives: storytelling and selfhood,* by Adriana Caverero (London: New York: Routledge, 2000), 9.

with emphasis on Christine Battersby's *The Phenomenal Woman.* In these texts, the concept of motherhood, met with intense ambivalence by the woman to whom the label is affixed, hinges on a faulty foundation, and is, at best, resolved to be a stricture of sorts in which the women find themselves, happily at times, wretchedly at others. This is all in the face of less than usual expressions of unconditional love. At issue here is also the question of how we are to see these women and their audacious actions: political, brave, or as abominable and essentially non-maternal. Through these texts we will bear witness to Battersby's assertions made visible, notably the refusal to accept that "the self is inside the body in the same way that a body is inside a room or a house."[17] Instead, I claim, the body is a "revolutionary space" on which discussions of identity are not necessarily rooted in an understanding that the self is unitary or contained. Endowed with a keen political sensibility and verbal outspokenness about the sex/gender system of which they are a part, both Aleramo and Lazarre possess a certain level of

[17] Battersby 40

lucidity concerning the plight of the woman, especially the adverse nature of the marriage institution.

In *Una Donna,* there is a rape, and the autobiographical narrator, Sibilla herself, must therefore ask herself the question, "appartenevo ad un uomo, dunque?"[18] "did this man own me?"[19] With this interrogation, Aleramo, neither fearful of her rapist nor resolved to seek help, is rather bewildered as to how or why to carry on a life so deeply marred by such trauma. The notion of ownership is one that dominates this woman's psyche. What results is the need to create and inhabit a space that is all her own, apart from the binds which tie her to her world as a mother, living with her husband and rapist. This woman, void of poetic delusions of liberation, abandons her only son and withdraws from that space, as did Ingeborg Bachmann's *Undine,* "defiant and unpossessed."[20]

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[18] Sibilla Aleramo, *Una Donna (*Rome and Turin: STEN, 1906), 27.

[19] Sibilla Aleramo, *A Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 36.

[20] Deanna Shemek, introduction to *Stately Bodies: literature, philosophy, and the question of gender. Relating Narratives: storytelling and selfhood,* by Adriana Cavarero (London: New York: Routledge, 2000), 9.

In *The Mother Knot*, no such bodily violence from a third party ensues. However, issues revolve around ownership of a woman's own self, not due to rape or any other type of criminal victimization, but instead due to the act of giving birth and having a child. "This world, in all its wonder and horror, seemed to belong more to my tiny son, sleeping in his carriage, than it did to me."[21] I conclude this chapter with the bold suggestion that the maternal instinct could possibly be as much a force of habit as it is a force of nature.

Chapter 3 is entitled *A Shadow of Self: Jamaica Kincaid's Daughters and their Mothers*. This chapter's discussion focuses on the means by which memory, repression, and flashback enact the agency of the mother in her efforts to validate, recuperate, and affirm identity, fragmented by the past.

My discussion will in part use memory as a trope. I look to Philippe Lejeune's essay "The Autobiography of Those Who Cannot Write" as a starting point for a discussion on authorship and narrative truth. When compounded with the maternal bond and memory, as

[21] Lazarre 39.

Kincaid's works are, the narratives take on almost mythological significance. What I aim to do is juxtapose the ambivalence of the daughters and the persistence of the mothers. At once, the daughters we encounter here remain subsumed by the mother's power while simultaneously attempting to remove themselves from the mother's grasp.

Jamaica Kincaid's works included in my project can be seen as works all dealing with some sort of loss.. *The Autobiography of my Mother,* in particular, is more so an incantation of never having had. It is the autobiographical tragedy of the main character, Xuela, who, upon learning that her mother "died at the moment [she] was born came to feel that for [her] whole life [she] had been standing on a precipice."[22] The problem of the self in this text is intrinsically bound up with the notion of eternity, with the distinction between the two always minute. This is because Xuela's story is told against a landscape that is overcome with, not necessarily absence, but rather non-existence. She recounts the ties, imagined or real, that she may have

[22] Jamaica Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother* (Penguin. New York, 1996.) , 3.

with this woman. She revels in everything "native" that is analogous with the mother, and exposes her through the only means at her disposal: memory and language. As a presence outside of the spoken word, forcibly narrated via a voice that speaks another language, Xuela's mother is relegated to a narrated existence, or, as Cavarero would perhaps posit, she is a "narratable self." For Xuela, piecing together her mother is contingent on imagination and sparse memory, and therefore, is not reflective of an autobiographical consciousness leading to narration. As such, the role of language becomes vital given that it is Xuela's intention to approximate not embody the maternal figure.

With Xuela, the irony lies in the fact that the only means by which Xuela can create this woman is language. At base, it is the desire in Xuela to create a maternal figure who sustains such a narrative. As Xuela wishes to expose her mother, not become her, Kincaid offers a new understanding of the origin of the matrix by asserting the relevance of being a female sexed subject constituted within a female genealogy. The next chapter is wholly dedicated to the business of being

that female sexed subject in writing, writing the mother, and the role of language as it relates to the daughter and her subjectivity.

Chapter 4, *Death Becomes Her: Writing Mother as 'Other' in Simone de Beauvoir's Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter and Une mort tres douce* is a discussion of the phenomenon of the daughter/subject assuming a firm identity only via the death of the mother, especially in terms of how, via circumscription of death, the figure of the mother is taken out of the framework in which she is formerly imprisoned and, only through language, re-evaluated. That is, the narrator (the daughter) forms an identity that has been thought anew in terms of embodiment, memory, and loss. The act of narration fosters a different kind of self, a self that is almost solely focused on the natality of the woman (dying or dead) at the helm of the text. I will explore what it means for the author to live with a dead/dying parent—as a daughter, marking the difference that gender makes in such a situation. For Beauvoir, her sick mother, for whom "le monde s'etait reduit aux

dimensions de sa chambre,"[23] brings to light the notion of the woman's body as a mechanical construct, apart from emotive possessions, whose foundation (body) is crumbling, whose door (mouth) goes askew, and whose words need translating upon exit. It is for this reason that the question of voice is so crucial in the text. Beauvoir reinstates meaning to her mother's life and is overcome with grief, more than anything because she believed there was little or no true resemblance between her mother and herself, Simone basically being the family breadwinner. Nonetheless, she finds herself steeped in a sort of unwilling interconnectedness,

> Je parlai a Sartre de la bouche de ma mere, telle que je l'avais vue le matin et de tout ce que j'y dechiffrais: une gloutonnerie refuse, une humilite presque servile, de l'espoir, de la detresse, une solitude - celle de sa mort, celle de sa vie - qui ne voulait pas s'avouer. Et ma propre bouche, m'a-t-il dit, ne m'obeissait plus: j'avais pose celle de maman sur mon visage et j'en imitais malgre moi les mimiques.[24]
>
> I talked to Sartre about my mother's mouth as I had seen it that morning and about everything I had interpreted in it - greediness refused, an almost servile humility, hope, distress, loneliness...my mouth was not obeying me

[23] Simone de Beauvoir, *Une mort tres douce* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 112.

[24] De Beauvoir 47.

anymore: I had put Maman's mouth on my own face and in spite of myself, I copied its movements.[25]

Other than voice, at the core of Beauvoir's text are questions of identity, aging, and loss. Whereas with Kincaid's texts, the reader is not privy to this type of corporeal exposition of the mother, Beauvoir makes out of it an entire novel. I will discuss the impact of such a textual exposition of the body of the mother on Beauvoir's newfound understanding of the maternal, drawing on Nancy K. Miller's 2000 work *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death*[26] as well as Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*.[27] The link between these works and the two primary sources in this chapter is the notion of textuality and corporeality. Kristeva and Miller examine subjectivity but also the subject of writing itself. To that end, Leon S. Roudiez's introduction advises that all we have is the text and that the text and its language must remains the main point of departure. I switch gears in chapter five from the role of language itself to an examination

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[25] Simone de Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death,* tr. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 31.

[26] Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1996).

[27] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

of the language and behavior of the artist/mother for the last two works in my discussion.

This last chapter, entitled *For Art's Sake: From Obsession to Abandonment,* privileges the agency of the mother, and makes a clear distinction, as does Adrienne Rich, between the potentiality of giving birth versus the ability and willingness to mother. *For Art's Sake: From Obsession to Abandonment* renders problematic the already "uneasy intersection [of] motherhood, identity, and creativity."[28] In this chapter I will examine two depictions of the eccentric maternal from the perspective of either a third party or kin of the mother in question. Jean Nathan's *The Secret Life of the Lonely Doll* will focus on the obsessive artist mother, while my analysis of Lois Gould's text *Mommy Dressing* will revolve around the issue of abandonment by a mother/artist.

Here, I work to weave together the relationship between women, madness, and the maternal. I will examine how the role of the unsentimental, self-possessed, and

[28] Moyra Davey, *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood,* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001).

often malevolent mother figure works to restructure the discourse of the maternal. While the narratives construct these women as mothers, first and foremost, it is quickly understood that, as mothers, they express no concern about the obligations imposed upon women as such.

Significantly, what seems to be missing in these women is any intimation of an altruistic tie or bond, assumingly made permanent by the act of being a mother. Often ensconced in mental illness, depression, and/or various types of abuse, these women provide torturous predicaments for their children, yet the crisis lies in the inability of the children to either completely identify with, or remove themselves, from the mother. Further, no theoretical framework is offered to explain away this phenomenon. A crude rendering of these cases may characterize the mothers in these texts as simply selfish and negligent. This would be not necessarily inaccurate but rather incomplete as a characterization. These women could be termed, to use E. Ann Kaplan's label, "postmodern mothers."[29] In this work, Kaplan

[29] E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), 20.

distinguishes three predominant mother paradigms that evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along with the industrial revolution and bourgeois culture - those of the saintly, self-sacrificing mother, the over-protective mother, and finally, the malevolent mother, who does harm to her children. These paradigms of Kaplan's serve as an historical background against which to view discourses on contemporary motherhood. Postmodern theories introducing the concept of flexible identities enable readers to conceptualize the twentieth-century women written about in the works here as possessing a multitude of identiy based traits instead of being subject to a fixed identity - sex object, mother, etc. As 'postmodern,' these women are able to comfortably claim many different positions and subjectivities. This thinking opens up new possibilities and new ways of thinking about women and their representation as mothers.

Constructed through and responding to social and historical changes in the discourse on womanhood and femininity, women like Dog Woman shed light on the reality that translating the mother figure and the maternal instinct into language allows for the

discursive constraints on a 'motherly' code of behavior to be called into question. And while it is true that mothers like Medea and Lady Macbeth prove that so called anti-motherly behavior has been in operation long before the writing about it took place, the mothers in my project aren't being classified or defined in the same way as these mothers have been. They do not subvert a 'maternal instinct'. Rather, they expand the limits of defining motherhood. Inherent in all of the women at issue in these chapters is a notion of unpredictability. The narrators in this chapter's works observe each mother as a scientist would examine a suspicious gene pattern in a DNA study, duly noting key gestures, breaths, and even non-actions, as if one move would drastically alter the outcome of the equation, working hard to betray, for better or worse, the torrent of institutionalized codes of maternal behavior. Are these women, then, peculiar deviants of a singular species, so to speak, or are they comprised of the same "stuff" that even the truest and *dearest* of mommies are made of?

A discussion of the maternal in contemporary times through the lens of a particular literary discourse should clarify my overall project as a compilation of unique, if not altogether off kilter, narratives of mother/mothering, which have, not necessarily rooted, but rather pronounced themselves in modern times. It is evident that the emergence of psychoanalysis compounded with the expanding worlds of feminism and feminist literary theory has helped engender an alternate economy of maternal representation that is beyond traditional plot structures.

I hope to engender serious discourse surrounding alternate maternal economies. What these economies consist of are representations that separate the maternal figure from the metaphors and fictions that have already rooted themselves so deeply in such central places as language, theory and identity. I aim not to exploit but rather elucidate the complex conditions around which women come to mother. I am focused on the conditions of women and their survival, and to that end, this dissertation is a project that works to make new offerings to readers and mothers with

regard to the maternal and the notion of the maternally prescribed instinct.

CHAPTER 1

"Mapping the Matrix in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Audre Lorde's *Zami*"

This discussion may initially seem an unlikely pairing of two twentieth-century writers, given their vastly different literary and cultural origins. However, what justifies the bringing together of Jeanette Winterson and Audre Lorde is their unique rendering and understanding of the mother. She is at once a fixed entity, tangible and present, as well as symbolic shelter, fluid and elusive. The elusive aspect of these mothers is what brings me to clarify my agenda with the notion of the journey and mapping. The narratives take the shape of both a symbolic as well as a real time geographical journey in which Dog Woman and Zami are virtual objects of displacement. They leave their homes, Dog Woman as mother pursuing the trajectories of her son, and Zami as a daughter in search of an identity. They find themselves traveling the world. Dog Woman's journeys privilege the agency of

imagination, while Lorde's are much less abstract and more geographical. Dog Woman wonders, "does it matter if the place cannot be mapped as long as I can still describe it?"[1] while Zami acutely focuses on the tangibility of the island that her mother came from, Carricaou. Lorde herself didn't find this tiny island on a map until she was in her twenties, subsequently adding to the obscurity of her mother's origins as well as the notion of journey and place.

Zami is Audre Lorde's eleventh published work. It is labeled an autobiography, even though Lorde claims an original category for the work, that of 'biomythography'. What this term suggests is that Audre Lorde the writer/activist/mother/lesbian/ warrior encompasses many selves in one. To further clarify, the rendering of her 'self' in writing is a multi faceted project, and before contemporary critical terminology such as 'hybrid,' or 'border' identity emerged, Lorde put forth her own idea of the 'self' in progress. Zami, like Dog Woman, is many selves in one, and defies almost all

[1] Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (London: Random House, 1989), 15.

categorization. *Sexing the Cherry* is Jeanette Winterson's fifth published work, and her fourth work of fiction. Like in many of her other works, the focus on the female and the female body is paramount, and to illustrate her profoundly original characters, she relies heavily on myth, fairytales, and history.

Jeannette Winterson was born in 1959 in Manchester, England, and adopted into a strict Pentecostal home. Evangelizing by 6, she left home at 16 after declaring herself a lesbian, and sought out a college degree at St. Catherine's College in Oxford, England. Her novels stretch language and behavior to its limits, testing the fluidity and essence of all things seemingly stationary. Winterson writes from the periphery of physicality and imagination. To date, the figure of the mother in *Sexing the Cherry* is the singular most prominent mother character in any Winterson novel. Winterson herself is not a mother.

Against a different urban backdrop, yet entrenched

in a similar search for personal and artistic identity as Winterson is Audre Lorde. Born to Caribbean immigrant parents in New York in 1934, left home at 20 to attend college and begin her academic and personal journey into self fulfillment. Within the framework of autobiographical writing by lesbians, it would seem that, in looking at Jeanette Winterson and Audre Lorde, the works most easily aligned are *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Zami*. My discussion here, however, centers not around the authors' sharing of a genre per se, but instead of a general thinking about the figure of the mother. This desire to render the mother figure in language crosses temporal, cultural, and literary strictures.

The common ground for both writers is indeed feminist autobiography. And while I choose not to focus solely on that crossroad, their works do incite useful discussions of sexuality, class inequalities and gender hierarchies. But that is just the beginning of what their literary achievements have granted the reading public. Another shared area of

exploration for both writers is identity, particularly female identity. Identity functions as a major trope with both writers. The individual approach towards understanding identity, however, does vary widely with both Lorde and Winterson. Whereas Audre Lorde is a pioneer of the multicultural self, Jeanette Winterson prides herself on being more gender bending than multicultural, with characters whose sexuality and gender role adherence shifts intriguingly throughout any given work.

What is rooted in the title of this chapter, "Mapping the Matrix," within the context of both works, can best be described as that which the Italian feminist philosopher Luisa Muraro labels the "symbolic order".[2] Muraro reconsiders the concept of woman by privileging the relationship with mother, in large part, but not solely, by underscoring a return to the body. Inherent to both of these writers is the understanding that the mother can be

[2] The most vital detail about this order is that it does not "repropose the male notion of power and authority". Instead, it reifies the link between the maternal as a symbolic concept and the "social authority of women in the flesh". Francesca Novello, "A Critical English Translation of Luisa Muraro's L'Ordine simbolico della madre" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1994), 82.

found, if nowhere else, in or through the body. Winterson and Lorde add a spatial dimension to the discussion, thus illustrating in their works a similar penchant for returning to the original place of the mother, and they both do so by using body, place, and time.

Above all else, Jeanette Winterson's Dog Woman and Audre Lorde's Zami use the maternal as a navigating force, a metaphorical map, if you will, to guide each of them on their respective journeys. These are figures of creative audacity that revel in an instinctive power that is often the single strongest force driving them, which I am simply terming 'women's love'. Whether it is love *of* a woman (as in Zami) or else a woman's love towards something or someone (as with Dog Woman toward her son Jordan), both women possess a great deal of agency and physicality. The maternal becomes the point of origin from which all is articulated. Jordan alludes to how his mother almost serves as a compass to guide him forward as well as help him find his way back, even though the return for Jordan is often imaginary. He says,

> The shining water and the size of the world. I have seen both again and again since I left my mother on the banks of the black Thames, but in my mind it is always the same place I return to, and that one place not the most beautiful nor the most surprising.[3]

That place is his mother. Mother love and maternal behavior serve as a force field through which both Jordan and Zami conjure their identities. That is why I am choosing to utilize the theoretical work of Luisa Muraro, a leading figure in Italian feminism. In *The Symbolic Order of the Mother,* Muraro extricates the figure of the mother from the well of writing surrounding the 'woman.' The mother, for Muraro, is not a by-product of the woman's function, but instead she is an ontological process unto herself. Likewise, Dog Woman and Zami are creations of the fantastic[4]. Luisa Muraro's philosophical findings are helpful in understanding how the 'mother

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[3] Winterson 17.

[4] Mine Özyurt Kýlýç, a professor at the Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey, wrote her PhD thesis on Winterson, claiming that, "in the hands of writers with feminist intents, the fantastic becomes a perfect tool for deconstructing old-established gender roles." M. Özyurt Kýlýç, *"The Function Of The Fantastic In The Works of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson"* (PhD diss., Middle East Technical University, 2005), iv.

as trope' works in both feminist narratives, in particular how this understanding moves toward a necessary re-thinking of gender and identity.

Muraro departs from theorizing about the mother in terms of unrealistic and often fantastical notions of childbirth and childrearing, and instead, affirms:

> I do not speak of the mother metaphorically. I speak of her realistically, and in order to be clear, I will renounce the beautiful and rich language that develops from the metaphor of the mother and the symbolism of birth.[5]

The maternal in the texts is mapped and traceable due to the work of kin (mother, father, sister, etc). I argue here that Jeanette Winterson and Audre Lorde share the literal use of maps, as well as the figurative use of 'place'. I will discuss both works in depth later in the chapter, but I first want to give ample context for my arguments. Each work uses the notion of space as well as place in locating the maternal. More interestingly, they

[5] Novello 48.

both use public versus private space: a city street, the open sea, flea markets, the bank of a river, a public square. In the prologue to *Gender Space Architecture,* Leslie Kanes Weisman discusses the idea of space as power. She claims that "the appropriation and use of space are political acts"[6]. In this respect, Winterson and Lorde work to restructure the rigid notions of gendered space for their characters' sake. What makes their projects even more unique is the fact that they attempt to do so using the authority of the 'maternal'.

What makes Winterson 'political,' to use Weisman's term, is that she wholly dominates male dominant, non-domestic space such as a 17th century public square in London. She is an anti-superheroine of sorts, unapologetic and fierce, unmercifully partaking in vigilante justice. She shoves the faces of corrupt Kings into her soiled undergarments. Yet none of her actions are gratuitous. The text clearly illustrates that the reason she acts as such is explained away by her

[6] Leslie Kanes Weisman, "Women's Environmental Rights: A Manifesto," in *Gender Space Architecture: an Interdisciplinary Introduction,* ed. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.

fierce maternal instinct: all that she does is in order to protect her son. The point I am making here is that Dog Woman's actions do not support a potential criticism that she may simply be appropriating masculinity by behaving as she does. Instead, under the auspice of maternal love, Dog Woman succeeds, I am claiming, with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in pocket, in performing subversive acts both verbally and physically which work to reveal the artificiality of gender based behavior and representations. There are countless episodes that serve as evidence of Dog Woman's unexpected and even at times deviant behavior. I will point out a few to begin coloring my argument appropriately. Once, upon trying to return to her former hut with her son after a trip abroad, she is met by enemy guards. She gets into a physical scuffle with them all, is then shot, but amazingly comes back at the assailants, removes the bullet from her body, and goes after them even more furious than before. She ends by single handedly dismembering someone. Also, once when a local self proclaimed herbalist (and con artist, according to Dog Woman) gathers a crowd together to try and charge money for a peek at a

newly discovered and exotic fruit, Dog Woman acts the rebel and says:

> I told Johnson that if he didn't throw back his cloth and let us see this wonder I'd cram his face so hard into my breasts that he'd wish he'd never been suckled by a woman, so truly I would smother him. He starts humming and hawing and reaching for some coloured jar behind his head, and I thought, he'll not let no genie out on me with its forked tongue and balls like jewels, so I grabbed him and started to push him into my dress. He was soon coughing and crying because I haven't had that dress off in five years.[7]

Both Winterson and Lorde examine the maternal as 'site' in *Sexing the Cherry* and *Zami*[8] by acknowledging the all encompassing agency of the mother at the onset of each work. But what do such efforts to locate the maternal and centralize a narrative around it signify? Unlike the ability to

[7] Winterson 12.

[8] Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (California: The Crossing Press, 1982).

identify and locate, the particular origins of a genre or of a trend in critical theory on a literary map of sorts, the task of trying to examine the trajectory of the 'maternal,' is quite problematic, especially when these mother figures are themselves on a journey of epic proportion.

Winterson asserts, through the voice of Dog Woman, that it does not matter if a place can be mapped as long as that place is describable. I make the claim that Winterson seems much more interested in abstraction and spaces, whereas Lorde privileges the physical reality of people and places. There are moments, however, when Dog Woman enacts the journey on her own and out of desperation and love, picks up and follows her son. Following Jordan around is what seems to quell Dog Woman's concern about Jordan's well being. The mother's actual pursuit of the son is quite different than Zami's need to locate on a map her mother's homeland, the island of Carricaou. It is their individual motivation that sets them apart. Zami's mapping efforts initially prove to be a marginalizing exercise, almost ending in futility, as she does not find the island on an

actual physical map until she is 26 years old. Conversely, in *Sexing the Cherry,* Dog Woman yearns to be the maternal homeland from where her son Jordan will depart. She is his origin. He does leave her for adventurous pursuits only to sail around the world and return. He asserts: "The shining water and the size of the world. I have seen both again and again since I left my mother on the banks of the black Thames, but in my mind it is always the same place I return to.[9]"

The representations of these mothers place strong emphasis on selves as multiple and categorization as futile. Space and place are metaphorical concepts that work to emphasize the fluidity in how the characters come to identify with the worlds in which they live as well as with themselves. I study these two works in particular because they both separate the maternal realm from the constraints of gender based rules of behavior.

[9] Winterson 17.

Sexing The Cherry:

Jeanette Winterson illustrates the idea that from the time that a mother has a child (notwithstanding biology), there is a constant tension of ebbing and flowing. With the imagery of water intertwined with the background of discovery and the journey, Winterson creates a narrative that ensconces the maternal body (Dog Woman) as fixed and the kin (Jordan) as stray. She posits, after having almost literally fished her son from the Thames, "when Jordan was a baby he sat on top of me as a fly rests on a hill of dung. And I nourished him as a hill of dung nourishes a fly, and when he had eaten his fill he left me."[10]

For Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* signifies a genre expansion of the already vast landscape of what is called Speculative Fiction, or Feminist Science Fiction. Wolfe lobbied for a 'room of one's own,' while Winterson claimed the entire world - for herself and her adopted son. Dog Woman plays the part of a warrior, fierce and confrontational, as

[10] Winterson 11.

well as genuinely protective of the boy Jordan she takes on as her own.[11] And what's more, she actually uses the female properties of her body as a defense. She does not, as Irigaray has suggested, need to "suppress and subordinate"[12] these properties. Her actions echo the sentiments of Carolyn Heilbrun in *Reinventing Womanhood* that "women must abandon the fantasy of womanhood, that fantasy provided by fairy tales and romances, and perceive themselves as the active principle, in short."[13] In any event, despite Dog Woman's ferocious facade, the reader easily believes that she may fall apart if harm were to ever come to her son. Her agenda is selfless in that respect. She is no Mother Courage.[14] Her intentions are pure and simple. While it's true that she does not hesitate to take revenge, verbal

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[11] When Dog Woman takes Jordan to see the wonder of a banana for the first time, and encounters adversity, she does not hesitate to assert her strength and threaten the adversary. "I took Jordan on a hound-lead and pushed my way through the gapers and sinners until we got to the front and there was Johnson himself trying to charge money for a glimpse of the thing...I lifted Jordan up and told Johnson that if he didn't throw back his cloth and let us see this wonder I'd cram his face so hard into my breasts that he'd wish he'd never been suckled by a woman, so truly I would smother him", 12.

[12] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 186.

[13] Carolyn Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 167.

[14] The Mother Courage reference speaks to the infamous mother figure in Bertold Brecht's 20th century play where a poor, widowed merchant loses two of her three children in war time but almost immediately continues on with the business of buying and selling, an operation afforded to her solely because of the war.

and physical when necessary, what never falters is her role as Jordan's mother. This role contains no preconceived notions about what that term has ever signified, only steadfast certainty about the imagined process of giving birth: Of that, she says, "when a woman gives birth her waters break and she pours out the child and the child runs free."[15] I venture to say that Winterson creates an 'other' sex in *Sexing The Cherry*, in which the character associations common to our understanding of "woman" and "mother" are not linked to the person of Dog Woman. In short, inherent in Dog Woman's public persona is a nature that is arguably and typically reserved for men, possessing little modesty or passivity. To echo Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which is Not One*, the character of Dog Woman understands "the possibility of sacrificing no one of her pleasures to another, of identifying herself with none of them in particular, *of never being simply one.*"[16] Reminiscent of the ancient Egyptian goddess Bastet, cat/lion goddess and protector of the lands, Dog Woman is instilled with qualities that link her

[15] Winterson 11.

[16] Irigaray 30-31.

often quite closely with her primordial predecessors in the animal kingdom. The way in which she acts as Jordan's protector and guardian indicates that she sees acts of violence and hostile behavior as all part of the makings of a mother.

I go as far as to claim that Dog Woman and Zami join the ranks of the few women in modern literature who occupy so many spheres- social, political, maternal, sexual, even mythological, and are said to outwardly feel every one of these 'selves' in utter excess. Also resembling Grendel's mother,[17] in many ways these women may even be characterized as monstrous. The mother in both texts often uses her seemingly superhuman powers to negotiate with the world of men- the father included.[18]

Begging this question of the mother's body as 'site' of origin, Dog Woman iterates, and in part,

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[17] Seamus Heaney, trans., *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

[18] When I was born I was tiny enough to sleep in my father's shoe, it was only later that I began to grow to such proportions that my father had the idea of exhibiting me. My mother refused him, saying no member of her family should be the subject of an exhibition, no matter how poor we became. One night my father tried to steal me and sell me to a man with one leg. They had a barrel ready to put me in, but no sooner had they slammed on the lid than I burst the bonds of the barrel and came flying out at my father's throat. This was my first murder. (Jeanette Winterson 107).

celebrates, the non-biological terms of her motherhood: "he came from the water". She at once acknowledges and laments this fact as well as Jordan's decision to sail the world, "… I knew the water would claim him again."[19] At heart, Dog Woman is a protector. She is also vehement defender of what she deems as unjust. Selective about that which she allows to envelop her heart, Dog Woman is an opportunist. Ironically, her son is the only one who can pierce through her heart and expose her weaknesses.

Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* employs the narrative pattern of privileging the tangible and symbolic power of the mother by endowing Dog Woman with a position of elemental authority. The text engages in narrative politics which, as Muraro theorizes, will incite a return of "original" power to the mother, not by means of reproduction necessarily but pragmatically, renouncing the forcibly natural language that develops from metaphors of instinct, birth and nurturing and that is so deeply inscribed

[19] Winterson 83.

in the female body, resulting, in part, in a re-thinking of the maternal and sexual difference. For example, Winterson allows Dog Woman to go into detail describing herself as a young girl at a time when she seems to be aware of her own coming into being and self development. She also, for the first time, mentions her parents' relationship. She unapologetically goes on to explain how she comes to commit her first murder: that of her own father.

With the Electra complex as a possible point of reference, Winterson accomplishes a lofty goal with this piece of the narration. Dog Woman's first person recollections, to employ Muraro's theorizing on the maternal, are about a "return to the origin, to the relationship with the mother." But they do more. They reject the father/male figure. Dog Woman first does this through the act of murdering him. It is utterly corporeal and the memories that she recounts almost tangible.

What Muraro does in theory, Winterson puts into practice. Winterson can be said to be enacting exactly what Muraro calls for: "a shift from the

power of the father and from its interface on our action."[20] She says:

> When I was a girl I heard my mother and father copulating. I heard my father's steady grunts and my mother's silence. Later my mother told me that men take pleasure and women give it. She told me in a matter-of-fact way, in the same tone of voice she used to tell me how to feed the dogs or make bread.
>
> When I was born I was tiny enough to sleep in my father's shoe; it was only later that I began to grow, and to grow to such proportions that my father had the idea of exhibiting me. My mother refused him, saying no member of her family should be the subject of an exhibition, no matter how poor we became. One night my father tried to steal me and sell me to a man with one leg. They had a barrel ready to put me in, but no sooner did I burst the bonds of the barrel and came flying out at my father's throat. That was my first murder.[21]

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[20] Muraro 16.

[21] Winterson 107.

If we recall that Dog Woman is now a mother, with her own maternal obligations and worries, it becomes crystal clear that Winterson writes female development and femininity as contradictory and problematic. Through the figure of Dog Woman, she interrogates and alters certain traditional notions the reader may have of the maternal. In doing so, the maternal is set outside of the cadre of the feminine, so that the texts challenge the notion of the maternal as an "unstable category" that plagues scholars and writers alike.[22] By contrast, however, in privileging the maternal over the feminine, Winterson caveats Muraro's question of a female centered discourse and carves a deeper route for mapping the matrix, even at times suggesting a rather essentialistic trajectory.

The discussion of Winterson will remain localized around this notion of a motherland. Dog Woman and Jordan experience a very fluid relationship to the notion of origins. Dog Woman, militantly resistant

[22] Unlike Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One,* in which she radically ponders how the female imaginary would even be represented if it were to actually "deploy itself", theorists Julia Kristeva, Drucilla Cornell, and Denise Riley hold that 'woman' is an altogether unstable category that cannot viably be set apart, even in the imaginary, from the narratives and images that contain her.

to and seemingly untouched by the often-violent stronghold of the male leader, nevertheless enjoys a profound attachment to her son. It is the filial bond of mother and son that she reveres while relegating the biological notion of a male participant to the background.

Dog Woman first appears in the text in chapter 2, and the reader instantly gets the sense that this character is neither explicitly male nor female, so it becomes a challenge to attempt to attribute any set of characteristics to her/it. She is instead a figure of sorts, one which Jordan, the first character to speak in chapter 1 of *Sexing the Cherry*, will later simply call "mother":

> My mother carved this on a medallion and hung it round my neck the day she found me in the slime by the river. I was wrapped up in a rotting sack such as kittens are drowned in, but my head was wedged uppermost against the bank. A face as round as the moon with hair falling on either side bobbed over me.[23]

[23] Winterson 10.

By locating herself within the temporal framework of the other subject (Jordan) in the text, Dog Woman, however liberating her wild voyages seem to be, proves to be a rather fixed subject whose existence can primarily be characterized as relative [to Jordan's]. In other words, by positioning herself in relation to Jordan, and his insatiable exploratory appetite, Dog Woman functions as a kind of linguistic, maternal stabilizer, attempting to hold him close while fastening the text to the page.

The problem is that Dog Woman herself is responsible for Jordan's exploratory nature. At first she defends her choice of names, "but I wanted to give him a river name, a name not bound to anything, just like the waters aren't bound to anything," and then regretfully admits her mistake, "I should have named him after a stagnant pond and then I could have kept him, but I named him after a river and in the flood tide he slipped away."[24] This is a crucial moment in the text, for it is precisely here that most of

[24] Winterson 11.

the "gender trouble" can be found rearing its shapeless head. And once it is established that Dog Woman did not biologically give birth to Jordan, the critical complexities of Winterson's text become more and more evident. What does it mean that she did not partake in the physical aspects of child bearing? What might be Winterson's larger assignment in carefully crafting Dog Woman so that she bears no resemblance to most maternal figures known as such in literature? Finally, what message is being conveyed by the lack of any male contributor?

On biology and men, Dog Woman asserts, "I would have liked to pour out a child from my body but you have to have a man for that and there's no man who's a match for me".[25] If I take Judith Butler's suggestion in *Bodies That Matter* that gender is a construction, then I am positing that Dog Woman is the "I" that acts the part of the mother, yet NOT the part of 'woman,' per se. What, then, does this do for the problem of naming? Dog Woman's

[25] Winterson 11.

comportment disrupts the notion of womanly behavior, yet we have to deal with the fact that she is Woman in name. What does name do, then? And how is the name Woman tied to the act, or function of mothering? Does it reinforce or contest the associations of this name? That is, does it reify that mothering is an assumed female occupation? Or does it work here to affirm Winterson's Dog Woman as a mother on the outskirts of the existing discourse on the maternal and therefore resistant to articulation? According to Butler, "the naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inoculation of a norm".[26] My argument is that the space in which Dog Woman's motherly-ness becomes established works as a map of sorts. Referent to the chapter title, Winterson maps the matrix by tracing both Dog Woman and Jordan's trajectory around the world, and by doing so, we the reader bear witness to the way in which *maternality* and *femininity* are two roads that Winterson frees from classification and lets Dog Woman perform, ad lib style.

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[26] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 8

It is in Winterson's second chapter that Dog Woman invokes herself as mother, and for the first time we begin to see the terms of 'maternality' begin to take shape in the text. According to Irigaray's[27] understanding of Plato's *Timaeus*, for example, matter and femininity are very much intertwined. Dog Woman's body, refusing the "proper function" of the female body as receiver/child bearer becomes characterized by depictions that do not evoke the term *feminine*. What this does is affect the stabilizing functions of language in terms of gender so that it never assumes any real form[28]. In this light, Dog Woman might be said to be the ambiguous subject *par excellence*. Not only does she *not* make a contribution to reproduction, she rejects a very necessary, potent aspect of the process: the man.

Without a womb, any articulated feminine attributes, human form, or even a real name, how, then, can such a subject be legitimized? Within whose discourse,

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[27] Irigaray 30.

[28] Butler 139.

if any, does she exist? She, who adamantly rejects the phallus, strangely enough, feels uneasy towards a banana. Upon its discovery, she says, "it's either painted or infected, for there is none such a colour that I know . . . There was no good woman could put that to her mouth."[29]

Physically steering his mother around the globe in pursuit of adventure, Jordan, navigator, continuously eludes his mother, navigatee, causing both of them to move further away from any solid land of origin. At the circus, as a spectator/participant, Dog Woman proves her strength by catapulting "an elephant into the sky."[30] Her apparent lack of logical preconceptions works symbolically to effectively eradicate the practice of *assuming* in the text. She knows not how much the elephant weighs. She reasons, "how am I to know what it weighs? A balloon looks big and weighs nothing."[31] While broadening the question of appearance and reality, a linguistic paradigm of

[29] Winterson 12-13.

[30] Winterson 25.

[31] Winterson 25.

binaries is constructed. And likewise, the movement of the narrative constitutes the mapping of the feminine, maternal, and non-maternal. What manifests in Winterson as a result is a vision of mothering that is not explained away in metaphoric, archetypal, or Freudian terms.

Insofar as 'mapping' is concerned, Winterson manages, with *Sexing the Cherry*, to create an entirely new template of what it is to narrate from what Muraro calls the "original experience" and to plot the trajectory of the matrix from the most reliable starting point that she can find. Perhaps then it is better to see Winterson's narrative pattern more as errant plotting than as mapping.

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name:

In *Zami,* Audre Lorde not only reveals, she conjures up her mother's potency. She does this all without alluding much to otherwise ordinary 'motherly' concerns - maternal duties, childbirth, or the act of child rearing. Instead, she works to make it clear that "the root" of these powers is made evident by

walking through the streets of Grenada. She is insistent on the notion that there exists a space in which she and her mother's life experiences can reshape the reality in which they live. Additionally, she often refers to her mother in the third person, appropriate albeit unusual, calling her by her real name, Linda, which, to me, invokes a dichotomous maternal subject position. For Lorde, it is as if her mother becomes a figure of language, a creative textual being whose entire self can be made known only by means of articulating lingual expressions of each self that comprises her. This is evidenced by the very first time Lorde speaks of her mother, she evokes not the physicality of this one woman, but instead the symbolic powers that she, and many women who came before her, hold. She says:

> When I visited Grenada, I saw the root of my mother's powers walking through the streets. I thought, this is the country of my foremothers, my forebearing mothers, those Black Island women, who defined themselves by what they did.[32]

[32] Lorde 9.

Further, Luisa Muraro makes the claim, in theorizing about the absence of female forms in language, that "the creative force that makes women "become" in language originates from a circle of correspondence between word and experience mediated by our relationship with the mother."[33] Muraro's claim is quite original in that she works to rethink women by "focusing on the original relationship of mother and daughter."[34] This is contrary to Helene Cixous' thinking, which focuses more on the female sexed body than the mother. This mother centric view is precisely what makes Winterson's text so analytically compatible with Muraro's philosophy. However, for Lorde, there is a point of departure where Muraro and Lorde are not going to synthesize. Muraro's main focus is a return to the maternal body, and not necessarily the woman's body. It is Helene Cixous and Luce Irigary who privilege the relationship of women to other women, with a focus on the body, and not solely on the maternal. Lorde is much more interested, it seems, in this relationship of women to other women. For Lorde, I

[33] Muraro 21.

[34] Muraro 21.

am claiming that the mother is many things, but most of all a symbol of the original strength of a woman. One of the significant ways that this matrix mapping takes places is in place and name.

The polemic of the name also enables Audre Lorde's *Zami* to be read, not just as literature on the 'maternal,' per se, but more interestingly as a metaphysical exploration of a woman's "geography."[35] The word mother in her text is not exclusively used as a filial reference alone, as in the motherland, or more specifically, the island of Carriacou, a highly mythologized place where women love one another and are inspired and empowered by them as well. It is a real place, with nostalgic and imagined nuances alike. Its history has stakes in time and place, but its rendering in language is as imagined as it is factual.

> Carriacou, a magic name like cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, the delectable little squares of guave jelly each lovingly wrapped in tiny bits of crazy-quilt wax-paper cut precisely from bread wrappers. How Carriacou women love each other

[35] Winterson 14.

> is legend in Grenada, and so is their strength and their beauty.[36]

Here, Lorde evokes the maternal in the text while using 'place' as a trope. The concept of 'place' here is written with a clear cut agenda. That agenda consists of the understanding that 'place' brings one closer to an origin. What place or places Lorde visits or discusses always brings her closer to the maternal origin. Within the scope of my project as a whole, Lorde's textual pattern of utilizing the tropes of 'place' and 'name' work to reconstitute the maternal in various ways, which in turn effectively redefine 'place' (Carriacou, Mexico, Harlem) and 'name' (Linda, Afrekete).

Lorde's project to connect to her matrilineage takes shape, both literally and figuratively, at the point when Lorde finally finds the island of Carriacou, her mother['s]land, on the map, at the age of 26. Before that discovery, Lorde writes, "I came to believe my mother's geography was a fantasy or crazy or at least too old-fashioned, and in reality, maybe

[36] Lorde 14

she was talking about the place other people called Curacao, a Dutch possession on the other side of the Antilles."[37] The act of mapping, in this case, the 'mother' land, anticipates the relationship between the individual and the matrix of life, the elemental core from which the subject is formulated. The discovery of the mother's origins through the use of language binds mother to child, in part, via the word.

Lorde's parents "spoke all through [her] childhood with one unfragmentable and unappealable voice."[38] Not unlike the spelling of her name, which Lorde labels as "new," the very native voice with which her parents spoke suggests a radical concept- a homogenous male/female consciousness. In other words, the linguistic meshing of the male and female voices incites a discourse on the issue of sexual difference. Her mother, being "invested" in a particularly powerful "image of herself," eases the narrative as well as the reader into a secure area whereby identity politics of the maternal is not

[37] Lorde 14.

[38] Lorde 15

female centered. A similar scenario is seen chez Dog Woman as well.

Language and words, for Lorde, are the tools of her trade. No word is accidental. Alluding to her mother's "secret relationship with words," Lorde goes so far as to label these words a "language" of their own, because [they] were always there."[39] This reflects a literary as well as a cultural reassigning of the economy of womanhood- not femininity, and not motherhood- that, through language, is actively being rethought, or, according to Carolyn Heilbrun, "reinvented."[40]

Another important practice involved in the task of rendering the maternal experience apart from the 'feminine' and the 'maternal instinct' is a process that I referred to earlier, something that Luisa Muraro calls "the operation of integrating early childhood experience with human experience".[41]

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[39] Lorde 31.

[40] Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).

[41] Muraro 70.

This 'operation', in *Zami,* works to affirm the importance of utilizing the 'starting point' as a narrative and intellectual trope. Lorde's mother is as specifically rendered by means of a more remote third person narration. Nonetheless, Lorde's project is deeply rooted in the power of language and in the name, or rather, the *re-name*, which works successfully to conjure up mother, land, and an identity apart from the one she was perhaps born to cultivate. It strikes me as peculiar that the narrated figure, the 'mother,' in *Zami*, who never actually has a 'live' presence in the text, is a subject solid enough to establish the identity of the speaker, and not the other way around.

The discourse, then, of the maternal instinct, becomes inextricably entangled with the mother/daughter connection due to the manner in which Lorde's text is narrated. Even more complicated than the maternal instinct in the text is the impending fragmentation and separation of the mother/daughter paradigm that Lorde enacts shortly after moving out on her own. She no longer writes

as if so firmly bounded by and to her mother. After her father died, Lorde writes of her mother: "I saw my mother's pain, and her blindness, and her strength, and for the first time I began to see her as separate from me, and I began to feel free of her."[42]

It is interesting to note that, shortly after her seeming 'liberation' from her mother, Audre begins her narrative on traveling. She, for the first time, has difficulty articulating her need to journey: "I don't know why I was seized with such a desire to go to Mexico."[43] Her inclination to discover this new land is, in part, based upon a stymied notion of a motherland- the full apprehension of which never comes to pass. The notion of Mexico as:

> an accessible land of color and fantasy and delight, full of sun, music and song. Whenever I went, there were brown faces of every hue meeting mine and seeing my own color reflected upon the streets in such great numbers was an

[42] Lorde 143.

[43] Lorde 147.

> affirmation for me that was brand new and very exciting. I never felt visible before, nor even known I lacked it.[44]

Here, Lorde makes a clear attempt at simultaneously locating a symbolic motherland and integrating that into her own identity and experience. It is after this segment that the figure of Afrekete manifests itself and remains essential for the duration of the work.

Seemingly fashioned out of the imagination, Afrekete "came out of a dream to [Lorde] always being hard and real as the fire hairs along the underedge of [her] navel".[45] There is a veritable symbiotic connection to make between Lorde's actual mother and Afrekete. Of this, Lorde states, "Afrekete taught me roots, new definitions of our women's bodies-definitions for which I had only been in training to learn before".[46] There is, as Luisa Muraro implies, something evoking an "original experience" inherent

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[44] Lorde 156.

[45] Lorde 149.

[46] Lorde 250.

in Lorde's relationship to this figure.[47] She becomes Lorde's narrative and intellectual momentum from the moment she appears until the close of the work. Afrekete embodies very many aspects of female existence - the sister, lover, mother, and grandmother. Afrekete has allowed Lorde to complexly map a matrix of her own, "her prints remain[ing] upon [her] life with the resonance and power of an emotional tattoo".[48] It is as if, having symbolically 'lost' the original connection with her actual mother, Lorde discovers, not a proxy for her mother, but an altogether different level of female mentorship and bonding, and therefore another avenue of mapping the matrix.

The 'new spelling' of her name functions largely as a textual manifestation of what comes to be a liberation of "home," which, for Lorde was "still a sweet place somewhere else."[49] But when I begin testifying as to how we come to 'map' the matrix, am I by default assuming that the 'maternal' subject

[47] Muraro 45. The notion of an "original experience' is more metaphysical here than actual.

[48] Lorde 253.

[49] Lorde 4.

position is a stable one? Or does my position instead assume that inherent in the process of mapping is the practice of anchoring down and trying to hold steady that errant thing called the maternal which I am trying to locate and then fix? A useful theoretical vantage point to revert to here is Linda McDowell's *Gender, Identity and Place* in which she analyzes how gender might be linked to geography. And from a geographer's perspective, she examines feminist concerns about place, gender, bodies, home, and identity.

In a chapter entitled *Place and Gender,* McDowell discusses how commonplace it is becoming for people to leave what is "home" for them, that is, their birthplace, whether due to displacement, or else intentional resettling somewhere else. She then links this idea to women and work. She posits that for women, this kind of movement is linked to proletarianization and subsequently makes serious ties between women, work, place and identity.

Lorde, consistently acknowledging her position as a "woman-identified woman...before [that phrase] even

existed," detaches herself from the stronghold of the mother, yet maintains a profound attachment to the 'matrix' of the female as the most prominent influence in and on her life. Afrekete, in particular, becomes the most integral component of Lorde's story apart from her actual mother, but does so only after the narrative of Lorde's actual mother begins to fragment. Time, space, and fact are all rendered in language, but just not in the interest of veracity. The reader is unsure at first whether the existence of Afrekete in *Zami* is actual or simply based upon a story, a *mythos*, as with Winterson's Dog Woman.

Coming Together

For Lorde, the significance of building a narrative simultaneously aligned around a central maternal figure using the metaphor of a geographical locale aids her project of telling the story of her mother's beginnings as if these beginnings were the ultimate beginnings, as if no history had preceded the earth upon which the streets and hills of

Grenada are held in place. She describes the essence of her "foremothers, [her] forbearing mothers, who defined themselves by what they did".[50] Lorde explores an amalgam of mutli-faceted selves in *Zami*, with *maternal* as only one of the characteristics, understood as such in part due to the layers of adjectival hyphenations that are never too far away from Lorde's own written name.

On the other hand Dog Woman, in *Sexing the Cherry*, is a self made mother, rewriting all that the term may mean. Finding a baby on the bank of a river, she boldly claims for herself the right to mother it. A lovingly grotesque disfigured giant of a thing, she adores her son and holds motherhood as the central responsibility of her life, yet she never insists that the mother is ever a sacred vessel or an original starting point. Instead, she fixes her attention onto the nature of the mother/ kin paradigm. Her son becomes a sailor, a fitting metaphor for their familial arrangement. He leaves

[50] Lorde 9.

home, travels the world and she either stays or goes along with him, in awe.

Both Lorde and Winterson use the 'map' and 'places' as a means to an end in excavating the issue of gender identity and the 'maternal,'. What draws the parallel between Lorde's Zami and Winterson's Dog Woman, for me, is their drive to make such a strong connection with roots that bind them to the earth. For Zami, this occurs via a geographical exploration of her mother's homeland, which is tied to her own personal journeys abroad and inward which lead her to come full circle in the rediscovery of a former lover, Kitty, who adopts the mythic name Afrekete, and causes Zami to reshape her life. For Winterson, this begins and ends with the discovery of her son Jordan and his subsequent journeying into foreign lands, which leaves Dog Woman often feeling alone yet strengthened by her love and devotion to him. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dog Woman acts upon instinct, and at the conclusion of the novel, we come to find that the one instinct that she acts on more so than any other is that of the maternal. Yet what I also claim is that no two

maternal instincts are alike. At the close of the novel, Dog woman celebrates the many chapters of her life, that of a mother, a fighter, and a dog breeder. She is readying for Jordan's long awaited homecoming by doing an amalgam of random activities, cleaning the hut, brushing down the dogs, and draping on her pearls. She mentions that she is excited that Jordan will see how she has "risen in the world these last years,"[51] hinting at how she had finally found the time to undertake her own enterprise, selling pure bred hounds to the nobility. Proudly, she remarks: "I see I have a flair for enterprise. It was ever with me, but smothered, I think, by my maternalness and the pressing need to do away with scoundrels".[52]

Both Zami and Dog woman are bound to the earth through narrative explorations of what a mother does, has done, or can do. To Lorde, I think, the 'maternal' becomes a pointable place, definable and tangible. For Winterson, she conceives it more as an infinite space, an abstraction which the reader

[51] Winterson 135.

[52] Winterson 135.

swiftly learns not to undermine, lest there be Dog Woman to pay.

CHAPTER 2

"**In** the Flesh: Motherhood as Political Occupation in Jane Lazarre's *A Mother Knot* and Sibilla Aleramo's *Una Donna*"

In my previous chapter, "Mapping the Matrix," I looked at the mother as object, and analyzed how her external circumstances such as kin work to mobilize her from one place to the next. I have then shown how the act of mapping can be a useful way of reevaluating the mother's trajectory. After having tried to approximate the location of the maternal, I intend for this chapter to be an examination of the maternal from within the body. The title of this chapter is meant to give a greater understanding to the idea that motherhood is in many respects an existential conflict that enters the mother into a debate with her two or more facets of her polarized self. The two works in my discussion privilege the mother/child paradigm vis a vis the selfhood of the mother/subject.

To provide some cultural and historical context, Sibilla Aleramo and Jane Lazarre share neither country, nationality, nor language, yet their shared understanding of the notion of 'motherwork' as being that has, for them at least, forayed into an uneasy experience akin to an invasion, is what joins them here in this chapter.

Jane Lazarre was born in New York in the 1950s. She is an American feminist writer of fiction and non-fiction who has also taught extensively in and around New York. Still married, her two sons are now grown. Lazarre continues her writing, working to examine the constructs of motherhood and race (married to an African American man and mother to two biracial children) while exploring how the issue of creativity serves as an underlying problematic. Nourishing her own creative drive is a necessity for Lazarre, yet it has often been a struggle to do so, a problem about which she speaks at length in *A Mother Knot*.

Apart from motherwork, however, I'd like to consider some of the issues that can and does often alter the course of any woman's experience of motherhood. Lazarre spoke to this issue in a recent interview published online. Her words shed light on the disparity between motherhood and selfhood, a caveat that both Aleramo and Lazarre indeed work through differently. During the interview with for *mothersmovement.org*, Lazarre comments on the issue that she introduces in *The Mother Knot*, knows as the "push-pull," being the intersection of the demands of motherhood and the need to do creative work. She posits the idea that a uniting of the personal with the social experience of motherhood could bring about a "major shift in consciousness"[1] whereby each woman's personal circumstances, if aligned with the "social-collective-political realm,"[2] might suggest possibilities for action. I wonder, then, if and how Sibilla Aleramo's 'action' of leaving her home and her child, essentially

[1] The Mothers Movement Online, "A sort of perfection: An interview with writer Jane Lazarre," Judith Stadtman Tucker, www.mothersmovement.org/features/05/jane_lazarre/a_sort_of_perfection.htm

[2] http://www.mothersmovement.org/features/05/jane_lazarre/a_sort_of_perfection.htm

leaving 'mothering,' if you will, fits into the category of "possibilities" that Lazarre suggests, or if it creates an entirely new category of maternal response.

Whereas Jane Lazarre looks to the politically occupying features of motherhood in *A Mother Knot* as explanation for her maternal ambivalence, it is clear that she is able to depart from Aleramo's situation due to the historical moment in which she mothers and writes. The movement in America in the seventies provided Lazarre with the occasion to ask for and anticipate an eventual de-polarization of the experiences of motherhood and selfhood and creativity.

To a further degree than Jane Lazarre, Sibilla Aleramo seems to place motherhood in total contradiction to the beliefs and behaviors that we know today as part of 'women's liberation'. There is no doubt as to why. Born Rina Faccio in 1876 Italy, just fifteen years after the unification of italy, here was a woman whose identity, not unlike that of her country's, was an operation in progress.

In *Una Donna,* Rina recalls herself as a girl who possessed an intellectual edge, devoured books at an early age, and boasted about never marrying. She also insisted that education and career were more important than domestic affairs. Given the historical moment of political, social, and economic change in Italy into which Rina was born and raised, coupled with her father's inherited work-oriented way of thinking, her aspirations are nonetheless very much antithetical to the things that a woman was expected to be interested in and do in early twentieth-century Europe. This woman would therefore later become Sibilla Aleramo, the writer and activist who is renown as being one of Italy's foremost feminists. She is also known for leaving her husband and young son to move away and pursue a life apart from the roles of wife and mother.

Thinking about motherhood as a political occupation allows for the emergence of new subjectivities in the representation of motherhood. That is not to say that Jane Lazarre and Sibilla Aleramo experience motherhood in the

same way. Both women take action, so to speak, but the actions they take are polar opposite. Whereas both women do feel conflicted and divided by the experience of motherhood, also known as maternal ambivalence, Lazarre transforms this ambivalence into an artistic enterprise, writing, thinking, and speaking through the experience. Aleramo's ambivalence, conversely, manifests into something a bit more radical.

This idea of motherhood as an existential conflict is not a new one, and has been elucidated more recently by these innovative twentieth century scholars. I introduce Welldon's *Mother, Madonna, Whore*, because it successfully dismantles the commonplace notions of "at-oneness", which is the idea of inseparability promulgated by Madonna and child depictions that falsely define the infant-mother bond. And Julia Kristeva, particularly in "Stabat Mater," in *Tales of* Love, firmly expresses an "urgent need for a new understanding of the mother's body" and a "post-virginal

discourse on maternity."[3] She also offers a brilliantly crafted definition of the term 'maternal' in which she states that it is at once an "ambivalent principle that is bound to the species" as well as an "identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable."[4] When speaking of the maternal body, Estela Welldon recognizes the theoretical truth to the notion of feeling literally 'occupied'. She states that "some women have perverse attitudes towards functions related to motherhood, during which the baby's body has long occupied their own."[5] She is particularly useful in understanding how dramatically different Aleramo and Lazarre internalize the situation of maternal occupation. A more recent critical perspective on the maternal is Rozsika Parker's 1995 work *Torn in Two,* which attempts to debunk some of the more readily adhered-to myths regarding motherhood. Her efforts illustrate the

[3] Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 191986), 161.

[4] Moi 162.

[5] Estela Welldon, *Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood* (New York: Other Press, 1988), 80.

benefits of articulating something she appropriately labels "maternal ambivalence".

What all of these thinkers have in common is a vested interest in identifying a new discourse of maternity that will acknowledge that the maternal function can and will not be reduced to the act of "healthy mothering." As defined by Welldon, healthy mothering is when "mothers derive much pleasure from the process of taking care of their babies and helping them to develop into independent and self-assured human beings with their own unique characteristics."[6]

Before any rock solid opinion is made regarding motherhood, however, it is most often pregnancy that serves as the precursor to this phenomenon. I begin with the premise that pregnancy, and subsequently motherhood, seems to work not so much 'on' the body as 'in' the body of the woman, and even more so in the body of the woman artist. I am claiming that this is due to an inner

[6] Welldon 63.

tension between identity formulation of the self and the need/drive to create life/art outside of the woman. At times, pregnancy even seems to work 'against' the body - depriving the subject of what it, as whole and autonomous, needs in order to provide amply for both itself as well as the occupant. This position is a clear move away from the more accepted conception of birth and creation. However, the woman and the woman artist have long been in a tug of war over their own self-creation versus the creation of an 'other'. The woman artist 'with child' often struggles with the idea of what it means to be 'maternal' if her situation is such that she is not at will to freely express herself.[7] The texts in question speak directly to this very struggle.

Una Donna[8] is Sibilla Aleramo's best known work. The novel was published in Italy in 1950, just a decade before the author's death at the age of 84. Initially gaining more critical acclaim overseas than it did in Italy, *Una Donna*

[7] This case is elaborated in chapter 5, which discusses at length the mother as artist who obsesses over and simultaneously neglects the duties of childrearing.

[8] Sibilla Aleramo. *Una Donna* (Rome and Turin: STEN, 1906).

eventually became a pillar in Italian Feminist literature. Aleramo upset all of literary Europe with her partly fictional, partly autobiographical portrayal of a woman who makes a choice to leave her young son and husband to pursue an existence void of any domestic confines. While it is a book about a single woman, Sibilla (*nee* Rina Faccio) universalizes the personal. While she doesn't seem to go as far as working her own *storia* into actual feminist theory, *Una Donna* became known as an artistic representation of a single life lived, and for Aleramo, that was enough. Her oeuvre of short stories and articles illustrate her penchant for unhappy female protagonists, yet they do not always provide a way out. Further, it was widely known that she was not a supporter of Social Feminism, which, by definition, rejects individualism and is largely concerned with what will most benefit the common good.

It is not until she has left her family that she is able to state that women will not be truly liberated until they manage their talents and

gifts apart from the way in which men do. This is a direct result of having lived many years feeling trapped in a loveless marriage to a man who had raped her when she was 15. The marriage was one in which Aleramo was stunted emotionally, artistically, and politically. And so, having made the decision to leave the man, and consequently her child, the name change from Rina Pierangeli Faccio to Sibilla Aleramo becomes the first significant catalyst in her development out of a state of dependency and into freedom. For Aleramo, however, the stakes involved were many. She made numerous painful attempts through the medium of her literature to be acquitted of the crime that she had convicted herself of years before, the abandonment of her son.

An entire generation after Aleramo publishes *Una Donna* comes Jane Lazarre's *The Mother Knot*[9]. This work was published in 1976 in the United States when the idea of what constituted "good mothering" was still very much a cohesive list of opposing behaviors that were deemed as either

[9] Jane Lazarre, *The Mother Knot* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1976).

right or wrong. Luckily, the feminist movement was simultaneously revving up its engine as well, so Lazarre, an urban Jewish woman married to a liberal minded man, embraces her existence as a feminist, teacher, professor, and mother, and is interested in not only issues of mothering, but also identity, race, and class. In her writing, she expresses this notion of ambivalence not only in response to mothering, but also in response to being a daughter, a wife, and a daughter-in-law. Her father-in-law expects a "Black Warrior" while her own father yearns to create a little Jewish intellectual. The overriding focus of *The Mother Knot*, however, is Lazarre's wavering attitude about the expression of maternal ambivalence, a topic that Rozsika Parker expounds on in *Torn in Two*. This ambivalence consists of emotions that waiver between guilt at having conflicting emotions towards the experience of motherhood and working to try and live up to the ideal portrait of the perfect mother. Parker makes the point that we collectively need to abandon the fantasy of the perfect mother. That said, Lazarre, in narrative, and Parker, in theory, seems to be on

the same trajectory. That is, they both want to dispel the notion that it is somehow wrong to articulate the natural anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and even displeasure over the maternal experience. On the contrary, what both women claim is that it is in fact detrimental to both mother and child if these ambivalent feelings are NOT made explicit in language. What Parker claims will happen is that the mother will often engage in a vicious repudiation of herself, causing her to spiral into a deep depression. As far as the child is concerned, he/she will harbor feelings of inadequacy due to the distance and dissatisfaction that the mother has displayed, and the cycle gets worse and worse as time goes on. What this situation eventually evolves into for both Aleramo and Lazarre is a feeling of being occupied by a force that pulls at the woman both externally as well as internally, making it all the more difficult to realize emancipation.

I am treating the two women in this chapter, Jane Lazarre and Sibilla Aleramo, as if they have quite literally undergone a political occupation.

How long this occupation will last is indeterminable and contingent on a variety of circumstances. Both Jane Lazarre's *The Mother Knot* and Sibilla Aleramo's *Una Donna* address the maternal as part of a more complex conglomerate of inclinations and emotions - in part as a force of habit rather than a force of nature. The woman in each work does not always mother in a loving, compassionate, and selfless manner. The thinking behind the real feelings that motherhood incites is part of what Lazarre, in the introduction to *The Mother Knot,* has aptly labeled the "motherhood mystique"(xxiii). In the same theoretical framework as this 'motherhood mystique' lies Welldon's arguement that "at the center of female perversion is the perversion of motherhood."[10] What Welldon seems to suggest here is that the only way to pervert the essence of the so-called feminine is by resisting or refusing the very thing that being female is intrinsically bound to: motherhood.

[10] Juliett Mitchell, introduction to *Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood*, by Estela V. Welldon (New York: Other Press, 1988), iii.

Before undertaking this project, I conceived of motherhood as a community of sorts, characterized by identifiable and unified patterns of behavior, rules and regulations, all which are sanctified by a hierarchically structured and qualified support system that informs and gives solid counsel. My research has led me to the conclusion that it is in fact neither a physical nor an emotional constituency of which one can become a member. Yet, at times, it is both, as with the process of adoption, when both women and men are deemed, via a set establishment, to be satisfactory parents. A new life now belongs to these people, constituting in part a kind of citizenship. In terms of labor, as in exerted effort, motherhood is not characterized by an identified workplace (except perhaps the home) and yet it is. One might report daily to this "place" of "being" the mother. Or perhaps not. Even when culturally and/or biologically assigned this role, mother may never show up for work, as it were. Welldon argues that since "mothers are also the children of their own mothers with their

own plethora of early experiences and traumas,"[11] the act of healthy mothering is often very challenging.[12]

Personally speaking, I found myself needing to get to know my son after he was born. Yet this unknowable stranger, who made his way out of my body with the help of medical experts (but no drugs) and, with nowhere else to go, came over to the small New York apartment that I share with my husband, and stayed. Fortunately, what also stayed was the desire or so-called "instinct" to love and care for him from sun up til sun down, and beyond. Nonetheless, this tidbit does not convince me that I possess no maternal ambivalence. Quite the contrary.

Inserting my own story into this chapter makes way for my position that subjectivity is one of the only ways of understanding motherhood as a

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[11] Welldon 64.

[12] Becoming a mother during the writing of my doctoral dissertation has certainly informed (and slowed down) every one of my intellectual pursuits. The biggest moment of clarity was in my former claim that the maternal instinct is a conditioned reaction rather than a sincere emotional response. I still insist that this is more true than false, yet in a moment of unabashed subjectivity, I veer closer to the middle of the road and say that the emotional response usually does come, it just may take some time.

political occupation. These two writers and mothers provide useful methods of rethinking subjectivity. My analysis illustrates how two women have written the self into history by re-narrating their own stories of motherhood. These two very different autobiographical pieces belong in the archive of women's writing that works to "revise concepts of women's life issues - growing up female, coming to voice, affiliation, sexuality and textuality, [and] the life cycle."[13]

Simply put, motherhood, in both Aleramo and Lazarre, defies being institutionalized. It resists being contained by established customs or rituals, the perpetuation of which is contingent upon the recognition of cultural symbols and imagery. Instead, it surfaces for the two women as an unfamiliar land on which they find themselves after experiencing pregnancy and the subsequent birth of a child. To that end, I am putting forth the premise that a woman

[13] Smith, Sidonie & Nancy Watson, ed. *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 32.

experiences her own bodily space differently than a man. The notion that motherhood is in part an 'occupation' of bodily space profoundly weaves itself through Lazarre and Aleramo's works, causing not an overabundance of love and nurturing, but instead, significant feelings of disembodiment, inner conflict, isolation and frustration. These feelings, Welldon would argue, provide substantive material in the reevaluation of the only partially understood 'maternal instinct'.

Speaking of bodily occupation, in labor with her second child, Jane Lazarre arrives to the hospital, and is, we quickly comprehend, "terrified."[14] After conjuring up an image of that to which she aspires during the process, "I want to be brave, an amazon," she swiftly contains her experience and succinctly narrates the painful passivity of the enterprise of giving birth. Likewise, should I ever put pen to paper and recount the 18 or so hours I was in labor, I would begin by telling you that I bought a new

[14] Lazarre 4.

"outfit" for the event. This shines a light on the fact that I knew I was certainly headed for an event, just not a medical one. Determined to exercise full control over the experience, and adamant that no nurse would talk me into an epidural, I refused to be "checked in" to the hospital until I thought I only had a short way to go. With nails manicured electric blue, hair blown dry, and my cute stretchy tank dress on my 38 week pregnant body, I felt ready. For whatever reason, my son did not feel as ready. But looking back now, the experience was as passive an event as I could possibly imagine. This is the point that Lazarre makes time and time again. Instead of the trite claim that "it was all worth it", or "you forget the pain," I'd recount the unspeakable pain that you somehow live through, and the month of not being able to walk right, and the hormone changes that render you inhuman. Jane Lazarre's own finds, to an extent "universal," are also quite unique, in the sense that she shares mostly unpleasant memories of the "delivery table" instead of romanticizing the experience for the sake of simply furthering

"the mythical aspects of motherhood," which "hung in the air" afterwards, if only for a very brief period[15]. She says,

> I took a look at the huge red hole between my legs and shut my eyes tight for the rest of the delivery. I pushed hard only because that was the only way to get the bastard out. I stood for a long while at the window, watching the night, blood still trickling down my legs. I felt I had never wanted anything more than to be a mother. And I swore I would never have another child.[16]

Lazarre re-registers the seemingly 'universal' experience of being a mother. And unknowingly, I think, also runs the risk of being the object of disparaging criticisms for having deemed completely bogus the nature of a widely accepted 'universality.' The purported universal nature of the maternal is one of the focal points of

[15] Lazarre 8.

[16] Lazarre 24.

Sidonie Smith's 1987 work *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography.* She approaches the issue from a theoretical standpoint in asserting that, since "patriarchal culture has fictionalized 'woman,'" women autobiographers have a responsibility to "challenge the gender ideologies in order to script their [own] life narrative."[17] What Lazarre does, then, is calibrate the experience of motherhood by a different measuring system than the current unpalatable and overly mythologized system of metaphors and symbols by which traditional narratives of motherhood are often nuanced. Whereas Lazarre works to reclaim a sense of self *through* the act of mothering in *The Mother Knot*, Aleramo, while having a similar goal in mind it seems, does so by ultimately relegating the duty and practice of mothering to the a place of less importance.

Aleramo begins *Una Donna* by testifying to her resolve to struggle through and rise above a very

[17] Sidonie Smith, *The Poetics of Women's Autobiography, Marginality and the Fictions of Self Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 12.

emotionally damaging childhood, which involved two loveable people who were embittered and scarred by their exceedingly unhappy marriage. She swore, amidst her mother's intense repression and subsequent depression as well as the almost inexplicable admiration she held for her controlling father, that she would simply never marry. She decides instead that she would work to earn her own living and become completely independent.

> Una seconda vittima delle mie bizzarrie era una vecchietta che frequentava la nostra casa per assistere la mamma. Chiacchierando, ella alludeva talora al mio avvenire, al tempo in cui sarei divenuta sposa e madre e avrei riso delle attuali mie funzioni d'impiegata; tranquilla io replicavo che *non mi sarei mai maritata*, che non sarei stata felice se non continuando la mia vita di lavoro libero, e che, del resto, tutte le ragazze avrebbero dovuto fare come me...Il matrimonio...era un'istituzione spagliata: lo diceva il babbo sempre.[18]

[18] Aleramo 21

> An old woman who came to help mamma with the housework was another victim of my caprices. We often chatted together and she would say that when I was older and a wife and mother, I would look back at my present job and smile. I calmly assured her that *I would never marry,* that I would never be happy unless I could go on working, and that furthermore all girls should do the same as me, for marriage was a mistake.[19]

We believe her wholeheartedly. Shortly thereafter, however, Rina suffers what comes to be the first of many traumas in her life regarding family life and the world of men. Her father, she finds out, has a mistress:

> Mio padre, l'esemplare raggiante, si transformava d'un tratto in un ogetto d'orrore: egli, che mi aveva cresciuta nel culto della sincerita, della lealta, egli nascondeva a mia madre, a noi tutti, un lato della sua vita. Oh babbo, babbo! Dove era la nostra superiorita, di cui andavo cosi altera fino a ieri? Mi pareva che piombassimo piu giu di tutte quelle creature intorno, di cui avevo indovinato il lezzo istintivamente![20]

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[19] Sibilla Aleramo, *A Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 29.

[20] Aleramo 24.

> Until then my father had been my model; yet in an instant he was transformed into an object of horror, a man who had brought me up to respect sincerity and loyalty but had deliberately concealed a part of his life from Mother, and from us all. Oh papa, papa! ... And my mother, did she know? I suddenly felt drawn to this unfortunate woman as my heart filled to the bursting point with anger and remorse - some of which I started to turn against myself.[21]

It isn't long before everything worsens. We learn that Aleramo (still Rina Faccio) has been raped. What's worse, this man is her future husband as well as the father of her son. In a single instant, Rina is transformed into a subject not unlike her mother. Not in control of her self, body and soul, she solemnly begins the chapter about the rape with the question "appartenevo ad un uomo?"[22] The next few years of Rina's life were marked with three major events: marriage, miscarriage, and then the birth of a son.

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[21] Aleramo 32.

[22] Aleramo 27.

> D'improvviso la mia esistenza, gia scossa per l'abbandono di mio padre, veniva sconvolta, tragicamente mutata. Che cos'ero io ora? Che cosa stavo per diventare? La mia vita di fanciulla era finita.[23]

> My life, already shaken by my father's desertion, was now suddenly turned upside down, tragically altered. What would I become? What would happen to me? My childhood was certainly at an end.[24]

Not only her childhood, but whatever her truncated youth ends up spiraling into afterwards, i.e., motherhood, also appears to be disabled. She marries her rapist with a tragic passivity, and is to her surprise given away by her father much more readily than she had thought she would be, considering that she was her father's favorite, the one destined for great things. Now, her father, as the wedding was nearing, was compliant but only silently so. He refused to speak to her.

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[23] Aleramo 27.

[24] Aleramo 36.

> Compresi ch'io ero morto per lui, ch'egli dava l'addio a tutto il sogno che aveva construito sul mio capo nel tempo remoto.[25]
>
> I was dead to him. All the hopes and dreams he had once built around me were at an end.[26]

Rina has one miscarriage that causes her to spend an entire year in a fog after which she learned that she was pregnant. Rina had a new set of worries now, notably what the child might inherit from her husband and herself and about how prepared [she] was for motherhood.

Welldon's theories about motherhood and perversion are useful here in understanding Aleramo's domestic plight. Even though Welldon's focus is on the child, whether abused, neglected, or abandoned, what we know about Aleramo **as** a daughter, essentially as a child herself, suggests that what Aleramo does in abandoning her son is indeed part of the enacting of the perversion of motherhood. And as such, what

[25] Aleramo 30.

[26] Aleramo 40.

feeling, acts, and behaviors constitute the maternal are necessarily reexamined.

With Jane Lazarre, the guilt associated with this feeling of detachment from motherhood is attributed to the very myths that she deems "destructive precisely because they are not altogether wrong, but because [they] leave out half the truth."[27] And Aleramo, who unlike Lazarre, actually puts into practice the act of liberating herself from maternal constraints, knows this guilt as well. She draws different conclusions, however. For her, the guilt will also bring forth a certain amount of enslavement. And this is because her decision to ultimately leave her family proves to be an irreversible one. That is, even if she were to go back, it would never negate the guilt and pain of having left in the first place.

The issue of embodiment comes into play for Lazarre and Aleramo when they are confronted with the decision to either abandon or remain in the role of mother and endure the responsibility of

[27] Jane Lazarre, preface to *A Mother Knot,* by Jane Lazarre (Beacon Press: Boston, 1976), xv.

childcare. What seems to shed light on this dilemma is the fairly recent "development of an explicitly female anthropology" which challenges "the self-evident assumption in the 'West' that the self and the body are congruent, fixed, and bounded."[28]

So, in a moment of utter torment, but with decisiveness unlike she had ever felt before, simply because she knows this is her last chance at securing freedom as she defines it, Aleramo leaves. Legally, she has fewer rights once she breaks ties with her husband, yet she maintains a position that suggests foraging through this limited legal status versus suffering through her current state would be, not only worthwhile, but completely necessary.

Logocentric tradition tells us to regard the concept of maternal space as fitting together only within the realm of domesticity, and preferably contained by a discourse on or loosely around the concept of the 'generative.' While there are multiple ways of doing, or performing

[28] Sidonie Smith 32.

gender, as elucidated by the scholarship of Judith Butler, *the maternal* is a particular area of consideration, as it is subsumed in the thinking of both gender and power. Motherhood, in this way, is undeniably a locus of political occupation, "constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion,"[29] to use the concept of place as defined by Linda McDowell. Becoming a mother prompts thinking about the issue of the body and politics, which then, in turn, allows for discussions on embodiment and selfhood. What Lazarre and Aleramo do is "problematize the apparent naturalness"[30] of motherhood and women. In Christine Battersby's chapter entitled *Her Body/Her Boundaries* she works to free up the ways that identity is conceptualized in order to more faithfully adhere to women's lived experience.

[29] Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 4.

[30] McDowell 35.

Battersby's negation of the idea that "the self is inside the body in the same way that a body is inside a room or a house"[31] is a promising one, in that it allows for discussions of identity that are not classified by an idea of the body as container at all. Rather, she ponders rudimentary issues of what it is, if anything at all, that can be classified as recurring, patterned, or universal, within the bodily experience. Such queries will help to not only better grasp the female condition as contained by motherhood, but on a much smaller scale, it would also work to encourage the general literary demographic to read such seemingly shocking and sensitive works as Lazarre and Aleramo's as part of a larger framework of discussion about the female experience.[32]

Battersby further unpacks the complexity of the idea of a universal schema for thinking the

[31] McDowell 40.

[32] The dialectic of the classroom in examining these texts has helped me to take away the notion on embodiment and essence that Battersby puts forth in *The Phenomenal Woman*: that a woman has a "different relationship with [her] body than does a man, and that the containment model for bodily boundaries and selves might be more typical of male experience" (43). This is in part due to Battersby's privileging the act of 'becoming' versus 'being' as well as her understanding about woman's identity as "phenomenal" in a dual sense, as both amazing and as an observable operation.

female body by stating that woman "cannot easily know whether her failure to recognize herself as fitting the philosophical paradigms is due to simple idiosyncrasy; to issues of sexual difference; to historical and cultural factors; or to the fact that the theories were false even for males at the time they were propounded."[33] And given the fact that there now are numerous avenues of discourse around thinking the mind/body, self/other relationship, my project is geared toward broadening the thinking about maternal subjectivity in the two interconnected works at the core of this discussion.

Lazarre finds herself in this new "knot" of inequality, consisting of the trinity of home, place, and identity, shortly after her first child's birth. Her mother-in-law leaves the couple alone after the first two weeks of Benjamin's life, and James, Jane's husband, picks up his daily academic routine as if nothing had changed, and heads to work each day. The reality of the home as a new, *occupied*, and 'other' place

[33] Battersby 42 .

sets in, and what ensues for Lazarre is loneliness and isolation, minus the actually 'being alone' part.

Lazarre attempts to synthesize her former identity with this newly acquired state of being "occupied," as evidenced by her feeling as a "guest in the world."[34] Out of character for Lazarre, she joins a local mother's group. But it proves near impossible to feel like she fits in. It becomes a very polarizing experience. She no longer courts an academic crowd, and now, doesn't even feel comfortable with other mothers. Jane's body becomes a status symbol for the man, and reflective of his, not her 'work'. Here, Lazarre echoes Aleramo's sentiments. Aleramo, a woman of sound intellect, as is Lazarre, comments about what her life of domesticity has done to her appearance and subsequently her identity,

> Le mie vestaglie di flanella mi assicuravano, ad ogni istante, ch'io ero proprio *una donna maritata*, un personaggio serio, cui l'esistenza era definitivamente

[34] Lazarre 39.

fissata. Quando uscii la prima volta sola a fianco del mio antico compagno d'ufficio, per lo stradone maggiore del paese, con in capo un cappello piumato che mi pesava orribilmente, e la persona impacciata entro un vestito all'ultima moda, mi parve che un abisso di tempo e di cose mi separasse dalla creatura che ero stata solo un anno innanzi.[35]

My new flannel dresses constantly reminded me that I was really a *married woman,* a serious person, whose place in life was irrevocably fixed. The first time I went out along the main street of the town at the side of my husband, my one-time colleague, horribly weighed down by a feathered hat and my body awkward in a fashionable dress it seemed to me an abyss of time and things separated me from the child I had been only a year before.[36]

And Lazarre, likewise, in an attempt to reconcile the outside world with her now conflicting

[35] Aleramo 33-34.

[36] Aleramo 45.

identity, speaks openly about this mother's group.

> I stopped going. I was becoming convinced that I was the only mother in the world who had such hateful feelings for the child I loved so intensely.[37]

The "parallels between women's bodies and the social construction of femininity and the home"[38] remain a defining part of Lazarre's psyche. In terms of Aleramo's plight, the pain felt by her own childhood trauma manifests itself much more viscerally than Lazarre's throughout the narrative. For example, we are privy to Aleramo's physical breakdown of sorts when she is confronted by her own mother who comes to her doorstep asking for help. We even learn that she suffered a miscarriage, presumably her first and only, shortly after that very encounter. In a moment of reasoned resentment, Aleramo writes:

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[37] Lazarre 46.

[38] McDowell 78.

Rimasi come fulminata. Poi immaginai la casa aperta coi fanciulli addormentati, ignari. Dinanzi a quella miseria umana che mi ricercava nel mezzo della note, ebbi una rivolta selvaggia di tutto l'essere… Tremavo, in preda anch'io alla febbre… E lanciai alla sventurata parole, acerbe, folli quasi come le sue… Oh, mia madre!... E per l'amore di um uomo che non la meritava piu![39]

I was thunderstruck. Suddenly, I visualized my old home, its door wide open to the street while the children, ignorant of events, slept inside. And confronted by my mother, that embodiment of human misery who had come to me for help in the night, I experienced a total, savage rebellion. I trembled, in a fever myself now. And I hurled harsh words at the unhappy woman, words almost as mad as her own.[40]

This passage by Aleramo leads me directly to Welldon's statement that "odd though it may

[39] Aleramo 40.

[40] Aleramo 53.

sound, motherhood provides an excellent vehicle for some women to exercise perverse and perverting attitudes towards their offspring and to retaliate against their own mothers."[41]

In contrast, Lazarre experiences a breakdown of a different hue. It is somewhat more muted. I attribute this to being because Lazarre and Aleramo conceive of the notion of 'freedom' completely differently. Lazarre's lot makes for a woman who can comfortably say, "the ordinary idea of freedom was becoming less and less seductive to me. For freedom to do as I please meant doing without Benjamin. And that was very simply a tormenting thought"[42]. Here, Lazarre confronts the "sad acceptance of the permanence of struggle"[43]. Conversely, Aleramo's domestic circumstances leave her to conceive of freedom as the idea of 'anywhere but here'. Despite the need to leave, she ends up entering a whole different type of prison altogether. This

[41] Welldon 63.

[42] Lazarre 107.

[43] Lazarre 129.

prison, at least, was entered into of her own volition.

Christine Battersby suggests that the seemingly unified front of "woman/wife/mother" is the product of an "oedipalized reality" which should bring back into light the initial question that she poses at the opening chapter of *The Phenomenal Woman:* "what would happen if we disturbed 'common' sense in ways that take the female subject as norm?"[44] I am not able to imagine that as of yet, as Lazarre is still narratively embedded in the dialectic of me (woman/wife/mother) against the world, as evidenced below.

> I walked toward the law school, longing for a smile of grown-up recognition from someone, anyone, who was over three weeks old. Rocking the carriage, although by now Benjamin was in a deep sleep, I waited for my husband. I was "Jim's wife." So I was known and called. Even to my face. "Oh so you're Jim's wife," I would hear many times. Which is not entirely offensive if

[44] Battersby 200.

> you are standing firmly upon the solid ground of your own identity. I, on the other hand, was slithering in and out of the muck of self-doubt at a velocity which was steering me toward the rim of hysteria. I was becoming the mother I had been seeking for twenty years. Now walking back and forth to and from the law school, I thought more and more about joining this new women's group which might possibly include both halves of my painfully divided self.[45]

Lazarre is contained by the discourse surrounding the politics of the body. She is also embedded in the narrative of the maternal. "This world, in all its wonder and horror, seemed to belong more to my tiny son, sleeping in his carriage, than it did to me".[46] Aleramo, conversely, is more in tune with the philosophical rendering of the figures of woman and mother. I think that this is partially due to the fact that she did leave her situation behind, and spent many years writing through why she needed to do it. Battersby's chapter *Her Body/Her Boundaries* is

[45] Lazarre 32.

[46] Lazarre 39.

relevant mainly because 'mother', it seems, takes precedence in the identity formation of Lazarre as a whole 'woman' and 'person,' whereas Aleramo works to reject the idea that her identity is entangled with the maternal grip. As if her body **is** her boundary, Lazarre has much difficulty allowing her intellect to dominate, as bodily confinement somewhat represses her intellectual awareness. "I felt myself to be a guest in the world," Lazarre says, characterizing the disembodiment she feels as Battersby's trinity and much more, almost as a 'motherwifewomanwriter' (maybe not in that order), "following the rules written out for my sex."[47]

Lazarre lives knowing that the metaphorical Yellow Wallpaper[48] will always be there. And the risk of tearing it down, for her, remains a frightful possibility. And so it stays. Aleramo, on the other hand, makes the decision that the existence with the wallpaper is no

[47] Lazarre 39.

[48] Symbolic reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's work published in 1899 entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper.*

existence at all. But rather than remove it, she removes herself, an even more symbolically radical gesture. Aleramo's actions void a cumbersome and fleshy vault of its contents. In other words, she has a son, but ceases to perform the act of mothering. After the fact, there is emptiness, still, yet this is much preferred to when she was actually full.

Both Lazarre and Aleramo, in varying fashions, make attempts to remove themselves from the iron grip of this occupation. What they do, in different ways, is expel the associations with motherhood like behavior - Lazarre more so as *institution* and Aleramo much more as *practice*. Due to the hostile responses to maternal ambivalence, it is not motherhood per se, but instead *the woman* at the center, who is, in turn, expelled. So if it is in fact the woman, then, and not motherhood that is expelled, then Aleramo's banishment can be considered, as Gayatri Spivak has famously coined in *Can the Subaltern Speak*, an "enabling violation." Not

without difficulty, she goes on to pursue an active career. Aleramo has effectively, for better or worse, removed the cohesive properties that motherhood and womanhood typically share. She is a visceral illustration of what the notion to live for ideas truly means. In what I see as the turning point of the novel, she decideively proclaims:

> Non ero io una di queste coscienze? Non mi era bastato il ragionamento e l'intima persuasione. Avevo continuato ad appartenere ad un uomo che disprezzavo e che non mi amava: in faccia al mondo portavo la maschera di moglie soddisfatta, in certo modo legittimando una ignobile schiavitu, santificando una mostruosa menzogna. Per mio figlio, per non correre il rischio d'esser private di mio figlio. Ed ora, ultima vilta che ha vinto tante donne, pensavo alla morte come ad una liberazione: mi riducevo anche a lasciare, per morire, mio figlio: non avevo il coraggio di perderlo per vivere.[49]

[49] Aleramo 151-152.

> I was so possessed by my new ideas that they became abstractions, devoid of any real significance for myself; they seemed like obvious and natural truths, which as yet had no connection with the way in which I and everyone around me lived. I began to think once more of death as a means of liberation. I was prepared to leave my son so that I might die, but I wasn't courageous enough to leave him so that I might live.[50]

Lazarre's escape, on the other hand, is solely via her imagination. In her last chapter, she narrates in several different women's voices, the independent woman, the mother, the young and unfettered, the wise, all coalescing to arrive at a final resting place in her long arduous journey toward self-completion. What comes next is the realization that the archetypal "Great Mother" that Erich Neumann speaks about with such reverence and fervor is not at all, as mythologized, a work of art. Instead, it is a

[50] Aleramo 203.

work of tissue, blood, sweat, grime, tears, love, and hate. Nonetheless, Jane Lazarre chooses to remain in the occupied land, much less xenophobic than Aleramo.

CHAPTER 3

"A Shadow of Self: Jamaica Kincaid's Daughters and their Mothers"

My first two chapters focused on the discourse of the maternal by looking at the emotional and psychological trajectory of the mother in twentieth-century works of western feminist literature. This chapter makes a departure from the mother and delves into the subjectivities of three of Jamaica Kincaid's female narrators, all of whom write from the vantage point of the daughter. Xuela in *Autobiography of My Mother*, the nameless "*girl*" in *My Mother*, the penultimate story in the collection entitled *At the Bottom of the River*, and Annie in *Annie John* all occupy the narrative space as the daughter/subject. This chapter takes subjectivity as a main point of interest. In addition, I examine the notion of voice, myth, and identity in each work. Kincaid's narrators possess a voice that oscillates between being solid and reliable to being tentative and hapless. I must wonder, then, if Kincaid's narrators consider the state of being 'daughter' a permanent one.

I am interested in how the narrators' own voices seem entirely encumbered by the past and by the remote voices and actions of the mother, and yet they all ultimately recognize this seeming burden as a necessary part of the mother/daughter cycle of life. This compels them to narrate through differing channels of memory, voice and time to achieve a true sense of self. I am claiming that the impetus driving the narrators to distance themselves from the maternal stronghold and find their own voice and identity is the fact that the narrators/daughters in these texts have put themselves in the position of storyteller and translator of their own, often apocryphal, memories.

Kincaid fits nicely in the middle of this project given the way that her narrators vacillate between the position of mother and daughter. Whereas my first two chapters speak solely to the motherhood experience, and the last two speak more so to the daughterhood experience, this chapter on Kincaid is appropriately in the middle, charting a course on the trajectory of both mother and daughter. In examining Kincaid's writings here, I hope to be able to encourage the thinking about maternal plots that haven't already been modeled, and

plots that transcend any model that we know. In essence, what Kincaid's writing does is translate into narrative the lived experience of a daughter through that daughter's experience with (or without, as is the case of Xuela in *Autobiography of my Mother)* her mother.

Jamaica Kincaid was born Elaine Richardson in 1949 on the island of Antigua, where she lived until the age of 16. She was smart, studious and loved learning, but due to the fact that she was the eldest, the only girl[1], and brought up in virtual poverty, she was sent by her mother and step father to New York to begin working as an au pair. Once in New York, she broke ties completely with her mother and family, never sending any money to them, quit the job she had initially, and secured new au pair work, this time for *New Yorker* writer Michael Arlen and his family. This was a formative and fortuitous move. Elaine decided shortly thereafter that she would also become a writer, and Michael Arlen significantly helped her career. The name change came soon after as well, as she was hoping

[1] Elaine Richardson was nine when her mother gave birth to a boy. Her focus shifted sharply from her daughter to her son. She went on to have two more sons. With three brothers, Elaine felt completely neglected by her mother. This notion of abandonment and gender inequalities will be a prominent theme throughout her works.

to sustain a sense of anonymity from her family back in Antigua. Having been educated until grammar school under British colonial rule in Antigua, the chosen name of Jamaica Kincaid is also a reflection of that colonial rule positioned against her native Caribbean roots. The motion to name one's self is a literal as well as figurative matter for Kincaid. This act of renaming appears in the form of characters who have the names of her own family members, yet whose depictions aren't autobiographical.

Kincaid is the only writer in my project who does not seem to possess, in her autobiographical pieces, any so called 'ambivalence' toward the experience of mothering. It is in her fiction writing, however, that her narrators often project the gamut of emotions on mothering, from ambivalence to perversion. Throughout Kincaid's work, there is a consistent focus on negotiating her own position on family, her mother, her existence as a daughter, and her homeland in the face of British colonization and the cultural brainwashing that came with it.

Kincaid uses the daughter as narrator, it seems, in order to translate the maternal experience, as if it cannot be understood from the source (the mother) itself. Philippe Lejeune's essay, 'The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write,' helps to clarify the status of Kincaid's narrators as 'translators,' as well as the functioning of autobiography as a genre.[2] This essay serves as a useful springboard to begin the discussion about Kincaid's Xuela Claudette Richardson, who, in *The Autobiography of My Mother,* simply cannot speak for herself, yet is nonetheless written as if it were an autobiographical account. This is because in a sense, Xuela the daughter narrator is her own mother's ghost-writer. Lejeune deconstructs the notion of authorship and suggests that the answer to the question about who owns the narrative (the writer or the subject) is debatable at best. The individual referenced in the title (My Mother) is not author, narrator, or protagonist (the last point is debatable I believe).

[2] Critic Carol Boyce Davies has said that while women's life stories "contribute to autobiographical theory," it is important to recognize and define them as a literary genre apart from Autobiography. This is because they "blur the lines between orality and writing". From "Collaboration and the Ordering Imperative in Life Story Production." Smith and Watson, *De/Colonizing* the Subject: *The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* 3-19.

I'd like to begin my discussion with the idea that Xuela, in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, bases most of her writing about her mother on what she has heard or has been told about her mother's life. *Annie John*, conversely, is a narrative primarily fostered out of memory- that which Annie has decided she will recall and to which Annie feels like giving a voice. Finally, the short story "My Mother" is, more than any other of the works, the agency of the 'imagined' in writing.

In each work, it is the daughter/narrator who works to control the dialectic. That is, however serious or trivial the dialogue between mother and daughter may seem, it is the daughter's subjectivity that is mirrored even when the mother is 'speaking'. Why, then, the daughter's struggle with issues of voice, identity, name, and the maternal itself? In the collection of essays *Mother Puzzles*, Martha Vertreace explains, in the chapter entitled *Secrets Left to Tell: Creativity and Continuity in the Mother/Daughter Dyad*, that the mother/daughter relationship is "a primal relationship enshrouded in myth. The mother stands between her daughter and the natural external world,

mediating that world to the child through magic, like a high priestess".[3] I will proceed to use the term 'mythological' in describing how Kincaid's characters lay universal claims onto the paradigm of mother and daughter. Additionally, they explain, in part, the supernatural workings of the relationship.

What Kincaid ultimately suggests, then, is that even though the daughter is the gatekeeper of the dialogic in the text on the narrative surface, she is defenseless in terms of the underlying workings of the voices beyond the surface. Further, even though speech, as such, is frozen and limited to what the narrator wants to tell, its meaning transcends any limitations.

Vertreace's idea (introduced above) of the mother/daughter narrative having mythological sway is evident in each of Kincaid's works here. First, in *Annie John,* Annie's mother is portrayed as the barrier that stands between Annie and her new life. One can read metaphorically into many of the passages about

[3] Mickey Pearlman, ed., *Mother Puzzles: Daughters and Mothers in Contemporary American Literature* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989).

Annie's anticipated departure from the island of Antigua. On the day that Annie departs, for example, she mentions that she wears clothing pressed by her mother, slept on sheets that her mother made by hand, applied the special talcum powder that only her mother used, and, once on the boat, connects with the gaze of only her mother, not her father, both of whom are standing side by side on the jetty. This seems to me the most poignant illustration of the how the mother/daughter relationship is at once a magnetic and opposing force. This paradigm is highlighted by Annie's mother standing on the dock as Annie stands on the boat deck. She identifies her mother in the crowd and from the boat keeps her eye on her until "she became just a dot in the matchbox-size launch swallowed up in the big blue sea".[4]

These moments are quite tender and certainly work to edify this intense, almost supernatural connection that is often assumed but unexplained. However, they are not enough to keep Annie anchored down to her mother or her motherland. The phrase "until she became just a

[4] Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), 148.

dot" suggests that Annie has already absorbed the reality that she is now disassociated from her mother. She now views her as a microcosm of the world, rather than the world itself, which is a relatively new phenomenon for Annie. The most significant moment comes when, after all of the goodbyes have been said, Annie stands there facing her mother, and must, for the first time, act independently. Even though she admits that she is "on the verge of feeling that it had all been a mistake," she remembers the fact that "I wasn't a child anymore and that when I made up my mind about something I had to see it through".[5] Further, despite the fact that she admits having "dragged [her]self away," she is drawn to a much more appealing prospect, that being her new horizons beyond Antigua. Uttering an awkward "well," Annie indicates that it is time to go, "as if responding to some invisible cue".[6] This invisible cue, I believe, is evidence that the natural life cycle of mother and daughter may have the necessary component of eventual estrangement embedded deep within its layers of meaning. This lays the

[5] *Annie,* Kincaid 146.

[6] *Annie,* Kincaid 147.

strongest mythological foundation to my argument. The cue comes not from Annie's own volition but instead from Annie's very own mother. It comes via a powerful symbol that has been transferred from mother to daughter, a wooden trunk.

We come upon this 'treasure' of sorts at the end of the first chapter, after learning that Annie's mother also left home at a young age and never returned. More importantly, we learn that she shared a very special piece from her journeys, this cherished wooden trunk. It is this trunk that withstands a hurricane and makes its way safely to a new land. Most significantly, it has been underneath Annie's bed her entire life;

> When my mother, at sixteen, after quarreling with her father, left his house on Dominica and came to Antigua, she packed her things in an enormous wooden trunk that she had bought in Roseau for almost six shillings. It was a small boat, and the trip would have taken a day and a half ordinarily, but a hurricane blew up and the boat was lost at sea for almost five days. By the time it got to Antigua, the boat was practically in splinters, and though two or three of the passengers were lost overboard,

along with some of the cargo, my mother and her trunk were safe.[7]

The trunk takes the form of a magic carpet of sorts, which, unbeknownst to Annie's mother, actually symbolically serves to help transport Annie to her new destination. It takes less literary excavation to see the mythological rendering of Xuela's mother in *Autobiography of My Mother* take shape in the very first line of the text; that is when we are made aware that Xuela's mother dies giving birth. It is Kincaid's language, however, which transcends the grim reality of this event and gives it mythological significance. She says, "my mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity".[8] Xuela is left to piece together her existence, and she does so by melding together both fact and story. In so doing, she creates a *mythos* of sorts in writing her version of the history (or *autobiography)* of her mother. Xuela's mother, having died as she did, forever renders the concept of death and the maternal interchangeable for Xuela. Critic

[7] *Annie,* Kincaid 19.

[8] Jamaica Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother* (New York: Penguin, 1996.) , 3.

Martha Vertreace further explains that "if the mother-daughter dyad exists to provide a haven for growth and experimentation, it also seeks to safeguard the past, which the mother knows and the daughter needs for survival. When that transmission is broken, through death or separation, the daughter is left to discover for herself the secrets of the past".[9] Xuela describes the feeling of never having had a mother as having "a bleak, black wind" always at her back".[10]

As opposed to Xuela and her mother, whose relationship is completely independent of memory and at best elusive, Annie John and her mother are initially like a cog and wheel, essentially each other's raison d'être, only to suddenly become unhinged in the second half of the work. Establishing a distinctly different kind of relationship, however, is the last daughter in my discussion. She is an unnamed daughter who I will call 'the girl', in the short story "My Mother." The girl begins the narrative by trying to recover a paradise lost of sorts that is her fractured relationship with her mother. In "My Mother," it is evident that mother

[9] Pearlman 83.

[10] *Autobiography,* Kincaid 3.

and daughter are inseparable on paper, yet in life are fated to be strangers, and divided by numerous factions.

One of the first things I am interested in unearthing is what exactly is evoked by the very title of the collection of stories itself, *At the Bottom of the River.* It is a title that serves as the over-arching motif for each story, and it is worth pillaging through. The place that is 'the bottom of the river' is a significant springboard as it sheds light on Kincaid's character creation as a whole, and subsequently helps us to better understand, not only the girl in *At the Bottom of the River,* but also Xuela and Annie John as well. For a large majority of the work, there is an interwoven reference to the top versus the bottom of the river. The daughter, in another of Kincaid's short stories, entitled 'At the Bottom of the River', mentions that "despite the current or wind which may cause leaves floating on top of the water sway and drift, the objects at the bottom of the river remain where they are, and intact".[11] This

[11] Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1978), 75.

poetic citation alludes to the eventual union between mother and daughter by seeing that at the bottom of the river is a house. This house seems to serve as a metaphor for a strong base which will anchor them both in. I make this observation because I believe that Kincaid understands the concept of the house at the bottom of the river as stationery and firmly placed in the earth, and also as a foundation on which one builds solid, indestructible things. Kincaid elaborates on this simple connection by saying that "at the bottom of the river I could see a house, and it was a house of only one room, with an A-shaped roof".[12] Yet it was not only a house she saw, but also a pathway and pebbles, however no *living* things, peculiarly enough. Essentially, she perceives a world beyond a world. And in the last sentence, she finally comes full circle with her independence. "I claim these things then-mine- and now feel myself grow solid and complete, my name filling up my mouth".[13]

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[12] *River,* Kincaid 75.

[13] *River,* Kincaid 82.

At the Bottom of the River at once elucidates and complicates the understanding of the mother/daughter relationship. Significant to note is the dramatic union of mother and daughter at the end of the short story "My Mother." Specifically, I will analyze how each narrator's profoundly different set of circumstances (Xuela never having had a mother, Annie having left her mother, and 'the girl' seeking an idealized symbiotic state with her mother) has informed the rethinking of this 'plot' of mother and daughter.

In "My Mother" what precedes this imagined union is a series of incidents, some actual, some not, which illustrate the dependent yet fractured nature of the bond. The lines "between my mother and I now were the tears I had cried" and "we sat mesmerized because our shadows had made a place between themselves"[14] are examples of how the daughter renders this divide in language. She makes the point exceedingly clear that she and her mother are fated, it seems, to be apart, if not physically, then emotionally and spiritually for certain. "My mother has grown to an enormous height

[14] *River,* Kincaid 54.

also, but my mother's height is three times mine. Sometimes I cannot see her from her breasts on up, so lost is she in the atmosphere".[15] The image that she creates illustrates the two distinct spheres that mother and daughter begin to occupy. Sharing the girl's powerlessness over the evident yet painful partition that separates the mother and daughter is another of Kincaid's characters: Annie John. Annie works through the very same difficulties mid-way through the narrative:

> In the year I turned fifteen, I felt more unhappy than I had ever imagined anyone could be. Everything I used to care about turned sour. I became secretive, and she said that I was in practice for becoming a liar and a thief-the only kinds of people who had secrets. My mother and I each soon grew two faces: one for my father and the rest of the world, and one for us when we found ourselves alone with each other.[16]

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[15] *River,* Kincaid 58.

[16] *Annie,* Kincaid 87.

What this does is force mother and daughter to become independently functioning entities. The unraveling of this relationship can be explained by looking to the work of two main critics: Nancy Chodorow and Marianne Hirsch. These scholars are interested, among other things, in isolating the mother-daughter relationship in literature. Specifically, they examine the relationship as a powerful story whose "plot," is examined essentially as a (re)construction of femininity. In this (re)construction, the definition and expression of 'love' between these two factions is broadened in scope, "calling the more conventional constructions of the love plot into question".[17]

Despite the fact that each of the narrators struggle to come to terms with the existing circumstances surrounding their own maternal experiences,[18] they are nonetheless persistent in giving voice to the mother,

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[17] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother Daughter Plot: narrative/psychoanalysis/feminism.* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989),7.

[18] Xuela's mother dies at the moment of her birth. Annie John, at the end of the novel, makes the gut-wrenching decision to leave the island of Antigua, her mother, father, and entire family, in search of "a place where nobody knew a thing about me and liked me just for that reason"(128). There, she will recreate herself. Her name is the same as her mother's, yet it will now, in a faraway place, be her own. Lastly, the nameless girl in *My Mother* describes many contrasting emotions about her mother throughout the story. In a a matter of a few pages, she wants her dead, wants to be one with her, is separated from her, finds her again, and then, in a triumphant declaration of omniscient proportions, she finally asserts: "as we walk through [the rooms], we merge and separate, merge and separate; soon we shall enter the final stage of our evolution" (60).

the single phenomenon that has stunted their own growth as individuals.

The titles of each work, *Autobiography of My Mother, Annie John*, (which is also Annie's mother's name) and the short story "My Mother", set the stage for the work to be read as mother-centered, yet both narratives turn daughter-centered by the end. An interesting side note is that Nancy Chodorow admits that her influential and important work *The Reproduction of Mothering* was written primarily from the perspective of the daughter. Now while it is true that in all three of Kincaid's works, what pattern is consistent is that each of the narrator's identity is being formed vis a vis the mother, each daughter seeks, at some stage in their development, to carve out a separate identity. Further, all three works end with an understanding that the relationship of mother and daughter is cyclical, and that it ebbs and flows, eventually settling in a final resting place.

In carving out this separate identity, the agent of memory is necessary, for each is written in the past tense. It is used to anchor the narrative but what it

also does is embed the daughter in a telling of her own experiences that are almost always mother-focused and for better or worse, immutable. The fact that none of the mothers are present for the telling of the narrative does not nullify the mothers' potency. And despite the fact that it is the child who tells the story, both narratives hone in on the daughter's quest for a separate identity as well as for emotional and spiritual survival. It is this yearning for survival that thrust forward the daughter-centered text.

The trope of survival is used by Xuela to work her way out of what she describes as a "false paradise,"[19] making the claim that she refuses to "belong to anyone, since the one person [she] would have consented to own [her] never lived to do so".[20] Annie John, conversely, weaves survival into her story as a way of fighting back against the pain of an apathetic maternal figure, and ultimately decides that survival necessitates leaving her home to begin anew. And the daughter figure in the short story "My Mother" uses the power of

[19] *Autobiography,* Kincaid 30.

[20] *Autobiography,* Kincaid 104.

poetic imagination to create an other-worldly, nurturing, prophetic, yet mostly imaginary figure of 'mother'.

In all three works, it is interesting to note how memories of 'mother' get recounted. For one, the mother's subjectivity is removed, in part by not being a first person narrator. In addition, the mother in *Autobiography* is a virtually all-consuming figure of the narrator/daughter's imagination. And through the agency of imagination, Xuela, narratively speaking, spawns her own mother. Contemporary American writer Kim Chernin in *The Hunger Song* affirms that "in order for daughters to become complete individuals, they must, in some way, "birth" their own mothers".[21] Xuela never achieves full character status, and that is illustrated by the missing maternal link that would render her whole. Xuela conceives of her mother as a celestial being. While resting at the bank of a river daydreaming about the Carib people, Xuela writes;

> It was while sitting in this place that I first began to dream about my mother. I saw

[21] Kim Chernin, *The Hunger Song* (London: The Menard Press, 1982).

> my mother come down a ladder. She wore a long white gown, the hem of it falling just above her heels, and that was all of her that was exposed, just her heels; she came down and down, but no more of her was revealed. Only her heels, and the hem of her gown. At first I longed to see more and then I became satisfied just to see her heels coming down.[22]

Xuela had to come to terms with only having fragments of her mother. In narrative, both Xuela and Annie work through "dependency and a code of behavior," according to Vivien Nice, author of the 1992 work *Mothers and Daughters: The distortion of a relationship*. What this means is that even though death separates mother and daughter in *Autobiography*, it is Xuela's dependency on never being dependent that causes the main rift in the relationship. Xuela bravely faces social challenges that might cripple other adolescents and fill their journal entries with angst and uncertainty. In so doing, she exudes an almost defiant independence. When describing how she feels about being in a classroom filled mostly with boys, she states:

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[22] *Autobiography,* Kincaid 18.

> In that room always there were only boys; I did not sit in a schoolroom with other girls until I was older. I was not afraid in that new situation: I did not know how to be that then and do not know how to be that now. I was not afraid, because my mother had already died and that is the only thing a child is really afraid of; when I was born, my mother was dead.[23]

Annie, as well as and the daughter in "My Mother", regard the maternal as an unsolved mystery. While they all approximate it without end in the text, for Xuela, the maternal is an emotional not physical presence. For Annie, conversely, the mother is present, albeit in the past tense. During the first half of the book, mother and daughter work like cog and wheel. One essentially makes the other's existence have meaning. Annie proclaims: "how important I felt to be with my mother".[24] She even speaks disparagingly of her father, which works as a defining feature of this woman-

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[23] *Autobiography,* Kincaid 14.

[24] *Annie,* Kincaid 15.

centered narrative. She says, "when my eyes rested on my father, I didn't think very much of the way he looked. But when my eyes rested on my mother, I found her beautiful".[25] Until Annie's 12th birthday she remains utterly devoted to her mother. However, a turning point comes once her mother begins to objectify her daughter by one day criticizes her choice of clothing. This moment introduces the possibility that Annie might one day be a completely separate person, independent enough to even wear her own, non-borrowed clothes.[26] At this point, Annie begins to pull away from her mother's care. She more readily contradicts her mother's wishes and is critical of her every move. If Annie's mother asked Annie a question, she'd quip, "a person I did not recognize answered in a voice I did not recognize"[27]. This utterance intimates that there is an identity rift, and not only 'mother' is becoming

[25] *Annie,* Kincaid 18.

[26] The turning point in the mother-daughter relationship takes place here, when Annie tries on an article of her mother's clothing, and her mother begins imposing a forced separation onto her. "I loved this piece of cloth and how nice I thought it would look on us both, but my mother replied, "Oh no. You are getting too old for that. It's time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me." To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far. It wasn't just what she said, it was the way she said it. No accompanying little laugh. No bending over and kissing my little wet forehead. 26.

[27] *Annie,* Kincaid 27.

estranged but Annie is beginning to recognize a change in her own patterns of behavior.

Annie's relationship with, and rendering of her mother ebbs and flows so dramatically throughout the work that the mother becomes an untrustworthy figure about which the reader grows to feel ambivalent. Annie speaks of her mother in extremes. In one particularly errant outpouring of emotion, Annie says,

> Something I could not name just came over us, and suddenly I have never loved or hated anyone so. But to say hate-what did I mean by that? Before, if I hated someone I simply wished the person dead. If my mother dies, what would become of me? I couldn't imagine my life without her. Worse than that, if my mother died, I would have to die, too, and even less than I could imagine my mother dead could I imagine myself dead.[28]

Soon after, following an altercation with her mother about arriving late to church, Annie's mother affirms,

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[28] *Annie,* Kincaid 88.

"until this moment, in my whole life I knew without a doubt that, without any exception, I loved you best."[29] At that, Annie backpedals and confesses to the reader, "I wanted to go over and put my arms around her and beg forgiveness for the whole thing. But I couldn't move, and when I looked down it was as if the ground had opened up between us, making a deep and wide split."[30]

Kincaid's image of the ground opening up serves my argument well, especially in light of Nancy Chodorow's theory about child development and the mother/daughter relationship. She claims that there comes a time during the infant stage when the child realizes for the first time that the mother is a separate being. She says, "during the early months, the child comes gradually to perceive the mother as separate and as 'not-me.' This beginning perception as mother as separate, in conjunction with the infant's inner experience of continuity in the midst of changing instances and events, forms the basis for its experience of a self".[31] Examining the multiple

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[29] *Annie,* Kincaid 103.

[30] *Annie,* Kincaid 103.

[31] Chodorow 67.

subjectivities of the child-centered narrative allows the reader to gauge how the maternal is absorbed on both the psychological as well as physical level. It furthers the discussion around what types of behaviors and emotions can encompass the bond of love, and how that bonds affect the child's development. For example, in each of the three texts, Kincaid explores the often cache nature of the mother/daughter relationship, which includes resentment, anger, obsession, and even hate, resulting in bonds being formed that are complex and esoteric.

Whatever the overarching sentiment, Kincaid's narrators are entirely dependent on the mother, either conceptually or in reality, and we see this most profoundly in "My Mother". When describing her poetic union with her mother, the girl says "as we walked along, our steps became one, and as we talked, our voices became one voice, and we were in complete union in every way. What peace came over me then, for I could not see where she left off and I began, and where I left off and she began".[32] Then there are other times

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[32] *River,* Kincaid 60.

when Kincaid's mothers are disdainful figures worthy of alienation. For example, the ways in which Annie John expresses her anger at being patronized and tricked by her mother explains her desire for independence. Annie recounts for us a time when Annie's mother tricked her into eating something she knew that she knew Annie did not like. It was another formative moment for Annie, because of which she harbored a great deal of resentment against her mother ever since that moment.

> My mother said, "You just ate some breadfruit. I made it look like rice so you would eat it. It's very good for you, filled with lots of vitamins." As she said this, she laughed. She was standing half inside the door, half outside. Her body was in the shade of our house, but her head was in the sun. When she laughed, her mouth opened to show off big, tiny, sharp white teeth. It was as if my mother turned into a crocodile.[33]

Likewise, the girl in "My Mother" initially places herself in her mother's shadow, only to shift gears

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[33] *Annie,* Kincaid 84.

later on. One line has prevented her from a permanent state of being just a shadow. It is the penultimate line of the story. "There is the warm falling rain on the clumps of castor bush, there is the small lamb bouncing across the pasture, **there is the soft ground welcoming the sole of my pink feet.**"[34] (emphasis mine) Here, we witness this girl basking in the prominence of her mother, when she interrupts the stream of the narrative to remind us that she, the girl, is, in fact, a firm presence, anchored to the earth, independent and alive. It eclipses the assumption the reader has perhaps made about this girl and unexpectedly aligns much more closely the figures of Xuela and Annie to the anonymous yet strong willed daughter in "My Mother".

As a whole, these three works trace the daughter's response to the maternal and the effect on the sense of self that daughterhood allows for, or, in some cases, takes away. As translators of emotional artifacts, such as collected memories, passed down stories and inanimate objects of nostalgia, such as the wooden trunk that Xuela's mother gave to her, it is the

[34] *River,* Kincaid 61.

daughters in the texts who gain authority over the maternal via a dominant inner dialogue that they formulate. This lends a sense of plurality in the identities of the daughters and provides them with a keen sense of strength. This strength is the force which permits women like Annie and Xuela to either abandon their homelands and the taut maternal strings that bind them to such places and carry on or else simply accept the unknown, which is the case for Xuela.

What sets Xuela's memories apart from those of both *the girl* in *My Mother* and Annie in *Annie John* is in the source of the memories. Somewhere within Xuela's narrative is the sound of a woman who has never actually spoken to or looked at Xuela. Xuela is left to try and extract the meaning of her own existence through telling her mother's story, I suspect, in hopes of gaining more insight into the mystery that is her mother. She ends the work, however, never having exacted the mystery of the mother, and is left feeling a profound sense of alienation. While she yearns to truly know her mother, she finds no solace in reality, and instead scorns both past and future, relishing only

in the present. She is "never," as Xuela phrases it, "in a state of anticipation". She continues:

> the future is not even like the black space above the sky, with an intermittent spark of light; it is more like a room with no ceiling or floor or walls, it is the present that gives it such a shape, it is the present that encloses it. The past is a room full of baggage and rubbish and sometimes things that are of use, but if they are of real use, I have kept them. [35]

Annie John, conversely, has not spent any time trying to unveil the mystery of the mother, and is very intent upon exacting all of her specific memories with a suitable meaning. For her, the mother is a corporeally prominent figure with whom she enjoyed a very strong attachment until a certain stage. How Annie differs from Xuela is mainly in the nature of their maternal memories. Annie's main struggle is grappling with early, very specific, and all positive memories that suddenly change course during Annie's adolescence, when her mother imposes on her an unwanted separation. What

[35] *Autobiography,* Kincaid 206.

this does is give Xuela more power than Annie in terms of narrative authority. Annie can and does speak of her mother while Xuela has to speak the maternal via absence. Since she has no actual memories of which to speak, Xuela must access the inaccessible and translate into meaning fragments of emotion that are not verbal or even cognitive, but rather imagined.

While Xuela, Annie, and *the girl* all essentially 'lose' the mother, the ways in which this actually comes to pass are vastly different. Annie's mother initially pulls away from her, to Annie's dismay, only for Annie later on in the narrative, in her quest for independence, to then pull away from her mother. Unlike Annie, Xuela and *the girl* are at the crossroads of neglect and abandonment, Xuela never having had a mother to remember. Finally, the mother sends 'the girl' away in the latter part of the story, which leads her down a panic-stricken spiral where she works tirelessly to imagines a true sense of happiness in union with her mother.

To further unpack what it is that happens to the girl in the story, it is useful to look at Nancy Chodorow's

work with early psychological development in infants and their mothers. The most important of Chodorow's clams, I feel, is that development of a child always occurs in relation to another person. In the case Annie, it is in relation to her mother. Essentially, the mother "must know when and how to begin to allow the child to differentiate from her - to allow some of the functions which she provides to be taken over by the infant's budding adaptive ego capacities. Thus, she must guide her child's separation from her".[36]

Chodorow sees the effects of early mothering and the maternal role as paramount to the infant and child's healthy development. When we encounter Xuela, the trauma of never having a mother does not nullify Chodorow's work. If anything, it make the point explicitly clear. Speaking at such length and with such profundity of 'not having,' quite simply, highlights the desire and necessity of 'having'.

In *Annie John* and *My Mother*, losing the mother seems a necessary event in order for Annie and 'the girl' to

[36] Chodorow 83.

realize a full sense of freedom. This may seem a fairly superficial observation, yet I feel that it is an all important one. For Annie as well as 'the girl', the mother's physical presence occupies the daughters' material atmosphere, and so the interesting difference becomes the notion of who *carries* memories versus who *conjures* memories. Annie John and *the girl*, I claim, carry them, while Xuela conjures memories. This difference is evidenced by the mothers' array of narrative existences, which range from dead, to living but at a distance, to imaginary and ambiguous.

In this study of Kincaid's mothers and daughters, whereas all of the narratives are grounded by the daughters' seeming unconditional love for their mothers, they all end with the necessary losing, whether willed or not, of the mother, as part of what 'the girl' in "My Mother" understands as "the final stage of our evolution".[37] That understanding is not without its own share of stakes, however. What does each stand to lose by enacting this move away from the maternal? On a theoretical level, Chodorow might suggest that, while being necessary and

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[37] *River,* Kincaid 61.

natural, 'losing the mother' is part of the "oedipal resolution" which looks at adolescence as "a period of renewed crisis and conflict,"[38] especially as it relates to the "construction of the feminine psyche in its object-world".[39]

While achieving a firmer sense of self, the daughter subsequently struggles to become the authority of her own narrative and hence loses the sense of naiveté and joie de vivre. In *My Mother*, what the girl loses is a bit more precious. For her, what is clearly compromised at the end of the story is her own identity and sense of sanity. Xuela is the only one who, to a degree, resigns to isolation without becoming mentally disfigured as a result. This is not to say that she comes through the narrative unscathed. On the contrary, Xuela grows cynical and sedentary, effacing all hopes that the future holds possibility. For her, death is the only reality that has any substance to it. As mentioned earlier, the mother, as a mythical figure, stands between the daughter and the natural external world, yet when the medium is not the natural external world, as is the case with

[38] Chodorw 134.

[39] Chodorow 134.

Kincaid's texts here- the mother is as lead filled as a hardened internal mass that needs hollowing out. Eventually, she will make her way to the bottom, if not 'of the river,' then of the narrative.

CHAPTER 4

"Death Becomes Her: Writing Mother as 'Other' in Simone de Beauvoir's *Memoirs d'une jeune fille rangee* and *Une mort tres douce"*

Evident in the previous chapter is how the agency of the mother can lead to the loss of the daughter's agency and render the narrator suddenly passive and desperate for recovery of a lost identity. This was the case with Kincaid's Xuela in *Autobiography of My Mother.* Examples of the kinds of preoccupations that these daughters faced are: death (*Autobiography of My Mother,*) adolescence (*Annie John,*) and imagination (*At the Bottom of the River).* I further my study of daughters and agency in this chapter with a study of Simone de Beauvoir's *Une mort tres douce* and *Memoires d'une jeune fille rangee.*

Beauvoir's autobiographical oeuvre has covered encyclopedic ground. I will specifically be dealing with Simone's rendering of her mother as "Other".

Through the lens of critics such as Toril Moi and Susan Bainbrigge, I show how Francoise de Beauvoir's death, personally, intellectually, as well as philosophically, is altogether necessary in realizing Simone's own existential liberation.

From *Memoires d'une jeune fille rangee,* which testifies to Beauvoir's rigid religious upbringing as well as her intellectual capabilities, proven by her diligent efforts in academia, to *Tout compte fait,* which is a more or less a complex and comprehensive reflection on the overall trajectory that her life has taken, Beauvoir requires, through her philosophical and political assertions, that she be defined as a free individual in the universe regardless of her sex, age, class, and education.

Given the historical moment of early twentieth-century Paris into which de Beauvoir was born, Beauvoir's accomplishment of this goal was a long time in the making and her efforts were ardent. She was born into a bourgeois family in 1908 and, similarly to Sibilla Aleramo, her father had always treated her as the 'son' of the family, as he

believed that she had the potential to go far with her studies. That she did. By 16 she had already decided she would become a writer. She was awarded the aggregation in philosophy at 21, and went on to pursue a dense career full of social, literary, and political success. Equipped with cultural privilege, confidence, education, and also fame, de Beauvoir enjoyed many things that most women at that time did not have the luxury of obtaining. The one thing, however, that 'most' women did have and that which she plainly rejected, was domestic life, that is, a husband and children. De Beauvoir's tolerance for the domestic realm began and ended with her mother Francoise.

Despite her assertion at the beginning *Memoires d'une jeune fille rangee* that she hoped to escape from a narrow circle that she viewed as confining, Beauvoir will not fully realize her end goal and become a self-made woman until an event occurs that forever suppresses her longest ruling regime, that being the death of her mother. *Memoires* also attests to the acceptance of the ending of Simone's childhood. She shifts gears towards lesser juvenile preoccupations

and speaks at length about her studies and her intellectual labors. She reveals the reasons for wanting to be a teacher and a writer in stating:

> Si j'avais souhaite autrefois me faire institutrice, c'est que je revais d'etre ma propre cause et ma propre fin; je pensais a present que la literature me permettrait de realiser ce voeu. Elle m'assurerait une immortalite qui compenserait l'eternite perdue; il n'y avait plus de Dieu pour m'aimer, mais je brulerais dans des millions de coeurs. En ecrivant une oeuvre nourrie de mon histoire, je me creerais moi-meme a neuf et je justifierais mon existence.[1]

> If at one time I had dreamed of being a teacher it was because I wanted to be a law unto myself; I now thought that literature would allow me to realize this dream. It would guarantee me an immortality which would compensate for the loss of heaven and eternity; there was no longer any God to love me, but I should have the undying love of

[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoires d'une jeune fille range* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 198-99.

> millions of hearts. By writing a work based on my own experience I would re-create myself and justify my existence.[2]

Much is at stake, however, in de Beauvoir's business of self-creation, and re-creation. Inherent in the desire to create your 'self' anew is the presumption that the 'self' which came before was either a non-signifying entity or else flawed. De Beauvoir's ambitions are certainly lofty, and it is her intention, in the face of imperfection, to make her self over, this time in her own image, acting resistant towards the previous creator, that being the mother. She writes:

> Je pensais a moi du dedans, comme a quelqu'un en train de se faire, et j'avais l'ambition de progresser a'l'infini.[3]
>
> I would think of myself as it were from within, as someone who was in the process of

[2] Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (Harper & Row: New York, 1959), 142.

[3] *Memoires* 202.

being created, and my ambition was to progress to the infinite of perfection.[4]

These goals look towards the future, leaving her childhood, and its irreparable blemishes, behind. Further, given the moment in which she writes of this recreation effort, I argue that Beauvoir, as a *jeune fille rangee*, is pointing the finger at her mother as a faulty creator. Francoise de Beauvoir's oeuvre, that is, Simone, is unworthy of preservation and, as such, is made into something completely 'other' than she intended. One might say that it is simply the nature of the existentialist's belief, that the individual creates the meaning of his/her own existence. However, as Beauvoir's mother figures as a central preoccupation during the writing of *Memoires*, it is the symbolic death of her mother's creation, aka, herself, that leads Simone to feel a sense of intellectual and emotional freedom.

In Toril Moi's chapter "My Monster/My Mother/My Man/Myself" she delves into Beauvoir's fiction as evidence of how Beauvoir came to reinvent herself.

[4] *Memoirs* 145.

Moi insists that in the work *L'Invitee,* under the suggestive glances of an Oedipal triangle (Pierre-Francoise-Xaviere: Father, Mother, Daughter,) "lurks another fantasmatic configuration in which Francoise is the daughter killing the cruel, invasive, and rivalrous mother."[5] Moi uses textual references from *Une mort tres douce* to provide further evidence that Beauvoir's very own mother exercised tyrannical methods of exerting control over many aspects of life, and that, it seemed as if her mother took on an almost mythical significance. That said, she elaborates, "looking carefully at Francoise's metaphors," Moi states, "it is hard to escape the conclusion that the timeless, suffocating monster that leaves no space in the world for Francoise is the very image of the omnipotent and malevolent mother threatening to devour her daughter".[6]

Hegel's comment that "each consciousness pursues the death of the other" from the frontispiece of her first novel *She Came to Stay* in 1943 indicates that

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[5] Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 118.

[6] Moi 118.

Beauvoir was beginning a long standing literary project which very often has the notion of death (of herself as well as others) as a prevalent concern that she examines in depth throughout her career. As an existentialist philosopher, this is not altogether surprising and hence need not be a focal point per se. Yet when the discussion ebbs towards her own mother in relation to mortality and the notion of 'being' as opposed to 'being a body,' it is the emotional and textual distance that she takes which remains the central point of analysis in this chapter. To clarify, it is explicitly clear in Beauvoir's writing that she fears death as an event, yet when it comes to pass that she outlives many of her family members and friends, as we see throughout both *Tout compte fait* and *La force des choses*, she is forced to experience the very thing that terrifies her the most. For the most part, she approaches these deaths as rationally as a philosopher and equally as emotionally as a human being. That said, it is Beauvoir's mother's death, and her process of dying, that is treated unlike that of any other of Beauvoir's affiliates, whether family or friend. Simply put, she experiences her mother's death

completely differently than that of others. I am claiming that through the corporeal narration of Francoise de Beauvoir's death, Simone feels at liberty to completely break free from the hold that her mother has had on her in life. Even Beauvoir's own death comes to be something that she seems resigned to accept. In *Tout compte fait,* she observes:

> Ma mort a commence depuis longtemps et je me suis habitué a voir mon passee me quitter. C'est sans doute parce que je me resigne a ma propre disparition que j'accepte aussi celle des autres. Bien entendu, la mort de quelques personnes qui me sont tres cheres briserait cette indifference: elles laisseraient dans mon existence un vide qui meme en imagination m'est difficilement tolerable.[7]
>
> My death began long ago, and I have grown used to seeing my past desert me. No doubt it is because I am resigned to my own disappearance that I also accept that of

[7] Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout compte fait* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 113.

> others. Of course the death of some few people who are very dear to me would shatter this indifference: they would leave an emptiness in my life that even in imagination I can hardly bear.[8]

Toril Moi, however, sees Beauvoir's writing as a signifying a resistance to death. She renders it as representative

> of a constant effort to fight off the death-dealing mermaid. By conjuring up the autonomous, centered, and balanced woman - Francoise, Anne, the 'independent woman' of *The Second Sex* - Beauvoir attempts to disarm the Medusa, to ensure that the snake-haired monster remains at a safe remove from any character that resembles herself. This struggle is not successful.[9]

While the ideal of the absolute autonomous woman is always present in Beauvoir's autobiographies, I rarely see occasion to fully believe her, until she writes *Une mort tres douce*. Moi rightly observes that:

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[8] Simone de Beauvoir, *All Said and Done*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 112.

[9] Moi 218.

> *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* reads as a sustained effort to write the *Bildungsroman* of an independent woman: the story of the young Simone is explicitly intended to counter that of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, and yet, even here, the death-dealing Medusa rears her ugly head. *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* weaves its tale of success and happiness across the shadows of disappointment, dependence, and death.[10]

In this work, Beauvoir reminds us of a promise that she had made to herself in childhood with the intention of transforming that promise into a self-fulfilled prophecy of sorts. She says,

> Adulte, je reprendrais en main mon enfance et j'en ferais un chef-d'oeuvre sans faille. Je me revais l'absolu fondement de moi-meme et ma propre apothese.[11]

> When I was a grown-up, I would take my own childhood in hand again and make of it a faultless

[10] Moi 218.

[11] *Memoires 79.*

> work of art. I saw myself as the basis of my own apotheosis.[12]

However, these other roles that history and family dictate that she play conflicted with her promise. And even when she affirms that "pour de vrai, je ne me soumettais a personne: j'etais, et je demeurais toujours mon propre maitre"[13] ("in reality I refused to submit to anybody: I was, and would always remain, my own master"[14]). The reality that we come to learn is that Beauvoir's reaction to the authority of her parents is more accurately defined as rebellion and not a stark refusal of duty. In *Tout compte fait*, it becomes clear why Simone is able to experience her mother's death in such a way. Having identified her mother as a rival, she states:

> Si ma mere avait ete moins indiscrete et moins tyrannique, les limites de son intelligence m'auraient moins genee; la rancune n'aurait pas oblitere l'affection que je lui portais et

[12] *Memoirs* 57.

[13] *Memoires 82.*

[14] *Memoirs* 59.

j'aurais mieux supporte l'eloignement de mon pere.[15]

If my mother had been less tactless and oppressive, the narrowness of her understanding would have troubled me less; resentment would not have overlaid my affection for her and I should have borne my father's withdrawal better.[16]

I am not arguing that Beauvoir did not love her mother, or that she did not grieve during her mother's illness and passing. The death of her mother is actually quite a shock for Beauvoir because, according to Moi, it "forces Beauvoir to situate her mother in time and space".[17]

The narration of death in *Une mort tres douce* completes the process of separation that Beauvoir had long been striving toward. This book is essentially a rendering in language the dying process, as it is felt to the living. Unable to give much else her

[15] *Tout compte fait 25.*

[16] *All Said and Done* 24.

[17] Moi 118.

attention, Beauvoir admits in *Tout compte fait* that "at that particular time I hardly cared about the fate of my book at all". Yet writing, being the "grande affaire de sa vie,"[18] de Beauvoir nonetheless struggles with sustaining a balance between her own life and the life that she lived under the thumb of her mother. Her mother becomes both a joyful as well as a menacing presence after her death via her world of dreams. She writes:

> Ma mere, j'ai dit dans *Une more tres douce* qu'elle appairaissait souvent dans mes reves alors que mon pere en etait absent; jadis c'etait parfois une presence cherie mais le plus souvent je redoutais de retomber en son pouvoir.[19]

> As I have said in *A Very Easy Death,* my mother often appeared in my dreams whereas my father did nor: sometimes, in earlier days, she was a beloved presence, but more often I dreaded falling into her power again.[20]

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[18] *Tout compte fait* 131.

[19] *Tout compte fait* 129.

[20] *All Said* 128.

For an existentialist, death is that which gives meaning to life. Yet for Beauvoir, Maman (as she called her throughout the work) is a third person object of scrutiny, enacting a role as if the script that accompanied it was never intended for her: she is simply "un cadavre en sursis",[21] ("a dead body under suspended sentence"[22]).

Speaking of the body, Beauvoir frequently writes metaphorically in describing her mother's defiantly conservative stance in life. Using the sexually suggestive image of a corset, she says,

> Dans son enfance, on a comprime son corps, son coeur, son esprit, sous un harnachement de principles et d'interdits. On lui a appris a serer elle-meme etroitement ses sangles. En elle subsistait une femme de sang et de feu: mais contrefaite, mutilee et etrangere a soi.[23]

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[21] *Une mort 29.*

[22] *A Very* 20.

[23] *Une mort 65.*

> In her childhood her body, her heart, and her mind had been squeezed into an armor of principles and prohibitions. She had been taught to pull the laces hard and tight herself. A full-blooded, spirited woman lived on inside of her, but a stranger to herself, deformed and mutilated.[24]

The daughter is haunted by how unrecognizable the woman is before her in the hospitable bed. She resolves mid way through the work that the woman before her is actually "plus ma mere mais un pauvre corps supplicie".[25] ("no longer [her] mother, but rather a poor tormented body".[26])

Beauvoir speaks about her mother's body in ways that suggest she had already decided that Maman was another's property. She was also

> impuissante devant le diagnostic des specialists, leurs previsions, leurs

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[24] *A Very* 43.

[25] *Une mort 81.*

[26] *A Very* 53.

> decisions. Le malade est devenu leur propriete.[27]
>
> Caught up in the wheels and dragged along, powerless in the face of specialists' diagnoses, their forecasts, their decisions, the patient becomes their property.[28]

As such, it is easier for Beauvoir the daughter to distance herself from Maman as 'mother'. She functions in large part as object. With Maman as object, the narrative takes on a self-indulgent feel. It is old age and subsequently the process of dying which are Beauvoir's main concerns, and these concerns are not limited to her mother. She is frightened about her own mortality, and has been since *Memoires d'une jeune fille rangee.*

Death is an overarching philosophical struggle that Beauvoir considers at length. In this work, however, she hones in on the objective nature of the experience of her dying mother. Beauvoir also shies away from using language that might indicate

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[27] *Une Mort* 87.
[28] *A Very* 57.

possession in speaking of her mother, veering away from any notion of propriety. She begins a sentence with "mon pere," and then proceed to transition to the subject of Francoise by calling her "Maman" instead of "ma mere." She says,

> Je ne blame pas mon pere. On sait assez que chez l'homme l'habitude tue le desir. Maman avait perdu sa premiere fraicheur et lui sa fougue. Pour la reveiller, il recourait aux professionnelles du Sphinx. Je l'ai vu plus d'une fois, entre mes quinze et mes vingt ans, rentrer a huit heures du matin, sentant l'alcool et racontant d'un air embarasse des histories de bridge ou de poker".[29]

> I do not blame my father. It is tolerably well known that in men habit kills desire. Maman had lost her freshness and he his ardour. In order to arouse it he turned to the professionals of the café des Versailles, or the young ladies of the Sphinx. More than once, between the age of fifteen and twenty, I saw him coming home at eight in the

[29] *Une mort* 54.

morning, smelling of drink, and telling confused tales of bridge or poker".[30]

What this narrative maneuver essentially does is create a portrait that is as much about Beauvoir as it is about Francoise, blurring "boundaries between autobiography and biography".[31]

Beauvoir depicts Maman's death in such graphic detail, and intertwines moments of utter empathy and tenderness that that we begin to understand how much this work is not only a study of the death of Beauvoir's mother, but, as Susan Bainbrigge suggests in *Writing Against Death*, a clear effort to both separate from and identify with Maman. I see Beauvoir's dueling desire to identify and separate facilitated by the fact that Maman's body is already something 'other' than it used to be before she entered into the category of 'dying'. That is, she begins the work creating a marked distance between herself, alive, abroad, and in motion, and death:

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[30] *A Very* 36.

[31] Susan Bainbrigge, *Writing Against Death: the Autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir,* (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 177.

> Le jeudi 24 octobre 1963, a quatres heures de l'apres-midi , je me trouvais a Rome, dans ma chambre de l'hotel Minerva; je devais rentrer chez moi le lendemain par avion et je rangeais des papiers quand le telephone a sonne. Bost m'appelait de Paris: 'votre mere a eu un accident', me dit-il."[32]
>
> At four o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday, 24 October 1963, I was in Rome, in my room at the Hotel Minerva; I was to fly home the next day and I was putting away papers when the telephone rang. It was Bost calling from Paris: "your mother has had an accident,' he said."[33]

De Beauvoir posits herself from the very onset as a body in control of time, place, and duty. This illustrates Beauvoir's ongoing negotiation with being a body subject to time, decay, and death. Further down the line when Maman's condition worsens, Beauvoir and the doctors discuss how much of the truth to reveal to her, and more importantly, if she will try to prolong her life with risky medical procedures or

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[32] *Une Mort* 11.

[33] *A Very* 9.

not. Ultimately, Simone and her sister decide to withhold the true cause of their mother's demise: cancer. This further 'otherizes' Maman by underscoring the inevitability of her impending death. Beauvoir writes: "Maman nous croyait aupres d'elle; mais nous nous situions déjà de l'autre cote de sonhistoire."[34], "Maman thought we were with her, next to her; but we were already placing ourselves on the far side of her history."[35] That is, they already considered Maman as occupying a separate plane from them, the 'living'. In fact, while abroad, Beauvoir got a telegram that her mother was very ill again and to return home right away. To that, she confesses:

> Je ne tenais pas particulierement a revoir maman avant sa mort; mais je ne supportais pas l'idee qu'elle ne me reverrait pas.[36]
>
> I did not particularly want to see Maman again before her death; but I could not bear the idea that she would not see me.[37]

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[34] *Une mort 88.*

[35] *A Very* 58.

[36] *Une mort 94.*

[37] *A Very* 62.

She, "this dying woman," as Beauvoir calls her toward the end, dangled in the balance of life and death. As Maman's death nears, Beauvoir reveals that Maman begins to feel as if things do not matter. What is important to consider is that details, her daily routine, as well as her opinions, have all become less important to her. Her marked lassitude for quality of life deeply disturbs Simone the daughter but greatly informs Beauvoir the writer. As Maman, and subsequently Beauvoir become less and less inclined to think about existence, as in living a life, they grow increasingly encumbered by the impending dread of the final moment, death.

> Ce qui nous eprouvait surtout, c'etaient les agonies de maman, ses resurrections, et notre propre contradiction. Dans cette course entre la souffrance et la mort, nous souhaitions avec ardeur que celle-ci arrivat la premiere. Pourtant, quand maman dormait, le visage inanime, nous epiions anxieusement sur la liseuse blanche le faible movement du

ruban noir qui retenait sa montre: la peur du spasme final nous tordait l'estomac.[38]

What tried us more than anything were Maman's death-agonies, her resurrections, and our own inconsistency. In this race between pain and death we most earnestly hoped that death would come first. Yet when Maman was asleep with her face lifeless, we would anxiously gaze at the white bed-jacket to catch the faint movement of the black ribbon that held her watch: dread of the last spasm gripped us by the throat.[39]

There is a certain absurdity to Beauvoir's remarks here. Reminiscent of Camus' philosophical perspective in *L'Etranger* (and other works), in that despite the acknowledgement of death, Beauvoir, in a moment of self-indulgence, seeks to maintain a lifeline even after admitting that it is futile to do so. She knows, as did Camus, that life can be made meaningful, but that does not negate her keen

[38] *Une mort 115.*

[39] *A Very* 75.

understanding of the fact that regardless of how meaningful life could be, 'living,' as such, had simply stopped. This consideration of hers illustrates a vital shift in her perspective on life now that the act of actually living is in the arrears. Life is left unnoticed because there is so little of it happening around Simone. It is death that permeates every waking moment.

> Le passage s'etait definitivement opera de ma mere un cadavre vivant. Le monde s'etait reduit aux dimensions de sa chambre.[40]
>
> The transition from my mother to a living corpse had been definitely accomplished. The world had shrunk to the size of her room.[41]

Maman's gradual but significant corporeal devolution causes Simone begins to reflect on her own physically altered state. Just as "son corps s'imposait a elle,"[42],"her body forced itself upon her attention,"[43]

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[40] *Une mort 113.*

[41] *A Very* 73.

[42] *Une mort 90.*

so did Simone's. Interestingly, what this forays into, however, during the time when all but Maman knows that the end is near, is not necessarily a fixation on the physical, but instead the philosophical.

When quotidian things begin to lack meaning for Francoise, dialogue starts sounding a little like *Waiting for Godot*. What this dialogue reveals is the way in which the mundane facts of Francoise's everyday life are now zapped of almost all sensibility.

> "Vous, qui etes-vous? - C'est mademoiselle Cournot. - Pourquoi etes-vous la, a cette heure-ci? - C'est la nuit", lui ai-je redit. Ses yeux ecarquilles interrogeaient medemoiselle Cournot: "Mais pourquoi?- Vous savez bien: jepasse toues les nuits assise a cote de vous." Maman a dit avec une ombre de blame: "Tiens! Quelle drole d'idee!" Je me suis prepare a partir. "Tu pars?- Ca t'ennuie

[43] *A Very* 59.

que je parte?" Elle m'a repondu de nouveau: "Ca m'est egal. Tour m'est egal."[44]

'You there, who are you?'
'I'm Mademoiselle Cournot.'
'Why are you here at this time of day?'
'It is night now,' I told her again.
Her wide open eyes questioned Mademoiselle Cournot.
'Why are you here?'
'I spend every night sitting next to you: I'm sure you remember.'
'Really! What a curious notion,' said Maman.
I got ready to go. 'Are you going?'
'Would it worry you if I did?'
Once again she replied. 'It's all the same to me.'[45]

Beauvoir's claim that Maman was herself ambivalent towards religion (she may have considered herself Catholic, but she did not pray, Beauvoir claims) serves as evidence for my suggestion that Beauvoir is projecting atheism onto her mother. She provides just reasons for doing, or not doing the things that

[44] *Une mort* 130.
[45] *A Very* 84.

would seem in line with her known religious affiliations, though despite it all, Maman gives no wishes either way regarding last rites, priests, or a burial. In line with a Camus-esque notion of existentialism, to have faith is a monumental gesture of nonsense. The absurd is a place from which a non-believer cannot turn back. There is no leap of faith inherent in this understanding of existence. As Simone must literally, in collaboration with her sister, speak on behalf of her mother, there is much room for potential misrepresentation, despite good intentions. How could we ever know what Maman's actual intentions would have been were she of sounder mind and body in the final days? We simply could not. Nevertheless, Beauvoir embodies the Myth of Sisyphus by enacting the part of the Absurd Hero. She at once resists death and yet wholly accepts its inevitability. It is akin to the act of waiting in *Waiting for Godot.* It is the burden of waiting which provides a sense of purpose and hope to the waiting subjects, but more importantly, it mobilizes the narrative and allows Beauvoir to proceed, ultimately detached and free, until the very end. One of her final thoughts about her mother's death identifies

for the reader for the last time that which Francoise's impending death has allowed for Simone, a shift in focus from death back to life.

> Il arrive, tres rarement, que l'amour, l'amitie, la camaraderie surmontent la solitude de la mort; malgre les apparances, meme lorsque je tenais la main de maman, je n'etais pas avec elle: je lui mentais.[46]

> Sometimes, though very rarely, it happens that love, friendship or comradely feeling overcomes the loneliness of death: in spite of appearances, even when I was holding Maman's hand, I was not with her - I was lying to her.[47]

[46] *Memoires* 162- 63.

[47] *Memoirs* 105.

CHAPTER 5

"For Art's Sake: Fashioning a Mother: From Obsession to Abandonment in Lois Gould's *Mommy Dressing* and Jean Nathan's *The Secret Life of the Lonely Doll"*

Mother, because you never spoke to me/
I go in my life, do I, searching in women's faces/
the lost word, a word in the shape of a breast?

-Muriel Rukeyser

Unlike the mothers in the four previous chapters, the two mothers that I discuss in this chapter aren't actually literarily manifested at all. They are indeed narrated in language, however their existence isn't literary, nor is their behavior in any way fictional. These mothers aren't part of the moments we can call literature. Further, their 'mothering acts,' if you will, aren't part of a writer's project. Instead, the role of mother that they played in real life simply happens to be the occasion for the writing. And as such, theses mothers aren't constructs of language. That said, the do undeniably

make offerings to the discourse on the mother and the maternal instinct. Therefore, this chapter is more of an analysis of the lives of these women as they have been narrated in writing rather than an analysis of the writing itself. I take these two biographically written exposes on the realities of two women's mothering, and, on the same theoretical ground, analyze the ambivalence and the eagerness of these artist mothers and their project daughters.

The crossroads of two daughters' journeys in search of maternal recognition and two mothers' lack of interest in providing the former is the catalyst for this chapter. The most striking feature of the Rukeyser quotation above is by far its interrogative nature. She asks the question - all the while understanding the answer. This chapter contains two tragic life-stories in which daughters Lois Gould and Dare Wright attempt to unite their mothers' hearts and minds by means of a simple trinity of sentiments: unconditional love, reciprocated affection, and selfless devotion. They miss. To the mothers in this chapter, the daughter-as-object plays a very

integral role - just not the type of role that any daughter might willingly choose.

Lois Gould, a widely published journalist and author, wrote the autobiographical work *Mommy Dressing* in 1998 after her mother, New York City fashion designer Jo Copeland, had passed away. Born in 1932, Lois Regensburg was raised in
New York City under the glamorous yet negligent reign of her mother, Jo Copeland. *Mommy Dressing* is her most autobiographical piece. Gould died of cancer in New York City in 2002. She was 70 years old.

The other work in this chapter is the biographical account of twentieth century children's author Dare Wright's life, entitled *The Secret Life of the Lonely Doll,* written in 2001 by New York freelance writer Jean Nathan. Dare began her professional career in modeling, and then moved on to photography. Her next and last profession, as a children's author, was one which rooted itself deep in the mysterious and very complex web that is Dare's upbringing. It is only very recently, and thanks to Jean Nathan, that we are

now privy to this web which, at times, seems more like a net in which Dare has sadly become trapped.

The section on *The Secret Life of the Lonely Doll* will center on the mother as obsessive artist, while my discussion of Gould's work *Mommy Dressing* will revolve around the issue of abandonment. In both of these selections, the mother engages in virtually no activity of or discussion about the practice of mothering, occupying a space in which she as woman, and *not* mother is the supreme agent of power, albeit one seemingly male identified.

Bringing both Lois and Dare's experiences to the forefront in light of the value they bring to the way we conceive of the maternal is the most significant motivation behind this work, both women sustain methods of mothering that do not seem to adhere to any known system or code sanctioned or not by any known maternal role description. Specifically, I look at the mother/daughter relationship between Jo/Lois and Dare/Edith from both sides and pinpoint the complexity of that relationship with a specific focus on the mother as artist.

In Lois Gould's memoir about her famous fashion designer mother Jo Copeland and Jean Nathan's biographical work on Dare Wright, the "uneasy intersection [of] motherhood, identity, and creativity,"[1] as articulated in Moyra Davey's *Mother Reader*, is nothing less than an amalgam of seemingly opposing forces. Further, when these forces, in tandem, take hold of a woman, much of what we mostly assume to be basic and true about mothering and the 'maternal instinct' becomes unfamiliar.

The ingredients themselves are familiar (mother, daughter, career, identity) while the merger remains an uncommon one. And while I am not offering a necessarily feminist reading of the two texts in this chapter, I would like to highlight that both mothers seem to "revise the conventional plot structure"[2] of the mother/kin paradigm. They may do this unintentionally, but I will say that unintentionality is not justification, and my analysis should not be

[1] Moyra Davey, ed., *Mother Reader: Essential Reading on Motherhood* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 61.

[2] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother /Daughter Plot: narrative/psychoanalysis/feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 13.

mistaken for a celebration of these stories and these women. It is the narrative reality of the 'story' of these mothers that I feel compelled to introduce and evaluate, based upon the significant challenges that these stories bring forth to the phenomena of marriage, work, the woman's place therein, and, most importantly for my purposes, the well traversed territory of the maternal.

My intention with this chapter is to delineate the narrative conventions used to give voice and meaning to the nature and role of the 'unfamiliar' maternal by demonstrating that, in fact, the patterns of behavior witnessed here are simply not as unfamiliar as we may have thought. Close examination of Nathan's *The Secret Life of the Lonely Doll*[3] and Gould's *Mommy Dressing*[4] divides my findings into 2 elements - obsession and abandonment.[5]

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[3] Jean Nathan, *The Secret Life of the Lonely Doll: The Search for Dare Wright* (New York: Holt Books, 2004).

[4] Lois Gould, *Mommy Dressing: a love story after a fashion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998).

[5] According to Cecilia Konchar Farr in chapter 5 of *Narrating Mothers: theorizing maternal subjectivities,* entitled *Her Mother's Language*, narratives about motherhood are often "daughter-centric" (95). The discussions of Lois Gould and Edith Stevens, however, bring a much richer balance to the study of this literary and cultural phenomenon. The narratives written about each woman resist the myth that women, the mother in particular, "are objects of representation" (96), and cannot or do not wrote themselves, so to

A Designing Woman

"... what I knew about her was only the dressing. Nothing of the rest of her life was visible to me. Unless the dressing was, in fact, the life."[6]

Jo Copeland in *Mommy Dressing* is a perfectionist and workaholic. She is also a very highly regarded and famous New York based fashion designer. What lies beneath the viscose and taffeta layered artifice, however, is the reality that she also gave birth to two children, although one might get the impression that the state of being a mother was an irregularity in her universe, like the hiccups, of which she had to simply (and preferably quickly) rid herself. Christine Battersby's *The Phenomenal Woman*[7] is quite useful here in terms of its analysis of the "Coda" of the female subject, which, in her esteem, "does not

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speak. Instead, these women take great pains to represent themselves in as creative and artistic an avenue as possible, and often to the detriment to their children.

[6] Nathan 2.

[7] Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman. Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

entail a duty of empathy with others, nor does it mean that [the mother] has a psychological disposition to adopt a 'feminine' and 'caring' response either toward her dependants or towards those who would dominate, govern or control her behavior"[8]. Instead, the female self has to be regarded "from the perspective of one whose 'I' was fractured into discontinuities - and who needed to reconcile with the 'others within'".[9]

And with that notion of "others within" comes Battersby's problematization, in her chapter entitled "Fleshy Metaphysics," of the term "essence" with regard to female identity. Jo Copeland opts to create a self and world in which she thrived as an artist and creator of high fashion. And being a mother is never necessarily part of the grand plan.

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[8] Battersby 209.

[9] The question about the female subject and subject position being taken as 'norm,' so to speak was not, as one would have thought, conceived of by a feminist philosopher. Instead, as Battersby points out, it was thought of by Soren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*. Tr, Walter Lowrie. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1941). Battersby 200.

Motherhood is an appendix of sorts for Jo, located at the very end of a register of roles that she fulfilled. What Copeland was interested in doing was creating a bevy of perfectly polished and flawlessly assembled images from which to enhance women's identity and place in society. Even the pencil sketches of Copeland's designs are substantiation of how closely she pays attention to every detail of the ensemble of 'woman'. The illustrations aren't your usual faceless body with a dress. Instead, the woman is intact, with a very well made up face, perfectly contoured arms and legs, and beautifully accessorized to boot.

Going back to Battersby might help unpack Copeland's larger project of associating sex with women's fashion and not with women themselves and most certainly not with herself. In the introduction to *The Phenomenal Woman,* entitled "Fleshy Metaphysics," Battersby lays out the Five Features of the female subject-position. She conceptualizes the relationship between the woman as 'paradigm' and the body that can give birth. Further, she implies that to recognize this relationship "does not imply that

all women either can or 'should' give birth. Instead, an emphasis on natality as an abstract category of (embodied) female selves means that we need to rethink identity."[10] To apply this notion to my work here, I can say that Copeland better understands the term 'woman' as archetype and not as composed of "fleshy" parts. Battersby's argues that "the 'self' is not a fixed, permanent, or pre-given 'thing'."[11] This is valuable in evaluating Copeland's position. When weighed against Battersby's understanding of woman and identity, Copeland's understanding of the female is as an object (and virtually inanimate) and not a subject.

When Copeland dresses her daughter, for example, she would seem perplexed at normal bodily functions, often questioning how she could have perspired on the dress and reprimand her for the fact that her hair had become undone. What is even more interesting to note, however, is that Copeland would then make

[10] Battersby 7.

[11] Battersby 7.

herself a referent during such interrogations, remarking "**I**[12] never perspire. Why must you?"[13]

Copeland seems to be operating within a system that extracts the figure of the female from the flesh of the woman when she sketches clothing and sews apparel for 'women'. In essence, she differentiates between the 'female' and the 'feminine,' as it were, most certainly privileging the feminine. Copeland supposes to know the essence of the feminine and purports to impose this knowledge upon little Lois. One must wonder why Copeland had such an obsession with the proper management of the feminine. Even though Lois admits that her mother was into being sexy but not necessarily into sex itself, Copeland was not deemed 'unsexed' by her tremendous success and talent. To the contrary, Copeland was as calculating in the arena of love and marriage as she was in the world of fashion. Lois Gould writes of her mother's thoughts:

[12] Emphasis mine

[13] Gould 2.

> There must be some escape from home besides marriage. All around her, suddenly, there were fascinating exceptions. Women who did things, went places, got their names in the papers, their pictures on movie screens. Swimming the English Channel, flying airplanes alone across oceans, dancing the tango. They had men, too, but no babies. How did they do it? Were there really men who would leave you alone? … Jo wanted men in her life. Just not a husband. And definitely not a daddy, sugar or otherwise.[14]

According to Gould, Jo equated sex with pregnancy and pregnancy with death, notably the death of autonomy, control, and her career. Her own mother dies in childbirth, and so, the fact that she ever did, in fact, bear two children, provides the occasion for an interesting study of female and maternal human behavior. Writer/critic Barbara Johnson, in the essay "My Monster/My Self," discusses the degree to which the issue of maternity marked the life of famed author Mary Shelley. Like Jo Copeland, "her own mother, indeed, had died upon giving her birth. The

[14] Gould 22.

idea that a mother can loathe, fear, and reject her baby has until recently been one of the most repressed psychoanalytical insights, although it is of course already implicit in the story of Oedipus, whose parents cast him out as an infant to die."[15]

In addition to using psychoanalytic analysis to inform readings of Gould and Nathan's texts, it is also useful to consider the phenomenon of other social sciences, namely anthropology, especially in light of the study of maternal instincts. Primatologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy's monumental work *Mother nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* works well here to bridge the gap between Lois Gould's narrative about the often cruel and distant manner of mothering to which she was exposed and the discourse on the evolution of the female and the concept of the maternal instinct. "Whatever maternal *instincts* are," Hrdy claims, "they are not automatic in the sense that most people use that term."[16] This notion will hopefully shed some light on the

[15] Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 145. This 1992 essay follows Nancy Friday's 1977 work *My Mother/My Self.*

[16] Sarah Blaffer Hrdy. *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999). xvi.

unfavorable system of gender identification about which women and mothers are often taught - a system that fits Jo Copeland's sensibility in the same way a dress cut on the bias might fit the average woman's body - unflatteringly and skewed.

According to Hrdy, it can be shown that "maternal succor in the human species is anything but automatic or universal."[17] Evidence of this claim can be found in the studies of 1960s primatologist Jeanne Altman, who, along with her husband, set out to study the ecology and social behavior of baboons in Kenya. The reason for studying baboons was, in part, due to the fact that they, as humans, live in a "complex ecological and social setting," in addition to the fact that their behaviors, reactions, and sensibilities are as close to humans as one could get. Her findings "emphasized the extent to which every baboon mother is a 'dual career' mother spending most of her day 'making a living'".[18] With

[17] Hrdy 26.

[18] Hrdy 44.

that, it became clear that "almost every aspect of a mother's life [is] shaped by natural selection."[19]

There are many aspects of Copeland's behavior that fit into a larger sociological framework which entails a variety of self preserving actions. For one, Copeland aborted three of her pregnancies- the third, a life-threatening self-imposed operation, was performed with a knitting needle[20]. And in these days, the 1930s and 1940s, for a woman to make her way through, as Jane Lazarre puts it, the "minefield that is motherhood,"[21] and come out seemingly intact, is virtually unheard of. Jo is not a defender of her progeny. She wrote for herself a script that did not include a husband and children, and she was determined to remain faithful to that plot of not becoming the dedicated wife and mother above all things.

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[19] Hrdy 46.

[20] The reason she went through with the last two pregnancies was not of her own volition. "What did it was her own father's deathbed wish that she never again flout God's will. He told her that God had spared her life that last time. And if God wanted her to bear children, then by God, she'd better obey" (Gould 120).

[21] Lazarre 4.

Potentially impeding her progress, however, was cultural thinking that did not approve of an ambitious professional woman's regard for maternity as an 'option' which she can 'opt' out of. Along with cultural disapproval often comes the notion of deviancy, or even madness. *In Maternity, Morality, and the Literature of Madness,* Marilyn Yalom asks to what extent maternity serves as a "catalyst for mental breakdown?"[22] Yalom posits that the subject in question is absorbed by something that she labels the "orbit of the artist". This was young Lois Regensberg, a revolving object, trying desperately to penetrate the maternal orbit, but never quite reaching her goal.

In terms of mother love and creativity in *Mommy Dressing*, it is clear that there is a distinct relationship, if not a fine line, between the role of the artist and formation of identity. It is appropriate to examine the cases of Jo Copeland and

[22] Marilyn Yalom. *Maternity, Morality, and the Literature of Madness.* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 5.

Dare Wright through the lens of the 'artist,' as they are 'portraits,' if you will.

Once, Jo even expelled her two children from their own home. On the eve of a fancy soiree chez Jo toasting the one and only *Gypsy Rose Lee* she sent her two young children on a train from Penn Station in New York City to the suburbs of Philadelphia by themselves. The children were to stay with the son of friends: Janet and Herbert Sondheim's son Stephen Sondheim. Janet (Aunt Foxy) and Herbert came to New York to attend the party, and the kids, with much less enthusiasm and fanfare, boarded the train for 'Stevie's' house.

Jo was in for a surprise of grand proportions that evening. After a card game in which Stevie Sondheim cheated, Lois's older brother valiantly swept Lois out of the house and traipsed back to the train station and back home to the Park Avenue apartment, where they "marched in like war veterans, as if

[they] expected a hero's welcome."[23] What they saw was "women in gorgeous cocktail dresses and evening gowns, men in dinner jackets and black tie. Highballs and cigarettes were waving; everyone was talking and laughing at once.[24]" How fitting that Steven Sondheim ended up writing the lyrics for the musical Gypsy, about real life Gypsy Rose Lee's horrid childhood "that she would later recall in agonizing detail in her autobiography *Gypsy.*"[25]. In any event, it ended up that the kids' ridiculous and chaotic entrance was "the highlight of Gypsy's evening"[26].

And so, because it impressed one of the most elegant women of the time, a most fashionable striptease artist, all was well. Gould does make sardonic reference to how amazing it was that Jo so admired a woman who was paid, not to wear, but to *take off* her clothing, given that she was so uninterested in sex and the naked body in her own personal life.

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[23] Gould 156.

[24] Gould 157.

[25] Gould 157.

[26] Gould 157.

Whatever mental instability Jo brought with her from childhood to maternity, clothes were her "refuge from the facts of life."[27] Her own flesh and blood, conversely, were deemed "other" and unfamiliar. Not only does Jo Copeland inadvertently reexamine the maternal instinct here, but she also re-envisions the idea of the "working mother". As a woman who has chosen not to allow motherhood to be a primary signifier in terms of identity, Jo Copeland is foraging through the "minefield"[28] of motherhood in an effort to, as her daughter puts it, and for better or worse, "turn the Cinderella story upside down."[29]

Motherhood presents itself to Copeland as a boundary of female and human identity. Just as her own mother saw to it that she never needed to "know the facts of ordinary life,"[30] Jo acquiesced and didn't bother to learn how mothering was typically done. Gould remarks: years later when I saw her shrink from my

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[27] Gould 57.

[28] Hrdy 3.

[29] Gould 21.

[30] Gould 222.

own babies, I began to think I understood. It wasn't just a superficial fear of ruined finery. A child's body, like an animal's, is beyond control"[31] By philosophically interrogating the so-called instinctive nature of the maternal response, Battersby promotes the blurred nature of identity of the maternal self. And Jo, absent from, and frankly uninterested in mothering, reconfigures patterns of maternal behavior even before having given birth to Lois. She is said to have sketched her best selling item during the very act of giving birth. It is most interestingly the mark of Jo's own mother having died during childbirth that becomes the devastating reminder for her that birth is perhaps too viscerally linked to death.[32] "She truly believed it would kill her. She was born knowing there could be no solace in a baby or any other token of everlasting love."[33] So, instead, she utilizes her natural skill and

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[31] Gould 56.

[32] Jo only heard the story of her mother once. Her father had sworn to his new wife that he would erase the memory of Jo's 'real' mother Minna completely from their lives. When a framed picture appeared in the apartment, Lois recalled a day with her mother in Larchmont, on a brief visit to Jo's aunt's house. "The photograph of the lady appeared one day in my mother's apartment. I remembered it at once, and recalled the visit. My mother told me then that she herself had been brought to the house when she was eighteen. She had seen the photograph. "Who is that?' she had exclaimed. "It looks just like me!" "That is your mother." Aunt Mary had told her quietly. "My sister. She died giving birth to you," 91.

[33] Gould 122.

crafted talent and envelops herself in an entrepreneurial line of work as a fashion designer and claimed freedom from such pink collared professions of Copeland's day as a secretary or telephone operator. By 1950, in fact, approximately one-third of all women were in the work force, but out of necessity. While it was true that Jo contributed greatly to her household's financial security, she had been ingrained as a young girl, by her father surprisingly, with the idea that she was special, an artist, and certainly therefore exempt from female associated domestic work such as washing dishes and cooking. Work for Jo was in part a financial necessity but mostly it played the part of firm symbol of her identity and fierce independence.

> One night when Jo was ten, her stepmother decreed it was time she learned to do the dishes. The mountain of plates and pots left by a four course kosher meal for a family of eleven sat waiting in steaming water. Jo went into the kitchen without a word. But there came no comforting noise of washing up. In fact, after ten minutes of silence, a high-pitched wail was heard instead. It

> spiraled higher, and higher still, until Sam Copeland put down his evening paper and went to investigate. He found his daughter Jo, suds up to her elbows, weeping into the sink like Cinderella on the night of the royal ball. Sam lifted the child's dripping hands high into the cloud of steam, held them aloft, and proclaimed, in a voice of God's own righteous wrath: "These hands shall never touch dishwater again!"[34]

"Weaving and sewing have been women's work throughout most of world's history,"[35] however, when "the production of clothing gradually ceased to be a home industry and become a profession, the business of making clothes fell into the hands of men. Likewise, legally, only men could belong to the guild of tailors."[36] That has since changed, and is changing still. More couture houses are now headed by women, and the female fashion designer is easily characterized as stern, full of opinions, and often times, asexual. But Copeland, with the green light

[34] Gould 17.

[35] Valerie Steele. *Women in Fashion.* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1991), 19.

[36] Steele 19.

from Sam Copeland to get to "act like a lady" without being "treated like a lady,"[37] carves out a real profession and therefore a space of her own. What is so interesting about Copeland, above all, is that throughout her life and the life that we are privy to read about via Lois Gould's biography, she seemed never to make a single excuse for her behavior, never reproaching herself, perhaps a result of never having been reproached. I am making the assumption that having a parental support to advance in a profession is a major factor. Jo seemed indifferent to the current criticisms and debates over the existence of an educated, rich, and opinionated woman. If anything, Jo's behavior is more noteworthy based on what she did not do more so than what she did do.

Pulitzer Prize winning author Natalie Angier writes in her May 2006 New York Times article entitled "One Thing They Aren't: Maternal" that "nature abounds with mothers that defy the standard maternal script

[37] "Act like a lady and you'll get treated like a lady!" is a phrase that was repeatedly told to me as a child by my maternal grandmother from Italy, Rita Pomilio. As I grew older, I began responding "but Gram, who wants to be treated like a lady?"

in a raft of macabre ways."[38] As a creature like many other sociologically scrutinized mammals, Jo all but denounces motherhood through her (non) actions and never seems to falter in that position. Angier continues, "as much as we may like to believe that mother animals are designed to nurture and protect their young, to fight to the death." Part of the "reproductive game plan" proves quite a contrary reality.[39] While Angier's studies hone in on mother animals and not humans, I argue that there might still be value in mentioning the findings here in terms of their potential relation with the complex and not yet hard-wired human mother.

Beyond universals, beyond myths, beyond assumptions, Jo Copeland mothers from a position that removes the body as much as possibly from the maternal realm. Battersby theorizers what the difference is in being a universal, male, 'transcendable' body as opposed to a female body, "with a materiality which is fully

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[38] Natalie Angier, "One Thing They Aren't: Maternal," *New York Times*, May 9, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/09/science/09mama.html?ex=1147406400&en=2cd13119b4d51d72&ei=5087%0A

[39] Angier

more imminent,"[40] and as a result, in a virtual "unrepresentable zone: somewhere between less-than-one and a becoming more-than-one."[41] In my estimation, however, Jo cannot be limited to a maternal discourse that is, at base, Darwinian, but also passive, simple, and 'feminine.'

Yet, the 'feminine,' one might suppose, is the end to Copeland's means. There exists an irony to Copeland's life and work. While her work seems to be very 'woman' centered, she operates within the plot of male desire. Her subjectivity is ensconced in and around a male plot structure. Jo was being carefully cultivated by her father from an early age and adored her older brother while growing up. Lacking the mother figure seemed just as well to Jo, as she feared more than anything becoming caught in the trap she identifies as marriage, a husband, and children. Jo had less than nothing to do with the day-to-day details of keeping house. "Not only did she never visit the kitchen," Lois wryly states, but "she never visited the market, the butcher or the florist. She

[40] Battersby 19.

[41] Battersby 19.

never met Mrs. Kaye, the dry cleaner who knew everything. She never went to Bloomingdale's. She never traveled east of Park."[42]

If Gould's text was perhaps fiction and the character of Jo had been written in the first person, the narrative could be characterized as very post-modern, entailing a plot structure where the heroine refuses to partake in the conventions of womanhood. But narratively speaking, it is very much more complex than that. Due to the fact that Lois Gould did in fact etch into language her mother's life story, Jo Copeland turns into more than a real life 'biographed,' if you will. Like being photographed, but substituting the visual with language, she becomes an actual agent of theoretical and literary worth. What's more, she consciously interpellates[43] herself by articulating her refusal to don the domestic throughout her life.

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[42] Gould 81-82.

[43] Althusser's theory of interpellation is at work "when the individual recognizes the system that he or she is working within, such as the creation of gender while clothing shopping or cross dressing, she/he interpellates him/herself. It is basically thinking 'that means me'. It is the process by which you recognize yourself to belong to a particular identity. One may note that it is exactly Althusser's meaning, isolated from his critical theory on Ideological State Apparatuses". http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interpellation

For the duration of her role as "mother," Jo, under a polished veneer of perfection, raises the daughter who will become a journalist and decide to wait until her mother's death to reveal the details of her unique upbringing on Park Avenue. Ironically, Lois Gould sub-titles her book, "a love story after a fashion"[44]. Copeland believed that everything "ought to enhance the ensemble,"[45] and well, motherhood just didn't match.

My analysis of Jo Copeland gives way to an analogous discussion, that of Dare Wright and her mother Edie Stevenson Wright. Both mothers enjoy employing/exploiting their feminine wiles without the added disadvantage of adhering to the undesirable roles and responsibilities of a working American woman/mother in the 1940's. With the mid-century New

[44] The psychological complexity of Jo and Lois's relationship becomes even more evident in light of an interview conducted around the time of the publishing of the memoir. In an interview with journalist Dayna Macy, Gould says "working with design and creating this artificial reality which consisted only of surfaces were a deep consolation for some kind of deep and terrifying void within her. Dressing was more than just putting on and taking off clothes – it was a grand cover-up for immense terror and loneliness". Dayna Macy, "Mommy's little accessory," *Salon* 21 October 1998, http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/1998/10/21feature2.html

[45] Lois Gould also talks briefly about Jo's quirky penchant for all things "sexy," except for sex itself. Lois assumed that for the most part, Jo and her husband had a 'white' marriage, entailing virtually no or very little physicality and intimacy.

York skyline as their backdrop, Jo Copeland and Edie Stevenson Wright are best defined as cosmopolites for whom mothering is no instinctual behavior.

All Dolled up

Bearing an uncanny resemblance to Lois Gould's story of Jo Copeland, and just a few New York minutes away, lived Dare Wright. Born in the first quarter of the 20th century, Dare was a well-known photographer and children's author of the ever-popular *The Lonely Doll* book series.

Dare Wright's first and only biographer, New York Columnist Jean Nathan, published *The Life of the Lonely Doll: The Search for Dare Wright* in 2004. After compiling and reviewing what little autobiographical records remain of Dare's past, Nathan begins her book with a metaphorical reference to Dare's peculiar beginnings, "maybe Dare was born in a seashell". This allusion is remarkable, as it so aptly positions Dare, a fragile and solitary

child, and Edie Stevenson, her bread-winning, controlling, portrait painter mother, in the unique filial predicament in which she 'worked on', rather than 'raised' her daughter Dare.

Jean Nathan came to Dare Wright's door by means of an unforeseen portal. Nagging curiosity about the children's book that sprung back into her mind came turned into more than the purchase of a rare hard back original. Nathan was about to get tangled in a sordid affair herself. For the reader, thankfully, her journey is a story well worth the telling. The children's book read long before had almost forcibly made its way back into the space in Jean Nathan's mind that stored such memories. Nathan herself describes the sensation as "floating". The image of the cover of *The Lonely Doll* "floated into [her] mind"[46]. Nathan was meant to find out why.

The initial query pertained solely to the book itself. She left few stones unturned as to where she might be able to get a copy of the book. And after

[46] Nathan 3.

writing a letter to Dare herself,[47] Nathan spoke with a children's book specialist and combed the stacks at The New York Public Library. Dare's nurse forwarded Nathan's letter to Dare's legal guardian in California, Brook Ashley. Brooke's mother was an actress and friend of Dare's and her father was Dare's lawyer. Brooke had been a playmate of Dare's for as long as she could remember. At the time the correspondence began, Brook Ashley was around middle age, and Dare 84. In the simple interest of cleaning up a mess, Brook called Dare one day to let her know that she would be in New York to pack up Dare's apartment and inquired about whether or not Nathan would like to join her. For Nathan, this was a golden opportunity.

Despite the strikes against the book, (a bookstore clerk deemed *The Lonely Doll* "politically incorrect" while an Amazon reviewer labeled it "disturbing") Nathan held this "touchstone of [her] childhood"

[47] Nathan says, "Meaning to put the phone book away, I found myself turning absently to "Wright." And there, jumping out at me from blurred columns of type, was Wright, Dare, 11 East 80th Street, 249-6965. I don't think I could have been any more amazed if the address given had been, say, "Second to the right and then straight on til morning," Peter Pan's address on the island of Neverland," 5.

close, even if she in fact was "finding signs that the world of the book and its author might be far darker than [she] anticipated."[48] Wright's story was preserved not through diaries or letters or interviews or any of the like. It was discovered in part by way of the 19 books that Dare Wright wrote as well as the compendium of photographs that she left.

But discovery of a story isn't enough, however. To write it, Nathan followed the unknown life trail of Dare Wright, but backwards, beginning from the image of a gingham pattern that came into Nathan's mind one spring day to the New York hospital bed in 2002 to which Nathan made frequent visits, and on which Dare Wright, at the age of 84, lay on life support.

I think it necessary to insert the disclaimer that I consider Dare Wright's story and Jean Nathan's rendering of it similar to the way I have considered Lois Gould's work and the entire story of Jo Copeland, as representative of both reality as well as literary convention. And as such, I am treating

[48] Nathan 16.

Edith Stevenson and Dare Wright as antagonist and protagonist but also as biographical emblems of the true complexity of the 'mother/daughter plot.' I utilize the critical voices of those like Marianne Hirsch who focus on the 'mother-daughter' text to analyze what kinds of plots or paradigms, psychoanalytic, sociological or otherwise, may be at work.

In the case of Dare Wright, I am particularly interested in the space between Wright's life with her mother and her children's books. I examine the disparity between the obvious obsessive and insular nature of Edie's maternal behavior and the fact that what Dare did in her own life, what life she was able to salvage for her self, in her books, was create a kind of fairy Wonderland of her own, all the while removing, or rather never including, the 'mother' figure, the 'maternal' role, notwithstanding the almost ironic reference to her mother by naming the main character, Edith the doll.

One issue to expound on is this act of naming. It seems that Edith the doll is a peculiar amalgam of

both real life mother and daughter. The moniker is that of the domineering mother; the behavior is that of the impressionable and usually obedient daughter, an easy and likely target of an elder's (that being Little Bear) reprimands. Further, no mention whatsoever of a mother is ever made in the story. It is in my estimation a covert and most likely unintentional means of muting, deep within Dare's world of art and fantasy, the far-reaching stronghold of Edie Stevenson.

The pattern of naming in Dare Wright's children's works to illustrate for the reader/critic the ways in which Dare the writer differs from Dare the daughter. Inextricably tied to Edie in her life, Dare attempts, in her art, to shape quite "a different plot for herself."[49] Dare and the doll share striking similarities. Seeming to lack origins or a true genealogy, both are left to their own creative devices and are later on reined in by an enormous amount of alienation and self-deprecation. Dare will be anorexic, bulimic, and an on-and-off alcoholic

[49] Hirsch 14.

throughout her entire adult life. Anchored down by a penchant for self-deprecating tendencies, Edith the doll virtually begs to be spanked when Little Bear discovers that she has been disobedient. The two characters, Edith the doll, and naïve Dare Wright, become virtually indistinguishable.

Dare's parents Edie and Ivan had divorced early on. From that point, Dare had not seen or communicated with her father or older brother, Blaine. Whereas Edie most likely imagined that Dare was never suspicious about the reasons why this was so, Jean Nathan suggests that Dare was actually aware of the part Edie played in the virtual disappearance of her brother and father after the divorce. She simply played the part of the unassuming ingénue.

Throughout her entire childhood, a childhood which virtually lasts until Edie's death, Dare remained a sad and lonely yet faithful and submissive daughter, an accessory, as was Lois Gould to Jo Copeland, to her mother's whims and woes. Edie showered endless attention onto Dare while instilling alienating and self deprecating tendencies in the young woman.

Edie's own mothering pattern of constantly displacing Dare and changing caretakers coupled with the fact that she preferred her work with inanimate creations in her portrait painting to the work of mothering left Dare a very suspicious and fearful adolescent. Likewise, Copeland spent quality time crafting her garments instead of her relationship with her daughter. As a result of Edie's parenting, Dare was not able to reach any level of emotional stability. But Edie and Jo were very different kinds of mothers. Edie did not allow for Dare to be aware that she should experience any type of emotion beside, as Barbara Johnson put it in her essay "My Monster, My Self," "a state of idealized symbiosis."[50] Lois Gould, on the other hand, was fortunate, I think, in that Copeland's brand of mothering did not contain much intimacy and reliance. It involved quite the contrary actually. Gould learned not to overly rely on her mother for anything. When Gould would arrive home from school, no one would be there. Whereas Edie has overly shaped, molded, formed little Dare

[50] Barbara Johnson. *A World of Difference.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). 144.

little Dare, Jo Copeland can be said to have done the very opposite to Lois Gould.

With every ascetic stroke of her maternal brush, Edie created a beautiful portrait, a living doll, if you will, out of her daughter Dare. And so, by the time Dare was in her early adulthood, one could say that Edie had completed her finest piece, her *chef d'oeuvre*. Or not. Even into her adult years Dare was Edie's marionette. And despite the brief moments of frustration at her mother, Dare never went too long without once again returning to her mother's side. Or vice versa. Edie would pursue Dare wherever she may be.

Mostly if not wholly due to the nature of the unhealthy bond between Dare and Edie, intimate relationships for Dare never came to fruition. In fact, it is said that Dare was a virgin up until a rape that occurred in her old age which left her bruised and disheveled on her own apartment floor. Dare would make friends with and let in drifters from Central Park so that they would have a place to sleep. One time her kindness and naiveté became the

last gesture of the like that she would ever extend. Her caretaker moved in with her after the assault in order to eradicate, once and for all, the central issue plaguing Dare for all her life: loneliness.

As a result, Dare, after years of Edie's own brand of mothering, simply became 'imaginary'. Edie became a full embodiment of a reflection. Her identity was rooted in the artifice of the image - reflected by her mother, the paintbrush, her camera, and most prominently, of her own imagination. Edie frequently took photographs of Dare and painted her portrait as well. Dress up was the most frequent of the many rituals Dare and Edie enacted together. Nathan writes, "while Edie might be indomitably pragmatic and strong, she also had a tendency to retreat into fantasy. But the role of wife and mother requires more than dressing up and posing. Dressing a child in exquisite clothes, all of which she sewed herself, did nothing to ensure that [the child's] emotional needs were being met."[51]

[51] Nathan 29.

In the case of Dare Wright, the discourse surrounding identity, fantasy and the double begins with Dare and Edie's performances of dress up, sitting for paintings, posing for photographs, or parading around at cocktail parties. Even the simple act of looking at the image in the mirror embeds this identity based struggle with the self. Often times, Edie would even photograph Dare nude. And Dare, "ever compliant, willingly played the exhibitionist to Edie's voyeur, a compliance that had everything to do with her desire to please her mother. Consciously or not, as if Dare's body were a territory yet to be claimed, Edie had put down her flag."[52] But, as much as Edie believed she "owned" her daughter, Dare's behavior would prove that she in fact felt very alone. Dare more or less retreated into her own mind which summoned the activation of all things imaginary. Her imagination was the gateway to true self-made companionship.

Concerning the importance of the 'imaginary' in Dare Wright's life, Jean Nathan speaks of the less than

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[52] Nathan 89.

innocent world of fantasy and fairy tales when discussing Dare's loneliness and what she does in attempts to occupy herself. She would "tell herself stories revolving around her life's central characters, attempts to work out solutions to her dilemmas."[53] Once, Dare published a short story in her school yearbook in the spring of 1925. This story, appropriately entitled "An Imaginary Story," involves a father who happens to be a King. This King is searching for his children, and a miserly old woman who refuses to return the children to him unless he performs some ridiculous feat, such as covering the entire floor with gold colored items. This narrative clearly illustrates Dare's frustrations and fears about her own family and how to possibly unite them at some possible future juncture. It is the troubling issue of separation that writer, critic, and psychotherapist Nini Herman, in her work *Too Long a Child: The Mother-Daughter Dyad,* believes is the most critical issue therein. In short, when the mother/daughter paradigm fails to free itself from codependency, it leads to

[53] Nathan 55.

frustration, madness, or even suicide. In her chapter "Daughter sets pen to paper," Herman makes the case that it is in the very act of writing that the daughter possesses the tools with which to begin the process of breaking that fateful tie which, in this instance, is crucial for Dare's survival. That said, I believe that writing children's books facilitated Dare's detachment from the maternal stronghold, even if only slightly.

Remarkably, it is Dare's brother Blaine who, unbeknownst to him, held the ability to turn Dare's attention from her mother alone to him to focus on having her "real family back together"[54] again. Unfortunately, given the fact that Edie, during the divorce, took Dare and left Blaine with his father, Blaine was hard pressed to make amends with Edie. However, for Dare's sake, he was willing to try. It didn't work. "After Edie's visit, [Blaine] began to drink heavily. And from that point on, he would speak of hating his mother like 'poison'."[55]

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[54] Nathan 99.

[55] Nathan 101.

Edie's letter to Blaine shortly after the visit pretty much catapulted their relationship to the back burner again, so to speak. Despite the fact that Dare had urged Blaine to apologize to Edie for upsetting her, which he later did, Edie's "cruel streak had been unleashed". She was not only uninterested in making amends at this point, but actually was "scheming for ways to divide [Blaine and Dare]."[56] From then on, whenever Edie and Blaine saw one another, it was what Nathan aptly labels "an ugly scene". Not only did they have no filial affection for one another, but it even went a step further. Blaine vehemently and vocally disapproved of his mother's behavior towards Dare, as well as her obsession with dressing Dare, as Jean Nathan puts it, like a fairy princess."[57]

Throughout this ongoing family turmoil, Dare experienced yet another and very sudden kind of tumult, this time even more personal. Phillip Sandeman, a good friend of Blaine's and the man to whom Dare was previously engaged, had died

[56] Nathan 103.

[57] Nathan 125.

tragically. His plane was shot down over the English Channel during WWII. It was during this particularly sorrowful period of her life that Dare began refocusing her attention onto the one outlet that would sustain any semblance of independence on Dare's part: the making of her doll Edith. "Through Edith, Dare could begin to explore a lost side of herself, a self who transgressed, who could risk being mischievous and disobedient, adventurous and independent."[58]

Dare began to pose the doll before the camera, poised and silent, like Dare, all dressed up in outfits that Dare would sew herself. Barbara Johnson remarks in the essay *My Monster/My Self* that "the desire for resemblance, the desire to create a being like oneself" in a novel like Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, for example, is the "autobiographical desire par excellence", as well as "the central transgression."[59]

As with Shelly's novel, Dare and her very real life but inanimate creation has given biographer Jean

[58] Nathan 133.

[59] Barbara Johnson 145.

Nathan, in her chapter "The Lonely Doll's Dilemma," the occasion to envision what is at stake for Dare when she embarks on this, as Johnson terms it, "autobiographical" endeavor. With this undertaking, she has her imagination to foster and her creativity to lose. To the publishers of Dare's books, she was an artist, and after the first book, the publishers wanted a say in what she wrote and how she wrote it. But Dare quickly showed herself to be, not only a "single minded artist," but also, "a child refusing to be told how to play."[60]

Dare's creation of Edie the doll, however marked by the moniker of her own mother, is, in my estimation, a first step toward the semblance of independence. It was through a rather unlikely channel that Dare in fact began her book series. Gaylord Hauser, a good friend of the Wright family, a rich and famous nutritional guru and long time admirer of Edie's artwork, was the central catalyst. A man named Tony Palermo entered their social network, became enamored with Dare, and then quickly retracted, noticing her

[60] Nathan 191.

"inner dilemmas." "It was like she came from another world," he said. "She and her mother were both children. Dare lived in a fantasy world playing with dolls. I think the mother ruined that girl." He told her about the doll: "since you think Edith's real, why don't you write about her? Make a story. Make a book." [61] And as such, Dare decides to create something partly in her own image, and for most of her life, that tense negotiation of identity will hang in the balance between "mother" and "me."

Jean Nathan's chapter entitled "The Books" deals with that often difficult balance and delves into the "trauma of [the Wrights'] early years which left enduring scars."[62] She says "in the forty years that had passed since their family's dissolution, Dare and Blaine's yearning for a happy, intact family had only intensified...unable to form the necessary attachments to adults with whom they might have explored marriage and parenthood, they both remained cut off from creating families of their own."[63] But Dare will

[61] Nathan 140.

[62] Nathan 157.

[63] Nathan 157.

remain alone, save Edith the doll and a little teddy bear bought from FAO Schwartz. Dare now photographed both the doll and the bear together, imaging "Edith as herself and the little bear as a stand in for Blaine."[64]

What happened next was sheer luck. Despite what Tony Palermo had planted in Dare's mind about writing stories about the dolls, Nathan suggests that Dare never actually had any intention of sharing the photographs with anyone, calling her passion a "hermetic pursuit, fueled by a private obsession."[65] However, family friend Donald Seawell shared a book of photographs that Dare had given his family for Christmas of 1955 with a Doubleday publishing executive. In the cluster of photographs was a picture of Donald's son receiving a teddy bear given to him by Dare that Christmas. "While Seawell thought the potential was in the Ocracoke

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[64] Nathan 159.

[65] Nathan 161.

photographs, the publisher preferred the ones of the little boy and the teddy bear."[66]

And with this opportunity in hand, off Dare went, to the imaginary world that she had been creating with her mother Edie. The difference was that Dare, for the first time ever, began to create a world somewhat exclusive of her mother. She was an artist in her own right, a photographer and a storyteller. And the character of the 'mother' was intentionally not part of the plot.

The storyline of the doll was fraught with the same characteristics as Dare's own childhood at the hands of her mother. She became, as Nathan puts it "a lonely doll, as Dare had once been a lonely girl."[67] Dare's newfound occupation had kept her very busy, and she would go on to write many versions of the same core story. By the late 1950s, Dare was a star, with features in magazines and newspapers, not to mention the general frenzy of interest that always surrounded the artist's private self. This private

[66] Nathan160.

[67] Nathan 163.

self is one that we must assume is other than the self that is exposed only through the artifice of photographs and costume.

Slowly but surely, it was understood that Dare Wright was virtually make-believe through and through. Edith the doll had become internationally known as emblematic of American culture. Dare was seeming much too independent for her mother's liking. This is despite the fact that Dare herself still felt very heavily reliant upon her mother.

Edie, often feeling slighted at Dare's need to travel without her, or accept an invitation alone, was in fact beginning to comprehend that she may be losing the tight grip that she once had on Dare. Age was setting in, and Edie was trying her best to pull the remainder of Dare's infantile heartstrings, lest she may lose that grip for good. Edie died in very much the same way she lived - wrapped around Dare, holding her tight.

> On the night of July 28, 1975, Dare and Edie settled into bed, nestling together, as

> usual, like spoons. In the middle of the night, Dare was awakened by a tugging around her waist. Edie's right arm was wrapped tightly around her, not at rest but clutching. Fully awake now, Dare realized that Edie was in distress. Softly, in case she was still sleeping, Dare whispered, "Edie, what's wrong?" At that instant, Edie's grasp finally released. Dare, as if frozen, stayed in the bed by her mother's side until morning.[68]

Dare, motherless, now in her sixties, became the true 'lonely doll.' When she wasn't talking about Edie, she was coping with her loneliness by "eating less and drinking more."[69] Fantasy wasn't even as great a presence as it had been for Dare before Edie's death. Nathan suggests that without the foundation of dependence that Edie instilled in Dare, she was crumbling, having lost the "armature of her identity."[70] In addition, the loss of her brother Blaine to lung cancer in the early eighties had finally deprived her of

[68] Nathan 241.

[69] Nathan 259.

[70] Nathan 259.

even the "will to live."[71] Her dolls and her books were not enough to sustain her mental faculties or her need to retreat into the imaginary.

Dare was on a downward spiral mentally and physically for the last quarter of the twentieth century. Full time caretakers did what they could to alleviate the loneliness, but in the end, any idealized state of maternal symbiosis faded out of Dare's memory as did much else. Dare's own story, essentially the story of the Lonely Doll herself, came to an end on January 25, 2001. After a life plagued by coexisting concerns of obsession and neglect, Dare Wright passed away at Goldwater Hospital in New York City. No longer the object of a cold camera's gaze, or the subject of Edie's codependent and obsessive maternal inclinations, Dare's search for love, harmony, and approval had finally ended. Ironically, in death, unlike in life, Dare and Edie are now apart in their final resting places.

[71] Nathan 273.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I've united a rather diverse group of women writers. My analysis of the mothers and daughters present in these texts, I believe, works toward the resituating of the definition and understanding of the mother figure, mothering, and the maternal instinct. The works in this dissertation are part of the tradition of twentieth-century women writers who put forward figures of the mother and ways of mothering that claim a place in the canon of literature on mothers. Individually examined, each text dimly infers that there is something perhaps out of the ordinary about the version of mothering that we encounter during the reading. When placed together,

however, and examined as being more or less interventions of the maternal rather than representations of the maternal, what becomes clear is that these writers seem to reject the portrayals of the mother that have been previously offered in literature. What this study also does is help reframe the discussion on the existence of 'instinct' and mother love that has forever been wrenched in polarizing distinctions, such as the "good" mother, "loving" mother, "nurturing" mother, and "bad" mother. While it is the case, as Marianne Hirsch aptly states, that "the term 'mother' and the discourse about/of mothering are objects of sometimes radical division within feminist analysis," the question that needs to be confronted is a question of definition: 'What is a mother? What is maternal?'"[1] My text selection should expand the story of maternal development. Through fiction, theory, and life experience, I work to find how the intersection of the lives of mothers and kin, against a vast landscape of geography, history and

[1] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother Daughter Plot: narrative, psychoanalysis, feminism* (Bloomington and Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 163.

literary plots, can carve out more space for the discursive understanding of maternal design.

I am also interested in further engaging the texts in a broader discussion of the power of literature to transform modes of thinking. That ambition renders my project political to a certain degree. That said, and given that external conditions such as geography, history, family structure, legal status, and even sexuality shape the lives of the mothers in this project very differently, the precise conditions under which they come to mother are vast and can be reevaluated only by a major shift in the political, social, and psychological consciousness regarding what 'mothers' and 'mothering' may now look like. In essence, when literature is being used to frame a certain universal construction of mothering that is at work in society and throughout history, yet is at best incomplete, the operation of re-framing is always necessarily political, as it reacts against a current to try and create more space in an already cramped arena.

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