

Mothers and Daughters

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Contents

Matroreform: Feminist Mothers and Their Daughters Creating Feminist Motherlines <i>by Fiona J. Green</i>	11
Mothering Feminist Daughters in Postfeminist Times <i>by Amber E. Kinser</i>	22
Working with Ambivalence and Loss: Artworks that Explore an Aspect of the Mother/Adolescent Daughter Relationship <i>by Sonia Donnellan</i>	38
My Darling Darling: Étude on Muriel's Body <i>by Catherine Racine</i>	51
For My Mother <i>by Cayo Gamber</i>	59
Hail Mami, Full of Grace <i>by Gisela Norat</i>	71
Shifting gears <i>by Leslie Vryenhoek</i>	79
My Daughter, How Do I Teach You What I Haven't Learned? A Personal View of the Impact of Child Abuse on Mothering <i>by Susan C. Ford</i>	82
My Guardian Angel: The Uncertainty of Exile and Memory <i>by Tamara Toledo</i>	90

Contents

The Foxes <i>by Claire Millikin</i>	101
What's in a Name? An Intergenerational Reflection on Naming Our Daughters <i>by Sarah J. Duncan</i>	103
Magnolia <i>by Barbara Pelman</i>	111
Mothers and Daughters at Menarche: An Indigenous-Inspired Quiet Revolution <i>by Sharon Moloney</i>	112
Mothers and Daughters Finding Each Other Through Intercountry Adoption <i>by Marlene Pomrenke</i>	123
Accessing Mother Within: A Study of Midlife Daughters' Use of Maternal Belongings in Mourning <i>by Laura Lewis and Judith Belle Brown</i>	134
Surviving My Mother's Legacy: Patriarchy, Colonialism and Domestic Violence in Lee Maracle's <i>Daughters are Forever</i> <i>by Sylvia Terzian</i>	146
My Mother's Face: Remembering Mothers in the Holocaust Testimony of Francine Christophe and Cordelia Edvardson <i>by Nancy Gerber</i>	158
Mother <i>by Carol Berg</i>	169
"A Mixture of the Madonna and a Woman of the World": Virginia Woolf's Assessment of the Mother <i>by Jennifer Goldberg</i>	171
The Rejected and Reclaimed Mother in Sandra Cisneros's <i>Caramelo</i> <i>by Cristina Herrera</i>	184
Some "Grimm" Reflections on Mothers and Daughters: A Fairy Tale for Our Times <i>by Maggie Kirkman and Gayle Letherby</i>	196

“Genealogy”: Towards the Revival of Feminine Genealogies in the Works of Contemporary Polish Artists <i>by Elżbieta Korolczuk</i>	211
Folio	
Editor’s Notes <i>by Rishma Dunlop</i>	226
My Mother’s Gifts <i>by James Ciblar</i>	229
Bergen Mercy <i>by James Ciblar</i>	233
What My Mother Used <i>by James Ciblar</i>	235
What My Stepmother Used <i>by James Ciblar</i>	236
What My Sisters Used <i>by James Ciblar</i>	237
What My Older Sister and Her Best Friend Used <i>by James Ciblar</i>	238
What My Mother Used Later <i>by James Ciblar</i>	239
My Mother Believed in Christmas <i>by James Ciblar</i>	241
More of What My Mother Used Later <i>by James Ciblar</i>	243
House Beautiful <i>by James Ciblar</i>	245
Resolution <i>by James Ciblar</i>	248

Mothers and Daughter Literary Contest

Knee Deep in the Mother of God <i>by Rebecca Goodrich</i>	252
Stories in the Wind <i>by Beverley Brenna</i>	254
A Letter to My Daughter (To Be Sent in the Future) <i>by Yelizaveta P. Renfro</i>	257
Pianissimo <i>by K. V. Skene</i>	259
Blade <i>by Leslie Vryenhoek</i>	260
Just Beyond Call If You Need Me <i>by Leslie Vryenhoek</i>	261
First Birds <i>by Laurie Kruk</i>	263
Learning the Words <i>by Lorri Neilsen Glenn</i>	265
Sangan River Meditations <i>by Susan Musgrave</i>	268

Book Reviews

<i>My Mother Wears Combat Boots: A Parenting Guide for the Rest of Us</i> reviewed by Jessica Smartt Gullion	270
<i>Parenting a Defiant Child: A Sanity Saving Guide to Finally Stopping the Bad Behavior</i> reviewed by Tatjana Takševa Chorney	271
<i>More Than a Mom: Living a Full and Balanced Life When Your Child Has Special Needs</i> reviewed by Theresa Nowlan Suart	273

<i>Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief</i> reviewed by Ruth Nemzoff	274
<i>Adoption and Recovery: Solving the Mystery of Reunion</i> reviewed by Sarah J. Duncan	275
<i>Birth as We Know It</i> reviewed by Dominique Russell	277
<i>Laike and Nahum: A Poem in Two Voices</i> reviewed by M. Louise Ripley	279
<i>We, The Women</i> reviewed by Rosie Rosenzweig	280
<i>Lying to Our Mothers</i> reviewed by Nancy Gerber	281
<i>Embracing Brings You Back</i> reviewed by Dorsia Smith Silva	282
<i>Super America: Stories</i> reviewed by Elizabeth Soliday	284
<i>You Can Get There From Here: 25 Years of Bridging Courses for Women at York University</i> reviewed by Rita Bode	285
<i>Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe</i> reviewed by Layne Parish Craig	286
Contributor Notes	288

Matroreform Feminist Mothers and Their Daughters Creating Feminist Motherlines

This paper, based on long-term research with a number of feminist families, addresses the relationships between specific feminist mothers and their daughters. It explores how some daughters of feminist mothers often embrace, and at times, attempt to emulate their mothers, unlike many daughters who experience matrophobia—the fear of becoming their mothers (Rich, 1986). Through matroreform—the empowering process of claiming and acting on power from within (Wong-Wylie, 2006)—daughters have benefited from their feminist mother’s courageous and deliberate challenges to the institution of motherhood. Furthermore, they appreciate how their mother’s have negotiated the social and cultural obstacles to the self-determination and agency for themselves and for their children. This paper continues the narrative of feminist motherlines; the feminist maternal genealogy that records and ensures the difficult, yet rewarding work of feminist mothering remains a communal and political endeavour.

I hope that feminist mothering is one of the things that’s going to help us move, over the long term, in raising children who are wanting to see this world be a better place and that they have a part to play in making it so. And whether that’s in anti-oppression work, or whether it’s in raising their own kids from a feminist perspective, I don’t care. But something that says, “I can make a difference in this world.”²¹

In her recent essay, “Images and Echoes in Matroreform: A Cultural Feminist Perspective,” psychologist Gina Wong-Wylie (2006) discusses the theory of matrophobia—the fear of becoming one’s mother—first proposed by feminist theorist Adrienne Rich (1986). Wong-Wylie argues that the use of “phobia” in this case does not accurately describe “the real and common experience of feminist mothers to not want to reproduce or be trapped in the oppressive

bonds of conventional motherhood” (142). Rather, Wong-Wylie contends the concept of “matroreform,” which she defines as “an act, desire and process of claiming motherhood power,” is a more appropriate term because it specifically refers to “a progressive movement to mothering that attempts to institute new mothering rules and practices apart from one’s motherline” (135).

According to Jungian analyst Naomi Lowinsky (2000), one’s motherline can be imagined as a line, a cord, or a thread that connects every woman—each born of a woman—back to her foremothers through her roots of family and culture (231). Wong-Wylie cogently presents a compelling illustration of how she engages in the active process of matroreform in her parenting to create a meaningful motherline for herself and her daughter by engaging in reflective understandings and narratives of her life experiences, despite a previously invisible motherline of her Chinese foremothers due to the cultural dissonance she experienced as a young Chinese Canadian girl living in Montreal. By attending to her own maternal narrative as the mother of a daughter, and linking that narrative to her reflections and understanding/s of her personal relationship as a daughter with her own mother, Wong-Wylie works to forge a strong bond with her daughter. In embodying matroreform and creating a new feminist motherline, she challenges patriarchal norms of motherhood and empowers herself and her daughter by living her life with authority, agency and autonomy (O’Brien and Swadener, 2006: xviii).

I am excited by Wong-Wylie’s language that articulates this feminist motherwork. Over the past dozen years or so, I have been engaged in a longitudinal and intergenerational study of feminist mothering, focusing on a group of self-identified feminist mothers living in Winnipeg, Canada and, more recently, on a number of their adult daughters.² Through this research I have observed how matroreform is a process that “is not only reforming and reaffirming (but also) a feminist act of voicing up and out of invisibility and silence” (Wong-Wylie, 2006: 136).

In this article I explore how a small group of feminist mothers and their daughters attempt to “unravel the patriarchal script of motherhood to write their own stories of motherhood and daughterhood” (O’Reilly, 2000: 145). Due to ethical considerations of interviewing minors and the limited number of available adult children, I draw upon one-on-one interviews with five daughters of four feminist mothers. Of particular interest is how these particular women are creating their own mother/daughter script to establish matroreform rather than foster matrophobia. I begin by examining feminist theorizing of motherhood, provide an overview of the ways in which feminist mothers have chosen to challenge conventional expectations of motherhood, and conclude with examples of how their feminist daughters continue to create feminist motherlines.

The patriarchal script of motherhood

In her monumental book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, feminist theorist Adrienne Rich (1986) purports that mother-

hood has two meanings in which “one is superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control” (original italics, 13). This distinction is often difficult to recognize, as both elements are normalized by social and cultural demands placed on women in the name of motherhood. For instance:

Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal “instinct” rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self. Motherhood is “sacred” so long as its offspring are “legitimate”—that is, as long as the child bears the name of a father who legally controls the mother. (Rich, 1986: 42)

The institution of motherhood is often elusive because there is “no symbolic architecture, no visible embodiment of authority, power or of potential or actual violence” (Rich, 1986: 274-5). Yet, as Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels assert in their book *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* (2004), current Western motherhood entails “a set of ideals, norms and practices most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem—on the surface—to celebrate motherhood, but which—in reality—spread standards of perfection that are beyond our reach” (5). This “new Momism” dictates and acts upon a highly romanticized myth of the perfect mother who needs to be a faultless therapist, pediatrician, mind reader, caretaker, consumer, safety expert and homemaker.

An ideology of intensive mothering is central to today’s new Momism. Sociologist Sharon Hays (1996) argues in her influential book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, that, “The ideology of intensive mothering is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend tremendous amounts of time, energy and money in raising their children” (x). Mothers are also expected to place the child’s needs and desires during each stage of their development before anyone else’s, including their own, and, with the help of experts, be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and composed in motherhood. The myths and discourse of motherhood are popularly transmitted and circulate easily because of their fluid currency within a society that celebrates and rewards these motherhood traditions, images and narratives (Hall, 1998: 61). This discourse offers a readily available and socially accepted role for mothers and, hence, becomes naturalized and embodied in the everyday lives and worlds of people, including mothers.³

While the institution of motherhood may be insidious to most people, it is tangible to all of the feminist mothers I interviewed. They understand, as Rich (1986) asserts, that their relationship to their powers of reproduction

and their children is a source of energy and a strategy that can potentially destroy the institution of motherhood and liberate them as mothers (280). Through claiming the knowledge of their own experiences, feminist mothers understand the dual meaning of motherhood proposed by Rich and consciously enact strategies of resistance in their parenting to create feminist motherlines for their children.⁴

Matroreform: Enacting strategies of resistance and claiming motherhood power

Due to the limited space of this article, I only provide an overview of the ways in which feminist mothers resist and unravel patriarchal models of motherhood. This summary draws from findings of the larger long-term project, and concludes with a more detailed example from one mother involved in the more recent mother-daughter study.⁵

Driven by their feminist consciousness, by their intense love for their children and by their need to be true to themselves, their families and their parenting, feminist mothers choose to parent in ways that challenge the status quo. All are critical of conventional nuclear family arrangements due, in part, to the hierarchy that places men over women, and adults over children. Some mothers openly reject the pressures and expectations placed on them to reproduce motherhood ideals by parenting in ways that explicitly contest conventional standards of motherhood. This may be in the form of conceiving, birthing and/or raising children as single heterosexual women, or as single or partnered lesbian or bisexual mothers. For others it means refusing to stay in and, thus, leaving unsupportive heterosexual relationships and nuclear families. Partnered heterosexual women challenge stereotypical gender roles by insisting on equally shared domestic and family responsibilities.

In all cases feminist mothers use their energy, focus and dedication to contest conventional expectations and models of motherhood. They also use their socially sanctioned position as mothers to teach their children to be critically conscious of and to challenge various forms of oppression that support patriarchy. Each mother takes a distinctive approach to defy and work loose the patriarchal script of motherhood. I elaborate on one such strategy by drawing on the experiences of Beverly.

Beverly is a 57-year-old, Ukrainian, single mother of two adult daughters. She has always been critical of and contested traditional family structures, most notably as a young bisexual when she conceived and birthed her two children with different fathers. Neither of these two relationships endured the test of time, and Beverly has largely raised her daughters as a single parent with limited support from their fathers.

At the time of our most recent interview in 2005, Beverly had been partnered with another woman for five years and redefined her sexuality from bisexual to lesbian “primarily to give recognition to all those lesbians before me who had to struggle to come out as lesbian and what that means.” Always

concerned about social justice, she currently works as a provincial project officer for a national organization developing programs addressing the victimization of women, girls and queers. When I spoke with Beverly's daughters, Sonia aged 31 and Kyla 28, in the fall of 2007, they had just returned to their respective homes from a rare family vacation with their mother overseas.

Beverly confronts the patriarchal model of the insular nuclear family being the only legitimate family form through her personal identity and creation of her family. She believes this narrow and constraining family structure causes harm to mothers and children:

The more and more you move to this emphasis on the nuclear family, the more isolation mothers experience in general. Those feelings of isolation can quickly lead to an erosion of one's self-esteem. You know when you are losing it as a mother. You know when you are just not able to cope anymore, and you just want somebody, anybody, to walk in the door and change things.

And it's just so prevalent in our society; we seem to think that women have this biological, intrinsic nature that we're supposed to know how to mother. There's this huge myth that I think we've all bought into, that we can do this alone, with no help. And then there's the myth that your husband's going to help you, and he doesn't know how to. Another myth is that you're going to turn to your mother at times when you're stressed, and she's gonna tell you what to do. When you know damn well that the only thing that she's going to tell you to do is what she did to you, which you don't want to repeat.

So, this whole system is clearly out of whack. And it's certainly not promoting the best interests of the children, and it's not promoting the best interests of women.

Beverly's attitude, philosophy and approach to mothering greatly differs from that prescribed by the institution of motherhood. She believes, "if your mothering comes from a place where you're constantly challenging conventional structures and notions then that's a political act in and of itself. And hopefully you're assisting your children to be able to critically analyze those same structures so that they can, in turn, challenge them where necessary and appropriate." She tells me:

One of the things that informed my mothering was the sense that women are strong in their own right, and we are capable of being independent and can critically analyze what's going on in the world around us. I was not big on women's roles; I did not want to mold them into being like my mother, being a stay-at-home mom and that kind of thing. And so, I really pushed their education. I pushed for their sense of themselves, to be able to be whatever they wanted to be.

I see feminism as totally intertwined with anti-racism, anti-poverty, anti-homophobia and anti-ableism and all the rest of it. Until we look at all of these oppressions and working on liberation for ALL of us who are marginalized, we're not going to achieve women's substantive equality. It's just not going to happen because there're too many ways for patriarchy to oppress us, cause so many of us are multiply oppressed.

Like the other feminist mothers, Beverly models an alternative mothering model and approach to motherhood for her children. She also lives her feminism in her relationships with her daughters. As a younger mother involved in feminist activist work she took her children to various meetings and events. She also engaged with them daily in ways that honoured their autonomy and individuality, noting, "I've had to treat my children in an equal fashion from the beginning so that they have always known that they have the right to express themselves, that they have the right to say, 'No' and that we could engage in a dialogue about the issue as opposed to me wielding my power over them. And that's still very important to me."

This approach is not unique to Beverly; rather it illustrates a fundamental method of feminist mothering shared by all of the women interviewed.⁶ Feminism is central to their worldview and is the foundation of their parenting practices. Feminist mothering helps their daughters develop into women with a strong sense of themselves and an understanding that mothering does not have to replicate the patriarchal model of motherhood. The following section features reflections of five adult daughters on their understanding of their mother's feminist parenting and how it has influenced their sense of self and life choices.

Matroreform: Developing new feminist motherlines

Attention to maternal narrative links hearing of one's mother's voice as she attempts to challenge patriarchal norms (e.g., mother blame, separation vs. connection) to forging a strong female bond and establishing self-identity. (O'Brien and Swadener, 2006: xvii)

Kyla is Beverly's youngest daughter. At age 28, she self-identifies as a feminist, bisexual, Jewish Canadian woman. With a MA in urban planning, Kyla works for a provincial government writing policy to make the public sphere safer for women and marginalized folks. When I spoke with Kyla in the fall of 2007, she reflected on her mother's feminist parenting and noted the influence of Beverly's feminism on her upbringing:

She definitely wanted to instill a sense of individual autonomy. She definitely wanted to show that we were able to act for ourselves in our own lives. That was probably a central value she wanted to put into our childrearing.

Her family is not necessarily the most progressive or feminist family and I saw a lot of personal struggles in terms of how she wanted to approach her family and be a different mother in those days, and a different daughter.

Kyla is well aware of the ways in which her mother breaks traditional family roles and models of motherhood, not only in choosing to parent differently from the ways her mother had and those prescribed by the conventional model of motherhood, but also in the feminist values Beverly embodies and enacts in her parenting. Kyla also believes alternative ways of creating family and parenting is a viable option for her. While in a four and a half year lesbian relationship that recently ended, Kyla and her partner were seriously considering starting a family together, which, of course, Beverly supported.

Beverly's eldest daughter, Sonia, is a 31-year-old heterosexual, Euro-Canadian who is an office manager for a law firm in Toronto and self-identifies as a "very strong woman." On occasion Sonia identifies as feminist, yet generally prefers not to as "the word has become so loaded over the years." Sonia reflects on the centrality of her mother's philosophy and practice of encouraging her daughters to engage in egalitarian relationships with her, noting "I have always been able to say how I feel to my mother and subsequently to others. I can say to my mother, 'I don't accept that.' Or tell people that I'm not happy with something. I've never felt that I had to choke on my own feelings or suck it up."

At the time of our 2007 interview Sonia was single, and contemplating mothering a child on her own. While she recognizes her decision to be a lone parent differs from many in her peer group, she directly relates this desire to her own mother being "a single mother for so long." Sonia told me, "I know that she struggled with it but, at the same time, I don't think she did that badly. I figure if she didn't do that badly, I could probably manage okay."

Both Sonia and Kyla are unafraid of and even welcome the prospect of conceiving and parenting children in ways that trouble and counter conventional models of motherhood set by the institution of motherhood and new Momism. Their experience as daughters of a mother who contests the patriarchal script of motherhood and creates her own practice of feminist mothering has instilled in them a belief that as autonomous women they, too, can choose to continue to develop feminist motherlines.

The other three daughters involved in the study also believe their mothers have fostered their development of autonomy, self-assurance and independence through their feminist parenting. For instance, Gemma, a 25 year-old self-employed musician who is the eldest of two daughters and self-identifies as bi-racial credits her mother's feminism for her sense of independence and confidence to work within the Canadian music industry, "I think that coming from the background I came from made it a lot easier for me to believe in myself as a musician, that I could do it. Not to think less of myself because I am a woman and not to be intimidated by all the males that are there a lot of

times telling you, 'I don't think so.' I think my mother encouraging us to be independent is a big part of that and knowing who we are."

Gemma and the other daughters of these feminist mothers imagine they may become mothers and expect feminism will have a role to play in their parenting. When envisioning the possibility of parenting a daughter Gemma says, "I would want to prepare her for what's out there. And I'd want to instill a strong sense of self, which I think was at the root of everything my mom did when she was raising us. She wanted us to feel confident and not to be intimidated as a woman by anything that might come at us. It all starts with confidence and I would definitely talk about that with my daughter, if I ever have one."

Meagan is a 22-year-old, self-identified feminist, Indigenous South American and Euro-Canadian, and the eldest daughter of "dedicated and intentional parents." Like Gemma, Meagan's ideas about feminist mothering first developed as a daughter observing her own mother, then through taking care of children herself, and by recently applying her own understandings of feminism to her personal context:

I'm always trying to find work that I will feel ethical about in terms of where the money is coming from, what the work is about, who I'm with, and how I make other people feel when I do it. Like providing childcare for friends of mine, which is the kind of work I want to do. I'm all about the human experience and it's also what I'm studying through acting. It's really crucial to me to be able to honour the human spirit and I think our society has forgotten, in our rush for power and following our patriarchal structures, some of the more visceral experiences we need as humans to stay healthy—emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

In the spring of 2007, Meagan was in an intimate relationship with another feminist woman and shared her thoughts about how feminism is integral to her life, particularly when reflecting on potentially becoming a mother:

Feminism starts, not only in the decision making process to raise children, but, also in that process of deciding if it's something that I want to do, or that I and a potential partner might want to do together, if that was the case. It would also involve setting things up for that child. So, how is this child going to come into my/our life? I think deciding on the HOW is really important. Is it an adoption choice? Is it a biological choice? Is it a surrogate mother choice? Like, all of those different possibilities, and there are many of them. If it's biological, whose sperm is it? Whose womb is it? All of those things are really intertwined with feminism. Not only because those questions are going to be asked by the children, or child, but also because it affects the relationship with the child too. And how they're going to view themselves and all those kinds of things. So I think that's

really important. I don't really believe your personal politics can be separated from how you live your life. I find it very contrary if they are separated. Raising children is a political act.

While these four daughters imagine how their possible parenting may unfold, the fifth daughter is a mother who lives her feminist mothering on a daily basis. Darcy, aged 38, is a heterosexual, separated mother to a six-year-old son and an eleven-year-old daughter. She describes herself as Euro-Canadian and very close to her feminist mother, Shar, aged 62, who recently adopted a baby. According to Darcy, they all spend “a ton of time together.” Both of Darcy’s children attend Shar’s home run childcare, Darcy’s daughter spends one night a week with her grandmother, and they all camp together in summers. Darcy and Shar’s values around raising children are “pretty much exactly the same” and they constantly discuss their beliefs about the ways in which they raise children, the thought they put into motherwork, and the types of toys, clothes, books and movies they should use. Darcy continues Shar’s feminist mothering practice of critically analyzing popular culture, especially TV, toys and clothing in an attempt to provide space for her children to develop as individual and whole people:

We stay out of what we call the “pink zone” at Toy-R-Us. You know the “Barbie, dress-up princess aisle.” On the other side of it, we stay out of the “flaming truck, boy, violent knife isle.” I don’t like those aisles because I want my daughter to be a powerful person. I don’t want her to be a princess rescued, and I don’t want my son to be a violent person. I want them to use all their parts of themselves, their brains and their bodies. I don’t want them to be limited by a toy choice or commercial they’ve seen on TV. I want it to be open for my kids. I want them to be able to do whatever it is that they want to do.

Darcy is well aware of her mother’s influence on her own parenting philosophy and motherwork, and calls herself a “mother snob” acknowledging her clear and set ideas about how she parents her children. In fact, Darcy continues her mother’s feminist motherline by consciously collaborating with Shar to deliberately challenge the institution of motherhood, and negotiate the social and cultural obstacles to their self-determination and agency as mothers, and those of their children. In doing so, they both continue, as other feminist mothers do, to challenge social motherhood norms and raise their children to be autonomous people, who have the skills to think critically about gender relations and the world they live in.

Feminist mothers and their feminist daughters creating feminist motherlines

Apparently, from the reflections of the daughters of feminist mothers, con-

tinuing the feminist motherlines of their mothers is a strong possibility should they become parents. While this study is limited to a very small sample of four feminist mothers and their five feminist daughters, the evidence demonstrates that daughters of feminist mothers learn to be autonomous and independent women, yet also honour their mother's feminist parenting, whether conceptualizing or practicing their own feminist mothering. Through the practice of matroreform, static patriarchal motherhood practices are being reformed and creative feminist motherwork is being reaffirmed. Furthermore, the act of matroreform generates space for feminist mothers and daughters to voice up and rise out of invisibility and silence, as noted by Wong-Wylie (2006: 136). Feminist motherlines are alive and well in this group of feminist mothers and daughters, and potentially their grandchildren.

¹Quote from Beverly, the 52-year-old lesbian feminist mother of two adult daughters.

²For further discussion, see Green, 1999; 2004; 2005 and 2006.

³For further discussion on this process and on the theory of habitus see Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of Theory and Practice* (1977).

⁴For a more detailed discussion of this research, see Green 2006.

⁵For a much more detailed and fuller discussion, please see Green 1999, 2001, 2004, and 2006.

⁶See Green, 1999, 2001, 2004, and 2006 for further details.

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Mothering Feminist Daughters in Postfeminist Times

This essay engages a confessional theoretical politic to examine ways that contemporary feminist motherwork pushes back against postfeminist ideology. Clever deployment of postfeminist arguments results in multiple ambiguities and paradoxes for mothers and daughters, despite encouraging findings about contemporary young women's positive attitudes toward feminist goals. Mass media culture is a profoundly influential socializing force that perpetuates the presumption that women are rather dissatisfied with their equality and so are driven to seek fulfillment elsewhere. This article defines and discusses the rhetorical strength of "postfeminism" and examines how feminist mothering of daughters in a purportedly postfeminist era is characterized by ambivalence, paradox, and matrophobia

Contemporary feminist motherwork must navigate families through a labyrinthine sociopolitical climate that is technology-driven, media-defined, class-divided, and politically contentious and as such, to say the least, it is a complicated thing. We are poised to raise daughters who can effectively infiltrate knowledge and information strongholds, who can affect critical and pivotal turns in cultural production and power redistribution. But because feminism more broadly seems always pushing back against postfeminism, which suggests among other grand falsehoods that feminism has thankfully met its goals and now is at best outmoded and at worst contraindicated, the enterprises of being empowered mothers and raising empowered daughters are constricted and impeded. In this essay, I examine some of these constrictions and impediments as they have emerged in my own mothering experience. I first explain the term "postfeminist," grounding its rhetorical strength in "strawperson" arguments among other diversionary tactics. I then engage a confessional theoretical politic to offer one view of how postfeminist ideology

injects itself into feminist mothers' and daughters' lives. Specifically, I argue that postfeminism complicates daughters' ability to live in liberatory ways and encourages matrophobic responses to feminism.

Most feminist writing on mothering comes from what Brenda Daly and Maureen Reddy (1991) identify as a "daughter-centric" perspective, focusing more on what it is like to have been mothered than on what it is like to mother. While it is possible to write in ways that "move through the daughter's experience to the mother's," few authors have written about mothering in this way (2). Some second wave work, such as Cherríe Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*; Judith Arcana's *Our Mothers' Daughters*; Daly and Reddy's *Narrating Mothers*; and, more recently, Amber Kinser's *Mothering in the Third Wave*, among others, have employed a pointed mother-centric focus in their feminist explorations of mothering practices. In what follows, I work to keep a feminist lens focused on mothering daughters from the mother's point of view, even as I consider some of the decidedly complex and potentially problematic consequences of feminist living for daughters.

My daughter and I are members of various social groups of privilege and as such the consequences for her are not as grave as they are for other mothers' daughters. I do not discuss here dangers of physical violence. Nor do I discuss the kind of attempts at erasure or annihilation that might mark her life, and that therefore would inform my mothering practices, if she identified at this point as lesbian, bi, or transgender, or were a young woman of color, or were disabled, or claimed an ethnic identity that was marginalized and subjugated. I write from a white, educated, middle class perspective; so the difficulties in feminist mothering I discuss here may have limited applicability to other families, and the burdens we bear in our feminist family may be comparatively light. Still, it is not a stretch to say that feminist families in general confront a persistent and nagging pull toward synthetic, postfeminist representations of women's power and away from more authentically empowered representations. From my particular social location then, I look at some of the tensions between these two kinds of representation as they rub against each other in feminist mothering.

Postfeminism as a counter to feminism

The term postfeminism has been used in two primary ways. Suzanna Danuta Walters (1991) explains that the first is a theoretical strand, associated with postmodern, post-colonialist, and poststructuralist thought; this is the less common use of the term. The second strand, a descriptive one, is associated with a backlash against feminism, claiming via the "post" prefix to move us beyond feminist concerns and struggles. But as Walters points out, "our political era is hardly *feminist* much less *postfeminist*" (104); her early 1990s comment here is certainly still applicable today, over a decade and a half later. Regardless of which strand a given use of the term postfeminism may be referring to, however, I agree with Whelehan (2000: 90-91) and Walters (1991: 105) that

either version is problematic; they are finally, of little useful significance for feminist movement, for moving women toward ever more liberatory thinking and living. Nevertheless, postfeminism *is* a useful concept for feminist criticism, for understanding contemporary *representations* of feminism and the culture in which it is embedded and to which it responds. In this essay, I address the second strand related to the mainstream backlash.

Postfeminist ideology, largely perpetuated in mass media and popular culture (Projansky, 2001; Tasker and Negra, 2007), is comprised of frequently articulated assumptions that feminism has succeeded and is now no longer necessary or useful (Aronson, 2003; Negra, 2004); oddly contradictory claims that it has failed and is ineffectual while simultaneously dangerous and problematic (Bean, 2007; Walters, 1991); and an implicit but pernicious focus on and heralding of a monolith of white, middle class, heterosexual girls' and women's desires and opportunities as representative of all girls and women (Projansky, 2001; Springer, 2008). Because postfeminism also conflates "choice" with consumption, highlighting "the figure of woman as empowered consumer," it is white and middle class "by default" (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 2). Further, postfeminism reinscribes women's discontent with the current inequitable state of affairs, such that this discontent appears grounded in the inadequacies and broken promises of feminism (Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Walters, 1991), rather than in the refusals and failures of a class-restricted, largely white, patriarchal social order.

Postfeminism is a response to feminism and its persistent undermining of male dominance and a conservative status quo. It is no coincidence that, as Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon, and Ingrid Richter (1995) argue, postfeminism emerged, for example, in the UK at the same time that "initiatives in government and industry were announced promoting the 1990s as the decade of gender equality" (3); or that, as Sarah Projansky (2001) explains, postfeminism formerly gained momentum in the US immediately after women won the vote in the 1920s (88). Buttressed by pop culture and championed by a handful of decidedly antifeminist spokespersons and sentiments,¹ postfeminist rhetoric and images are positioned in opposition to any liberatory² feminism, claiming that real liberation for women can finally only be found in accepting male dominance while denying its pervasiveness and restrictive power; in accepting white, heterosexual, middle class images as representative of a pluralist society; in safely dabbling in the "celebration of diversity" by consuming race, as Kimberly Springer (2008) argues, through, for example, the purchase of "ethnic" clothing or the "consumption of fair trade goods without ever questioning the conflation of commerce and democracy" (74). Postfeminism is *not*, as Projansky argues, the next, separate and distinct or natural stage in a historical trajectory, linearly connecting pre-feminism to feminism to postfeminism. Rather, it is a direct and pointedly antagonistic response to the fact that feminism has acute relevance for contemporary women, as Pamela Aronson's (2003) and Elaine Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez's (2003) studies, among others,

have shown; to feminism's unrelenting and agitating demands for changes in the status quo; to feminism's continued efforts to expose the heterosexist and racial agenda of media culture. Rather than prove feminism's waning relevance and modern women's disregard of it, the proliferation of postfeminist discourses and images indicates a worried though calculated and sustained effort to maintain postfeminism's tenuous place in the public dialogue, not wholly unlike feminism's efforts to do the same.

Postfeminism and feminism exist then, in relation to and in tension with each other. It follows therefore that feminist maternal scholars ought concern themselves with the ways that feminist mothering is inflected with postfeminist representations. As we do, however, it is important to acknowledge that postfeminism hardly poses the only tension for feminist mothering. Mothering practices are tightly interwoven with feminists' own personal, historical struggles, their own human imperfections, failed attempts, and ambivalent convictions. I turn now to a confessional theoretical exploration of how liberatory mothering of daughters in these times may also function as other than liberatory.

Postfeminist dramas and strawperson arguments

It is easy, and not just for young people, to do what Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983) call, "equate tone with substance, a hot eye with clear vision" (vii). Learning the subtleties of feminist thought, its ambiguities and layers, and distinguishing in its righteous anger what exactly is righteous about it from what is plain old, white-hot anger is difficult enough; passing that ability on to my daughter is something I find exceptionally complicated. Even more difficult is teaching her how to move from anger to a recognition that, as bell hooks has said, "opposition is not enough" (1990b: 15) if our daughters are to live in the world as, and see themselves as, acting subjects rather than acted-upon objects. These are especially difficult lessons in postfeminist times, when the terms of debate are articulated, even invented, by a conservative, postfeminist ideology, disseminated and heralded by the still largely conservative forces of mass media, or, as Kellie Bean argues, by an outright antifeminist "post-backlash" ideology. An important challenge for mothers and daughters then is, in bell hooks' words, "to create an oppositional worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive self-actualization" (1990b: 15). There are times, many times, when I have been doubtful about my ability to teach this creation and expansion of self on one hand, and an economy of identity in the service of self-protection on the other. There are times when I have limited faith in my ability to model an oppositional worldview while simultaneously making clear that the *point* of it is to challenge and dismantle race, class, sexuality, age, ability, gender, and other privilege systems. To teach my daughter that feminism can be, need be, brassy, discordant, and cacophonous, while still measured, fine-tuned, and clarion, has been one of the most complicated tasks I have faced. Kimberly

Springer's (2008) work suggests that this is acutely complicated for feminist mothers of color, who confront severely restrictive images of black womanhood in mainstream media, given postfeminism's clear, though undertheorized, racial agenda. Somehow what has resonated with my daughter most, I fear, what has risen above the feminist-postfeminist clamor and din is that opposition for its own sake is the goal we are striving for. That contestation detached from a clear politics of change, that resistance which may not be useful or in one's own best interest, and perhaps not even particularly interesting, is worth devoting much energy to. This confusion for daughters is reasonable, given the ways that feminist arguments are perpetually contorted and minimized and muddled by postfeminist zealotry.³

Another dimension of the complexity of mothering in postfeminist times is grounded in the fact that as feminist critiques of dominant power structures have evolved and refined, so have oppositional efforts to misrepresent and debilitate those critiques. Hence the emergence, for example, of postfeminist scripts bewailing "male bashing" and white males as the "most oppressed group." Any impediment to unbridled privilege for white men is recast as "oppressive;" if we are not applauding all things male, we must be "bashing" them. And since we have hardly been applauding at our house, the lessons I have been trying to teach are likely to have been read, even by my children, as "bashing." Personally, I am surprised that this language continues to have so much currency in everyday public and interpersonal dialogue. Relatedly, the "feminazi" and "militant feminist" are characters who recur in roles in the postfeminist social drama; these rhetorical figures emerged in the 1990s and though their names might take different forms now, their characterization of feminists as obdurate, brash, and battle-mongering remains. The drama has meticulously scripted public dialogue in ways that typecast feminists as unnecessarily wasting our time and energy on dated and tired arguments or, worse, as in fact undermining the very liberties they claim to defend for women (Faludi, 1991; Kinser, 2004). Feminism is portrayed, in part by characters such as Rene Denfeld, Camille Paglia, Katie Roiphe, and Christina Hoff Sommers, and the mainstream media, which continue to fuel their punditry, as not really interested in women's sovereignty because it is more focused on indoctrination and cult recruitment than on liberated thought. In its characterizations of why we are in fact in a "post" feminist era, postfeminism employs with persistence what communication scholars call the "strawperson" argument (Inch, Warnick and Endres, 2006; Rybacki and Rybacki, 2008). To use these arguments, one articulates the claim s/he seeks to critique so that it is inherently weak and therefore easily, immanently, even mockingly defeatable. The claim is articulated as non-substantive, only made of "straw," hardly a force to be reckoned with. As such, it is easy to dismantle or knock down, and leaves only one's own argument still standing. So critiques of masculine dominance are dismissed as male "bashing;" resolute feminist objections are derided as "militant;" confident daughters who stand their feminist ground are repudiated as foolish "feminazis."

It is no wonder my daughter struggles in her development of an oppositional worldview. Strawperson arguments are propped up in public and interpersonal dialogue, again and again, stuffed with the same poorly articulated and contorted arguments, in order to play and replay the same scenes, none of which capture what feminist arguments work to say, though they *do* effectively portray feminism as gratuitous or irrelevant. And all of which, more importantly, direct attention away from the accuracy and supreme relevance of well-articulated feminist claims and from the real chance of real change that might do some body some good. A strawperson argument is “a form of deception,” as Karyn Rybacki and Donald Rybacki (2008) explain, because “it introduces a bogus claim, one that was not part of the argument or misrepresents the original claim” (154). Further, strawperson arguments are rehearsed and recited in the public dialogue with such great regularity and consistency that they intrude mightily upon the more private family dialogue in our homes and communities. Here, they may be inadvertently fortified before being recycled back into the larger public domain, if the functions of strawperson arguments as deception and diversion are not clear to feminist families.

The postfeminist social drama is played out in part through scenes of women “opting out” of the workplace⁴ in record numbers so that they can raise children, without any financial compensation of their own, which apparently does little to alleviate the concomitant “war” between the “mommy” at work and the one at home.⁵ Current social scripts in fact now refer to mothers as “moms,” as the loyal companions of children, rather than as “mothers,” a linguistic turn which ensures that grown women are seen perpetually from the child’s perspective, as Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels point out (2004: 19–20). “Moms” are positioned firmly among the relatively powerless, and are infantilized themselves thereby.

Media dialogue—perhaps “monologue” is a more accurate descriptor—is over-peppered with references to “feminists” “attacking” the “choices” of “moms” to “opt out” of work and “reprioritize” their lives so that her children (“the most important job in the world”) “come first.” And these references might be part of an interesting discussion if they were positioned dialogically with references to workplace opportunities being so “constricted” for women that those with “class privilege,” who are “entitled” enough to “gamble” with “economic self-sufficiency,” are sometimes doing so (prompted in part by the fact that their “second shift” becomes unbearable as they buckle under the weight of “intensive mothering” expectations, despite their career “opportunities”). Even if that means laying aside years of professional training or experience or seniority or all of it—a “privilege” few men are clamoring for—with a plan to step back into a job that hardly sat idle waiting for them while the children were growing, a plan that some might call flawed, and others a travesty. But this interesting discussion is not likely, because neither postfeminist representations nor monologues work that way. Strawperson arguments are powerful because they are deliberately incomplete or inaccurate.

So my daughter learns that I have opted out of opting out of work, rather than that I have opted *in* to my own income and the maternal power that comes with deciding how that income will affect her life, not to mention my own. She learns that the directions she may pursue in terms of work and family, however she defines it, are a simple matter of opting in or out of this or that. A simple matter of individual decision-making, and never ever about social structure or institutional power or how they might be modified to secure a different future for her and other girls and women who have fewer privileges than she does. Fictional postfeminist accounts, as Tasker and Negra (2007) argue “set aside both evident economic disparities and the fact that the majority of women approach paid labor as an economic necessity rather than a “choice”” (2).

Strawperson fallacies also work by focusing on one part of feminism’s arguments but extending it “beyond its original bounds by drawing inferences from it that are clearly unwarranted or unintended” (Inch, Warnick and Endres, 2006: 84). We see this working in the co-opted and depoliticized language of choice, effectively deployed by postfeminism. Used in this way, anything any woman is doing, no matter how compromising, can be defended as her *choice*, and feminists are expected to trip over their own rhetoric. And we do. In fact, as Linda Hirshman (2007) has said, just about the only question that ever gets asked is about choice when there are a multitude of other questions we could be asking. More specifically, guided by postfeminist articulations, we ask about *whether or not X or Y was her choice*. This is a strategy which effectively diverts attention from the myriad other questions we ought be asking, including: *What are the social locations and material conditions from which she makes her choices? What are the race, class, sexuality, ability, age, and other privilege systems that might constrict or expand her access to multiple choices? What training has she had in seeking out less apparent but equally valid choices? What forms of support can she count on to sustain her choices? What choices are heralded or denigrated in her immediate and broader social worlds? Which choices will enable or thwart other ones?* Interestingly, postfeminism’s *reduction* of choice to the admonishment “leave her alone, she’s made hers,” has in fact functioned to *extend* the feminist ideal (as straw arguments are wont to) in ways that link choice with consumerism, in ways that “substitute lifestyle questions for political ones” (Dow, 1996: 207).

Postfeminism’s clever deployment of choice arguments as a diversionary tactic and, frankly, feminism’s less-than-vigilant use of them too, have made it exceptionally difficult for either mothers or daughters to comprehend how much or how little choice they and other women are in fact exercising in their own lives, much less how to identify and what to do with the choices they do have. We have failed to “see the cynicism, or the logistical maneuverings that [went] into emptying words like ‘choice’ and ‘rights’ of real meaning,” Judith Warner argues (2005: 181). We came to understand that we had choices, she continues, and that “it was our responsibility to make good on them (or not). It was not the government’s responsibility to make sure we were *able* to make good on them” (181). Any conversation about the paths that women are tak-

ing, any critique that might identify the pitfalls of certain paths and so the potential empowerment of different ones gets shut down, Hirshman (2007) contends, when the sacred garments of “choice” are brought out to cloak otherwise useful and important conversations not only between mothers and daughters, but also and perhaps more importantly between daughters and their peers. The intricacies and multi-layered complexities of choice are mystified, and daughters’ ability to think and talk beyond “well it’s my/her choice, and you can’t touch it while I’m/she’s wearing that sacred garment” is impeded. Further, the inequitable distribution of choices is obscured by the cloaking function of choice rhetoric (Tucker, forthcoming), perhaps especially for daughters of privileged groups, who may be more likely to adopt the universalizing explanations of such rhetoric. Individual and personal choices are neither individual nor personal; they are always already “shaped by public laws and policies,” as historian Rickie Solinger notes (17, qtd. in Tucker, forthcoming). Teaching daughters the intricacies of choice within an oppositional worldview is aggravated by postfeminism’s insistence that a monolithic and universalized “freedom” has already been “won” for women (Tasker and Negra, 2007; Springer, 2008), a keen strategem that works well to sustain the status quo because, as Coppock, Haydon and Richter (1995) argue, “it is precisely the *illusion* of ‘freedom,’[and] ‘choice’... which remains fundamental to the political management of conflict and resistance” (183). Feminism’s fierce protection of women’s choice is now being hurled at them at great speed and it has become nearly impossible to avoid getting knocked down by it.

The connection between postfeminism’s illusions and how they work to manage resistance and power is an important one for maternal scholars, in part because it is a link that has not gone unnoticed by daughters of feminists. Though they are not likely to peg postfeminism as illusory, they are likely, entrenched as they are in postfeminist fallacy, to struggle with their own and their mothers’ embodiments of power. It is to this discussion that I now turn.

Power, paradox, and matrophobia

Feminist power and agency are prickly notions, hard to hold onto without getting nicked. Andrea O’Reilly (2004) notes, borrowing from Sarah Rudick, the immense power mothers have to influence their children’s lives. But also she notes many women’s own sense of powerlessness in protecting their children from a dangerous world and in not being positioned politically to ensure their well-being, further aggravated by a broad-based cultural fear of women’s power. This simultaneous sense of power and powerlessness points to “a paradox of motherhood that helps explain women’s ambivalence about motherhood” (250). Women likely embody mothering from equivocal positions, both embracing and railing against the levels of power and agency they possess. Young daughters too, have a complex relationship to power. I have worked diligently in my daughter’s sixteen years to teach her about the great

store of personal power that resides within her. She has come to believe it in enviable ways. She is a courageous woman who can hold her own; but I fear she puts undue faith in this power. I fear that in my efforts to highlight her strength and agency I may have failed to teach her that the power which dominant ideology tries to wield, and often effectively holds over her, is *real*—not just a figment of the patriarchal imagination, not just the whimsy of silly teen boys who giggle over sex talk, and not just the rhetorical orchestrations of “whiney” or “militant” feminists. I fear she puts great faith in sheer will and determination and by god her feminist entitlement; in her ability to spot a troublesome situation before it happens; in her ability to argue her way out of any circumstance; in her belief that to get out of harm’s way she need only “give ’em hell.” I fear that she has adopted postfeminism’s tenet that “a ‘seize the power’ mindset and more vigorous individualism will solve all women’s problems” (Dow, 1996: 207).

On one hand, needless to say, I am tremendously relieved that she believes in and taps into this store of hers, as it has carried her through many a social situation and will continue to; and on this hand my greatest challenge is to not envy her for coming to this knowing place at such an early age when I arrived there so late in my life. But on the other hand I am unsettled by the idea that she does not quite believe that being in the room of “these guys we met last year” while at the beach is a bad idea; that this situation probably is bigger than she is and that boys *are* often taught that girls and women *are* to be used for their own ends; that her power actually resides in refusing to go to the condo where they are staying rather than in navigating potential problems once there. I do know that much of this confidence is grounded in her being sixteen and in not really knowing, thankfully, how dangerous her world is. But it is clear to me that such naiveté is aggravated by her feminist sense of empowered living and her sense of entitlement to a fair and equitable world, untempered by an accurate view of the persistence of pernicious inequity and how it can work in perilous ways—a view that is obstructed by postfeminist denials of unremitting male power and privilege and its parasitical relationship with female subjugation.

There have been places where I have been able to teach my daughter multiple facets of girls’ and women’s empowerment, but learning feminism as prismatic doesn’t necessarily hold the promise of joyful living. Fundamental to mothering my daughter for example, as with many feminist mothers, have been lessons about sex and the body. In fact, most families, whether feminist or not, make such lessons fundamental to how they raise their daughters. Elizabeth Spelman points out, however, that many feminists suffer from “somatophobia,” or “fear and discomfort with the body” (qtd. in O’Reilly, 2004: 249). This could render problematic some of our lessons about sex and the body, interlaced as they are with our own issues too difficult to purge. Such lessons are further complicated by postfeminism’s claim that feminists are “anti-sex” (Projansky, 2001: 79-82). This is another strawperson claim set in perpetual motion, de-

signed not only to divert attention away from authentic feminist arguments about sexuality equity, but also to encourage young women to prove just how (hetero) “sex positive” they are. I did, as a girl learning about myself and about motherhood, have an affirming and constructive, though not feminist, model in my mother, whose lead on these matters I followed: I fostered an accuracy and transparency about the body and how it works; a comfort about bodily functions, sexual and otherwise, as well as questions regarding them; an ability to see considerations about one’s own sexual behavior as much more complex than a simplistic virgin/nonvirgin dichotomy suggests; a genuine valuing of bodily diversity and a flexible position on dress and bodily adornment. But this openness, this transparency about sexuality and the body, needless to say, has consequences for my daughter beyond those I intended.

My daughter lives agitated with her (perhaps especially male) peers for, at best, their rudimentary knowledge and childish giggles over matters sexual and, at worst, their fear and frustration about sex emerging from the cultural silencing of healthy sex talk, which then manifests itself in misogynist discourse, quite often flung at her since she is typically the only person in the room who finds grave fault in it. And she says so. I taught her the necessity of “talking back,” as bell hooks describes it in Anzaldúa’s *Making Face, Making Soul*. I taught her to push back against being “pushed into secrecy or silence” (hooks, 1990a: 208), especially as a feminist agnostic liberal living in the Bible Belt. I taught her to use her speech and every other form of communication at her disposal to profess fiercely and cleverly her right, following hooks, “to voice, to authorship,” and thus refuse to be “tuned out,” or to “become a kind of background music, audible but not acknowledged as significant speech” (208). She is a powerful young person for these teachings; and she is punished for embodying them. The primary problem, again, is that the people in her social world are as fluent in postfeminist and backlash arguments as she is in feminist ones. She has learned to take issue with matters that are passé, from the perspective of postfeminism, which quite prematurely applauds the death of the *need* for feminism. I sense that she feels alone and discouraged and weary; and it is so early yet for her at sixteen. Loneliness, discouragement, and fatigue were not the outcomes I was shooting for. Though they *are* the outcomes postfeminism is shooting for, because they make daughters susceptible to arguments that feminism is the cause of their ills, and moving “beyond” it to “post” feminism the remedy.

What I meant was, yes, to teach her what Anzaldúa (1983) urges: “Shock yourself into new ways of perceiving the world, shock your readers into the same. Stop the chatter inside their heads” (172). But that really only finally works if I also have effectively taught her: “Your skin must be sensitive enough for the lightest kiss and thick enough to ward off sneers” (172). I think she and I have been able to prepare her “skin” in this way, but it is hard to be this sensitive and this thick at the same time. I wonder if I have ever learned this lesson well enough myself to be able to teach it effectively; I wonder if it is

possible for mothers to teach this lesson while simultaneously training their daughters to bob and weave amid postfeminist and backlash punches. I worry that she feels castigated, ever-more marginal as a result not only of her feminist positions, but also of her skill in and compulsion toward professing them. She feels both powerful and disempowered at the same time and this conflict is difficult to wrestle through. It is confusing and demoralizing.

In addition to my misgivings about what could prove to be a false sense of actual power in the world, or early discouragement about the limits of her power, I also am uneasy about how my efforts to ground that power may disproportionately weigh her down. There are skills that I am compelled to teach her that are different from those I need to teach her brother, and I struggle with how to do that and still foster equitable living in our home. How do we raise daughters with the sharper and tougher skills that they will need, skills only acquired through relentless training and meticulous attention, and still conduct an equitable household—one which would not in the end favor the sons over the daughters, despite our intentions? How do we drill these skills and teach the necessity of keeping them honed and not threaten their joy for living, especially when we know from Rose Glickman's (1993) work that daughters of feminists "squirm" under the weight of the different and heavier expectations they answer to and sons do not (qtd. in Chase and Rogers, 2001: 210). Are we even fostering a joy for living that our daughters want to emulate? Glickman's research reports a frightening discovery that "feminist families repeatedly favored their sons over their daughters," which is a devastating finding for feminist mothers to read, and even more upsetting in light of Glickman's report that this fact "'irritates the daughters' to this day" (1993: 210).

The research on how daughters of feminist mothers fare indicates that the relationships that bind these women is multi-layered and complex. We do learn that in many ways, as Susan Chase and Mary Rogers (2001) say in sum: "daughters thrive—they learn to stick up for themselves and to speak their truths—when they have strong relationships with adult women," which they often find with their own mothers (215). Christina Looper Baker's research with her daughter, Christina Baker Kline, which resulted in their book *The Conversation Begins: Mothers and Daughters Talk about Living Feminism*, revealed some important insights into the power and possibility of feminist mothering of daughters. One thing we learned from their work on second wave activist mothers and their adult daughters was that these daughters did in fact adopt the "feminist legacy" their mothers passed on to them (Baker, 2004: 95). However we also learn that feminist mothering has other sides, darker sides that warrant honest exploration.

Daughters of feminists can carry a profound resentment for the ways in which feminism steals away their mothers. Both Baker and Kline's (1996) and Glickman's (1993) research indicate that daughters of feminists can feel resentment, resignation, and a sense of neglect. Mother of five children, Marie Wilson, argues for a rigorous honesty about the impact of feminist work on the

raising of daughters: “That we abandoned our children in some ways while we did the work to save them in others is real,” she admits (qtd. in Baker, 2004: 101). That I am writing about mothering all weekend long and connecting little with my children; that after working all week I am working from this Friday afternoon until Sunday night, spending little if any time engaging with my children, which right now feels particularly troubling to me because I am exhausted from the work I do and need some family connection; that I am putting more hours into trying to make intellectual sense of mothering in a way that other mothers and practitioners might find useful . . . these paradoxes and deprivations for many in our families are real. S. Alease Ferguson and Toni King (2008) note that many current era daughters, the young women of color in their work, have not found their feminist mothers’ lives particularly liberating or enviable, and resent the ways in which the feminist movement has robbed them of their mothers. I first came across this finding when I was editing *Mothering in the Third Wave* and was jarringly disturbed by it; it is a sentiment that haunts me still. In contrast to some of the daughters in Glickman’s and Baker and Kline’s studies, these young women have no intention of using their mothers’ examples as models for living.

This matrophobia, this “fear of becoming one’s mother” and the consequent splitting off from her and what she represents, diverges in interesting ways from Adrienne Rich’s (1976) early explication (235). Rich argued that daughters who saw their mothers as dupes at worst and victims at best to the patriarchal constrictions choking women’s lives lived in fear that they too, upon becoming mothers, would live constricted, devoid of any individuality or freedom, and full of “compromise and self hatred” as they believed their mothers did (235). Interestingly, though the lives of many mothers, especially feminist mothers, look different from the ones Rich identified as inciting matrophobia in daughters thirty years ago, some feminist daughters seem to be adopting this matrophobic stance in their views of their supposedly unrestricted, liberated feminist mothers nevertheless. There are matrophobic threads running through the writings by third wave metaphoric “daughters” of the second wave, as Astrid Henry (2004) has noted, and D. Lynn O’Brien Hallstein (2007) argues that “facing the lingering matrophobia within feminism” itself is a complex project requiring feminist attention (293). So a fear of becoming one’s literal mother, or figurative “mother” is certainly a common theme in feminist living and writing.

It is flattening, however, to consider that in our very efforts to free women from confined lives, we may have contributed to differently confined lives that incite a desire for “matrophobic splitting” from our daughters (O’Brien Hallstein, 2007). It is flattening to consider that, in our feminist mothering, we may in some ways represent to our daughters “the unfree woman, the martyr,” to use Rich’s words (1976: 236). And if their “personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap” with ours, Rich continues, then “in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins” daughters will “perform

radical surgery” (236), splitting off from their feminist mothers in ways that these powerful women—we—may be powerless to stop. Of course, the role of patriarchal structures in making it so close to impossible to affect radical change in the conditions of mothering in these times should be emphasized here. It is less feminism or its “failures” that have so restricted mothering and fostered matrophobic sentiment, no matter what postfeminism is saying, and more patriarchy’s success in dictating the status quo. Further, postfeminism’s use of strawperson arguments and dexterous articulation of the terms for public debate, not to mention the all-pervasive and utterly dismissive literal or figurative eye roll in the face of feminist argument, should be noted here too as effective tools of impediment and attrition.

Still, as Baker and Kline (1996), and Chase and Rogers (2001), and countless maternal narratives indicate, feminist mothering builds strong mothers and strong children and strong families. That does not mean though that its practices are marked by clarity of vision or purpose. It already is rife with ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction—as is mothering in general—which then are further aggravated by the power and pervasiveness of postfeminism and its characterizations. The idea that feminist mothering is multi-faceted is going to mean that some of those facets are darker than others, and it is important that we continue to explore them. It certainly is difficult to foster and live with a sense of well-being alongside lessons of discontent with the state of things; it is difficult to teach serenity without complacency. Guiding daughters in the embodiment of an oppositional worldview becomes increasingly characterized by both complexity and perplexity as postfeminist arguments become increasingly sophisticated and given more and more media airtime. The shrewd engineering of strawperson arguments, their manipulative linguistic turns and misrepresentations of feminist concerns pollute the social environment and not only muddy maternal waters but bemire feminist ones more generally. Some matrophobic response to feminism makes sense, given the context in which daughters take in and practice feminist thought. It is, though, but one component of a much broader repertoire of response which feminist mothers and daughters can practice, starting with an outright rejection of postfeminist claims about feminism and a steadfast stance that feminism is not finished, has hardly failed, and is supremely relevant in the lives of contemporary women.

¹See for example the works of Rene Denfeld (1995), Camille Paglia (1992), Katie Roiphe (1993), Christina Hoff Sommers (1994), and some work by Naomi Wolf (1993), including interviews with several of them featured in such venues as *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Hustler*, *Esquire*, and *Details*, as well as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* (Bean, 2007).

²I follow bell hooks (1994) in the use of the term “liberatory” here.

³See footnote 1 above.

⁴See Belkin's (2003) phrase-coining article in *New York Times Magazine*.

⁵Discussions have proliferated about public and private battles fought between at-home and at-work mothers. See, for example, Leslie Morgan Steiner's *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face Off on Their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families* and Miriam Peskowitz's *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars*.

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Working with Ambivalence and Loss

Artworks that Explore an Aspect of the Mother/Adolescent Daughter Relationship

Artworks made from the material sugar and which explore ambivalence in the mother/adolescent daughter relationship are discussed through psychoanalytic perspectives developed by Julia Kristeva in Black Sun. The works investigate a mother's experience of emotional and psychological ambivalence as she separates from her adolescent daughter. The article discusses insights that emerged from the creative process, such as a present experience of loss (separation from the adolescent daughter due to maturation) may provoke an ambivalent response by the mother as a result of an earlier and unresolved loss. The works of art perform ambivalence over loss through the associative qualities of sugar as both a preserving material but also a material that decays over time. Kristeva also suggests that "affect" and a lost maternal Thing can be detected in literary works and theorised as the symbolic and the semiotic orders. Although an affect such as sadness over loss and a narcissistic wound exists before language, Kristeva proposes that it can be detected in a literary work as rhythm that disrupts the order of language. Is it therefore possible to detect the presence of affect in a work of visual art by looking for a corresponding set of criteria? The article looks at an artwork to see whether rhythms made from a symbolic representation of the breath and repetitive processes can be used to trace affect and thereby create a visual language for loss. The artwork references the work of Canadian artist, Agnes Martin and Adelaide poet, Cath Kenneally.

As a sculpture and installation artist I am interested in ways that my own life experience can motivate creativity. An area of potent emotional complexity for me is the parenting of three teenage daughters. Prior to their adolescent years, I had thought of the girls and myself as a unit. As a consequence I felt bewildered and betrayed by their obvious adolescent ambivalence towards me, but I was also perplexed and uncomfortable with my own ambivalent feelings

for the girls. The process of art making and reflecting on the insights of writer and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, has allowed me to explore the possible origins of this ambivalence and has also led to the insight that a current experience of separation and loss due to the growing maturation of my three daughters may be evoking an earlier, unresolved and unconscious loss.

Themes of ambivalence and loss

In order to contextualise a mother's experience of ambivalence and loss in relation to the maturation of a teenage daughter, the artworks draw on selected elements of the work of Kristeva as developed in her book titled *Black Sun* (1989). Kristeva's psychoanalytic and linguistic perspectives discuss and analyse the creative potential of depression and "affect"¹ for initiating creative imagination and art practice. Kristeva's theories of melancholy and depression are useful resources for analysing the creative potential of loss in works of visual art, particularly my own work. More explicitly, Kristeva discusses loss in the context of melancholia and depression in relation to a lost object² which I now go on to discuss and to a narcissistic wound which is discussed later. In relation to a lost object, Kristeva writes that: "While acknowledging the difference between melancholia and depression, Freudian theory detects everywhere the same *impossible mourning for the maternal object*" (Kristeva, 1989: 9). She asks why this mourning for the maternal object is impossible and responds by proposing that melancholics and depressives share a common experience of: 1) "*intolerance for object loss*" and 2) slowing down of thinking and a decrease in psychomotor activity that affects language in particular (10).

Classic psychoanalytic theory proposes that ambivalence for a lost object is concealed by depression (Kristeva, 1989: 11). A largely unconscious experience of ambivalence may occur due to unresolved and contradictory feelings about a lost object from the past. "I love that object' is what that person seems to say about the lost object, 'but even more so I hate it; because I love it, and in order not to lose it, I imbed it in myself; but because I hate it, that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad..." (11). For the depressive this initial loss is re-experienced with each subsequent loss of a beloved person or thing.

How do psychoanalytic theories about depression and a lost object concern the separation during adolescence between a mother and her adolescent daughter? The loss of the mother is a biological and psychological necessity for both men and women; it is the first essential step to autonomy and one which Kristeva identifies as being a different experience for men and women. According to Kristeva (1989) it may be difficult for a heterosexual woman to resign herself to the loss of the mother because, unlike the male heterosexual and the female homosexual who recover the lost "object" of the mother as an erotic object, "...the loss of the [maternal] object seems beyond remedy for a woman and its mourning more difficult, if not impossible" (85-86). Kristeva emphasises that a tremendous psychic, intellectual and affective effort must be made by a woman, to find the other sex as erotic object (30). As a result

there is a greater chance that a heterosexual woman will not find adequate compensation for the “lost maternal object” making it more difficult for her to relinquish it and mourn its loss. Many women are therefore susceptible to a depressive desire to want to hold on to the beloved object.

In addition Kristeva (1989) identifies that the separation from the mother is difficult for a daughter due to shared subjectivity. She calls the drive to separate from the mother “matricidal” and describes it as essential to the process of becoming an individual. The male child renounces his love for his mother and “kills her” but the daughter’s separation from the mother is made more difficult due to her “specular identification with the mother” and the introjection⁴ of the maternal body and self which is more immediate (28-29).

Kristeva’s (1989) description of the matricidal drive as it affects a daughter emphasises the potential for women to carry unresolved and contradictory feelings about separation from the mother into adulthood: concealed by depression. Later as a mother she may experience the echoes of these unresolved psychological and emotional feelings about a lost object from the past as she witnesses a replay of the inhibited matricidal drive when her own adolescent daughter takes steps to separate from her. Triggers such as this can potentially lead to a complex emotional response to loss for mother and daughter that is disproportionate to any particular situation.

The artworks and loss

I made a series of artworks out of the material sugar to explore a mother’s ambivalent response to separation and loss of an adolescent daughter. To me sugar symbolises contradictory states of nurture as in sugary treats and of anger as in blood sugars produced by the body and part of the fight/flight instinct, as well as its use as a preserving material, but one that deteriorates over time.

I experimented with the sugar: using it as liquid to grow crystals on a toy (*Unfurl*, 2005, Figure 1), or to stiffen netting that was then cast (*Abandonment*, 2005, Figure 2), or boiled and then cast onto marble slabs to make “stained glass” (*I can’t go on/I go on*, 2005, Figure 3) or made into toffee and cast into moulds (*Melancholia*, 2005, Figure 4). Although relatively stable as a stiffening agent when it is first cast, over time the sugar becomes unstable and deteriorates. It melts as it reacts to moisture in the air, becomes tacky, attracts ants, small birds and dirt, and eventually becomes opaque or crystallised and loses its shape.

The works made from sugar can be understood to symbolise intolerance for object loss. For example a work such as *Unfurl* (Figure 1) suggests an unconscious experience of ambivalence as the notion of time as “frozen” or arrested is evoked by the association of “sugar” as a preserving material. Preserving defers the moment of loss. As a metaphor to delay the moment of loss sugar may be understood as a material that suggests an “inability to let go.” Kristeva notes that grief is a postponement that points to the fact that: “I don’t know how to lose” or am unable to find valid compensation for the loss

(5). In *Unfurl* a childhood toy is suspended in a thick crust of sugar crystals, trapped in an excess of sweetness.

Sugar also presents an interesting, if literal, way of interpreting Kristeva's discussion of "melancholy cannibalism" in *Black Sun*. "Melancholy cannibalism" is the fantasy of ingesting the object rather than losing it: "Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested ... than lost" (12). A work titled *Melancholia* (Figure 4) has casts made in sugar of the dolls from my own childhood and which are placed in a cast sugar "shoe-box." The dolls' faces look invitingly edible and could be imaginatively, as well as literally, held in the mouth and sucked on for a long time.

The importance of the doll to a little girl is emphasised by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1972). Beauvoir describes the doll as an "alter ego" or "double" for a girl as well as being her child. Through the doll a girl combines in herself both the mother and the daughter (de Beauvoir, 1972: 310). A use of my childhood dolls in the work of art may be understood as symbolising a combined mother-daughter subject position from the past. Read in the context of Kristeva's psychoanalytic insights, this may be seen as pointing to an earlier unresolved or incomplete separation; the result of an inhibited matrilineal drive and a sense of inadequate compensation for the lost maternal object? A symbolic layering of ambivalence as an inability to lose accrues in *Melancholia* through a use of the dolls to suggest a combined mother-daughter subjectivity; an association of "sugar" as a preserving material; and "sugar" as an edible material that can be ingested.

Paradoxically though, if sugar can be seen as analogous to a melancholic "holding on" due to its preserving qualities, it may also be understood as analogous to loss and death due to its temporal nature as it changes and deteriorates over time. Freud postulates that the "double," originally considered as an assurance of immortality, turns around to become the uncanny "harbinger of death" (Freud 235). As such sugar suggests the qualities of the "double."

The mother finds a "double" in her daughter. Looking at examples of the double in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Oscar Wilde, de Beauvoir notes that: "The double is a dubious personage, who assassinates his original [so too] ... in becoming a woman the daughter condemns her mother to death; and yet she lets her live on" (1972: 600). The mother is aware that even as her daughter reaches her prime, she herself is in decline having lost the freshness of her own youth (535). As a consequence of mirroring her inevitable aging process, the mother may feel ambivalently towards her daughter, her double.

The doll is a double for a girl, and a daughter is a double for a mother. In *Melancholia* the doll as a symbol of past mother-daughter doubling by a daughter, re-emerges to become a symbol of a present experience of a mother-daughter doubling, now from a perspective of a mother. Cast in sugar and as doubles the dolls' faces act in their dual capacity as a preserving material that reflects a desire to hold on and deny the loss, but which as it changes and deteriorates, turns around to become a sign of the inevitability of loss.

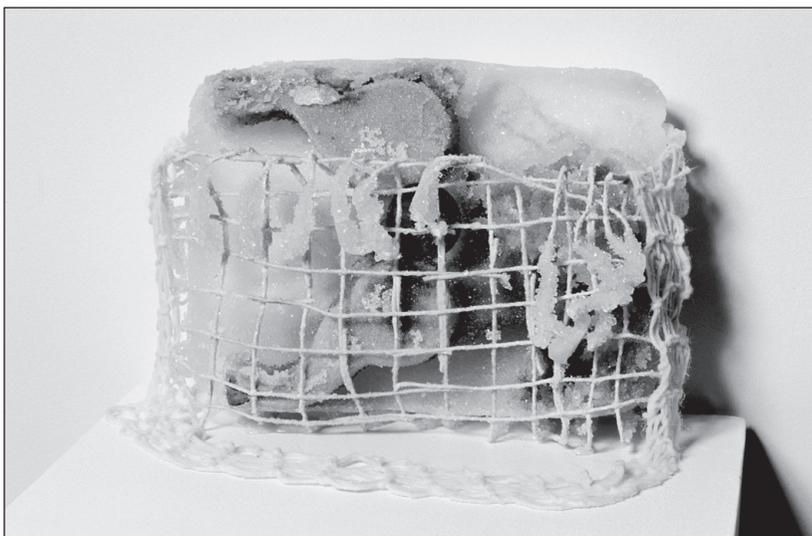


Figure 1: "Unfurl," sugar, wood, wool, plaster, 35cm x 25cm x 10cm, 2005.

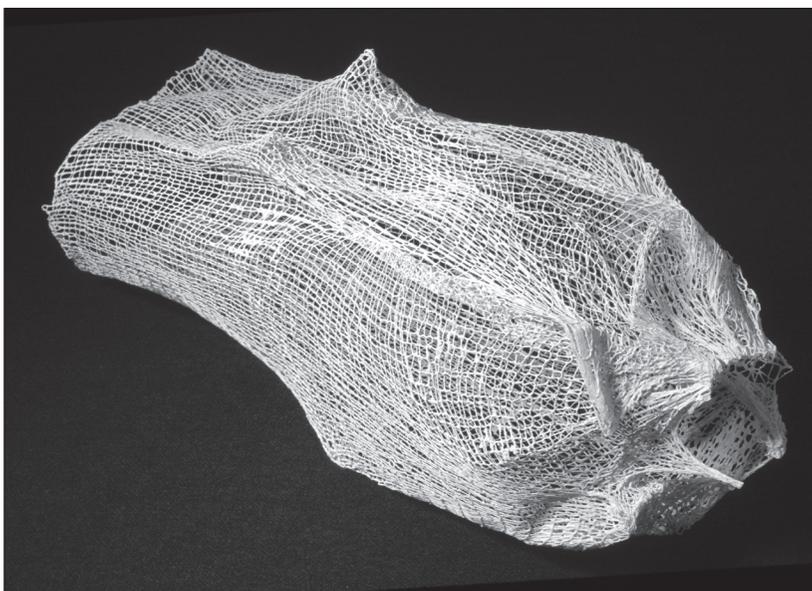


Figure 2: "Abandonment," wool, plaster, sugar, 195cm x 75cm x 90cm, 2005.



Figure 3: "I can't go on/I go on," sugar, 74cm x 60cm, 2005.

Meaning in loss

Modern psychoanalysis has revealed another form of depression that is not about ambivalence towards an object. Kristeva (1989) writes that this other form of depression is a narcissistic wound of the "primitive self," a fundamental wound to self esteem (12). Persons afflicted with this form of depression consider that they have a fundamental flaw. They sense the loss of an unrepresentable and "unnameable good." The affect of sadness replaces the object and the sufferer becomes attached to sorrow (13). The depressed narcissist does not mourn a lost object but a lost Thing.

Kristeva's (1989) work on melancholia and depression is important for imagining meaning *in* loss. She writes, "rather than seek the meaning of despair (it is either obvious or metaphysical) let us acknowledge that there is meaning only *in* despair" (5-6). The despair, the hopelessness is borne of the certain knowledge that we will be separated from the one that we love. It is



Figure 4: “Melancholia,” sugar, 13cm x 18cm x 11cm, 2005.

in this space of despair that a search begins for the lost object of love, “first in the imagination then in words.” Creative potential is present in the despair over loss. Emotions such as anger, love, anxiety, hostility and sorrow that are experienced by the mother when separating from her adolescent daughter may be transposed into a work of creative imagination.

Loss as creative potential

In *Black Sun*, Kristeva theorises how an emotional affect, such as sadness, can become both the initiator of, and indexed to, the product of the creative imagination.

Kristeva (1989) claims that loss, bereavement and absence may be the initiators of a work of creativity and help to nourish this work. Yet loss, bereavement and absence are also paradoxically the elements that “threaten” the work of creativity as the melancholic artist struggles against succumbing to the sorrow (9). Kristeva conceptualises this process in terms of art work as fetish. The artist endows the artwork with meaning and significance. Fetish is an example of primary process thinking, an aspect of which is symbolisation. Symbolisation means to substitute one image or idea for another and is a process upon which sublimation depends—or the ability to deflect energy into creative channels. Kristeva claims that the artwork as fetish emerges when the activating source of the work, being sorrow, has been “repudiated” and no longer has binding force (24).

But having made the work of art, how can traces of the initiating affect such as sadness be detected?

In psychoanalysis affect is a generalised term for feelings and emotions that are attached to ideas and not vice versa (Rycroft, 1972: 3-4). Sadness is an affect caused by external or internal traumas and is the main mood of depression. Kristeva asks: "If affect can be assumed to be the 'most archaic inscription' of inner and outer events, pre-language and pre-sign, how does one then reach the realm of signs?" (1989: 23). This question needs to be briefly considered because Kristeva speculates on the relationship of affect, its generative ability and to its presence in literary creation, which I then go on to apply to a work of visual art.

Kristeva refers to Hannah Segal's hypothesis that the child produces vocalisations or uses objects that are symbolic equivalents of what is lacking. Then later in response to its sadness the child produces "within its own self elements alien to the outer world, which it causes to correspond to such a lost or shifted outerness; we are then faced with symbols properly speaking, no longer with equivalences" (23). Kristeva then adds her own perspective to that of Segal's and develops her own understanding of "affect." She writes that the ability to overcome sadness lies in the identification with a third party—father, form, schema—and not with the lost object. This identification may be called phallic or symbolic and results in the subject denying the loss and entering the realm of signs and creativity; "no, I haven't lost; I evoke, I signify through the artifice of signs and for myself what has been parted from me" (23). It becomes possible to detect affect in literary creation as it is transposed into rhythms, forms and signs that "disrupt" the symbolic order (22). Kristeva's point about affect in literary creation is important when considering the complexity and the intensity of the emotional and the psychological aspects of the mother/daughter relationship and its representation in works of art. This is because, if affect may be detected as rhythm that disrupts the grammar and logic of language in literary creation, it suggests that it is possible to detect the presence of affect in a work of visual art by looking for a corresponding set of criteria; for example the use of repetition to create visual rhythms that disrupt the order of the grid.⁵

Repetition and the work of art

An example of affect in a work of art may be seen in the paintings of Canadian born artist, Agnes Martin. Her paintings are built up of grids, measured and regular but with irregularities appearing in the hand-drawn, pencilled lines made with a straight edge (Haskell, 1994: 146). As I look at her paintings I picture Martin drawing in her breath, holding it and slowly breathing out to still her hand as she concentrates on the line being drawn. I wonder too if she deliberately breathes out and with the next indrawn breath continues drawing the line to become a rhythmic process of working with her breath; irregularities appearing as each line is drawn.

Kasha Linville's phenomenological reading of Martin's work describes the changes that appear as the viewer moves back from the work. On stepping back

from the paintings they become atmospheric as the ambiguities of illusion take over from the earlier materiality to become a "...non-radiating impermeable mist. It feels like, rather than looks like atmosphere ... hazy, velvety ... you step back even further ... the painting closes down entirely, becoming completely opaque" (Krauss, 1999: 79).

The mention of "atmospheric" takes us to the enigmatic realm of mood and affect. The repetitive hand-drawn quality of the line allows irregularity to appear and creates a visual rhythm as the repeated lines in the painting interact with each other in order to create an artistic whole. These irregularities are highlighted by a use of the grid. Anna Chave writes that the grid in Martin's work is conventionally viewed as a "... highly intellectual geometric formulation that reflects the logical order of man's mind..." (Haskell, 1994: 135). Haskell writes that, "...in [Martin's] hands the grid becomes a vehicle for the expression of infinite expansion and metered cadences" (109). Although inspired by the rhythms of nature, Haskell adds that it is not Martin's intention to depict them in her painting, rather Martin seeks to "...find visual correlatives for the detached emotions that often attend the experience of these rhythms and visual experiences" (109). Using Kristeva's (1989) theories of affect it is possible to understand the grid in Martin's work as evidence of form or schema belonging to the phallic or symbolic order. Rhythm occurs as a consequence of subtle changes visible in the quality of the repeated lines. These visual rhythms disrupt the ordered nature of the grid to allow the initiating affect to be discerned by the viewer. In Martin's work this affect appears to be one of joy.

My interest in Martin's paintings and affect relates to a work I made for exhibition in which I focused on the rhythm of the breath. The work began when I made two or three small crocheted forms out of transparent nylon thread and suspended them in my studio. They moved gently on the air currents and suggested to me the idea of breath. As the exhibition date drew nearer and I considered how to resolve the work I came across a poem by Adelaide poet, Cath Kenneally titled "Being Away" (2003). The poem uses the personal voice to talk about illness and resolve. Kenneally described for me her use of unpunctuated, unbroken and unmeasured rhythm to suggest a slower pace due to illness. As I read the poem, it became possible to experience illness as a breathy quality, its halting rhythms, economical use of words, and a quotidian awareness of limits, imparted a sense of multiple rhythmic layering. The last eight lines of the poem affected me deeply:

...but love
for my absent eldest, who
travelled to this country
with me, a wide-eyed ten,
ten years back. For him

I wish this calm

profusion—less admirably,
I wish it could be me
who gives it to him.
(Kenneally, 2003: 46)

The lines speak about an absent eldest by a mother who remembers him as a wide-eyed youngster. The poem also narrates Kenneally's own self awareness of complex and conflicting emotions about the independence of her child that stem from her ongoing desire to nurture and protect him, which she knows to be inappropriate. The acceptance of physical and emotional limits by the mother and her resolve in the face of illness and loss, appear to me to be quietly courageous in the face of human frailty.

As I read and re-read the poem I became conscious of each breath I took and counted thirty-eight breaths in all. I decided to make thirty eight small forms to resolve the work for exhibition and titled it *Breath in Breath out* (2006) (Figure 5). Each of the forms was tied by a length of nylon thread to a piece of tulle netting and moved with the ambient air currents. The symbols for breath moved in a visual representation of the unmeasured rhythms of speech.

I enjoyed the repetitive process of hand-making each of the small modules that make up *Breath in Breath out*. The subtle differences that emerged in each individual form sustained my interest and I found pleasure in the unique character of each of them. These differences were apparent at a close viewing of the work, however from a distance the small forms became almost invisible and were seen moving softly in the air currents against a backdrop of the gallery architecture. At the time of making *Breath in Breath out* I was learning a meditation technique that focussed on the breath as a way to live with depression. The idea is that each breath is a calming and re-focussing mechanism to allow time and space to change thinking patterns. It requires that the individual slows down their responses and becomes aware of the moment and their emotions.

This is the joy of repetitive processes. In my work, I can slow down and focus on the moment of creating the work. In *Breath in Breath out* the affect is transposed from my thought, through the body and hands and into the plastic material being manipulated. From Kristeva's theories of affect it becomes possible to understand this process as a non-verbal indicator of mood. The initiating mood is sublimated through a process of repetition that allows differences to appear in each individual form; these differences are responses to feelings at different moments and to the moods of different days. But her theories also suggest that it may be possible for the viewer to detect affect in the finished work of *Breath in Breath out*, as the rhythms generated through the movement of each inter-related component act to disrupt the grid-like structure of the gallery walls, ceiling and floor. It is my hope that the breath-like rhythms inherent in the work communicate affectively to the viewer a calm acceptance in the face of sadness, depression and loss.



Figure 5: "Breath in Breath out," nylon thread, 80cm x 60cm, 2006.

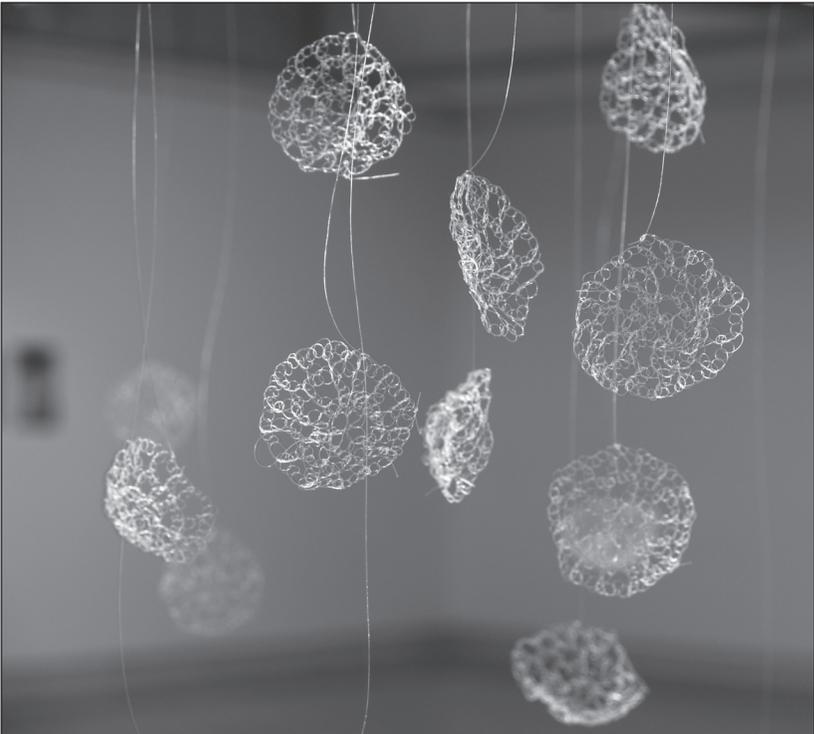


Figure 5a: "Breath in Breath out," detail, nylon thread, 80cm x 60cm, 2006.

¹“Affect” may be detected in literary creation transposed into rhythms, forms and signs that Kristeva calls the semiotic or maternal realm that “disrupt” the symbolic order, that of the law and the Father (Kristeva, 1989: 22).

²The object is “... that towards which action or desire is directed.... In psychoanalytic writings, objects are nearly always persons or parts of persons or symbols of one or the other” (Rycroft, 1972: 100).

³Van den Berg diagnoses the maternal object in Freud’s dreams in reference to an oedipal and pre-oedipal mother. “The fantasy of the pre-oedipal mother is not entirely positive: she devours as well as nurtures, kills as well as cares, takes as well as gives” (Klein cited in van den Berg 1). She can be detected lurking behind a “seductive” and forbidden oedipal mother. “...[T]his archaic object is constituted by his [Freud’s] double desire to merge with her and to separate from her” (van den Berg, 2007: 2).

⁴Introjection “The process by which the functions of an external object are taken over by its mental representation by which the relationship with an object ‘out there’ is replaced by one with an imagined object ‘inside’” (Rycroft, 1972: 77).

⁵Rosalind Krauss (1999) proposes that there are two ways in which the grid functions to declare modernity in modern art, spatially and temporally. Spatially it is geometric, flattened, ordered, anti-natural, anti-mimetic and anti-real. Its temporality is reflected by the fact that the grid is particular to the twentieth (and twenty-first) centuries and did not appear in art prior to that; it is ubiquitous in the art of the twentieth century. For these reasons the grid may be considered as a visual representation to reflect ideas of order, rationality, logic and structure inherent to notions of culture and a modern society.

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My Darling Darling *Étude on Muriel's Body*

The zenith of the mother–daughter relationship can occur late in the mother's life when she is still healthy enough to be reasonably independent. During this time the middle-aged daughter, who has yearned for the idealized mother to finally arrive, can be dumbstruck to discover she never will, and that in her place is an old woman; perhaps widowed and medically fragile, perhaps lonely and in need. Further, that this woman, who appears to have less to offer than at any time in her life, mysteriously becomes the source of love once craved for. She becomes the cherished “Beloved” as the daughter herself moves into more complex roles as peer, friend, ally, advocate, spiritual companion, caregiver, teacher, husband–surrogate and mother. This re–jigging of roles and relationships to accommodate the changing circumstances and abilities of the mother, in the face of impending death, can lead to experiences of attachment and intimacy that are transformational and deeply satisfying. Such experiences are profound in reconfiguring this primary relationship, and may well result in the highest expression of reciprocal, or even mystical, love ever shared between these women. The following memoir explores this theme.

In the summer of 2007 I spent six weeks in a near marathon of intimate physical and emotional care for my ninety-one-year-old mother who is doing everything in her power to maintain her dignity and autonomy despite fragile health, a colostomy she insists on managing herself, chronic pain, and deteriorating faculties. We are separated by three thousand miles and, while I usually see her every four to six months, I was troubled to learn just how advanced some of her deficits had become.

I had flown to Ottawa to collect her so she would not have to fly alone to my home in Vancouver. But fifteen minutes before we boarded the plane, hell opened with the sudden discovery of a leak in her colostomy bag. “Oh

God, Catherine, smell me, I smell bad don't I?" This was followed by a frantic scum in a dimly lit handicap airport bathroom where I helped her change her "appliance" for the first time. "This is why I always have my supplies in my carry-on," she said, her hands trembling only slightly while we worked together. This inauspicious beginning, however, was merely a prelude. One hour before landing in Vancouver International, she looked at me with an expression of controlled terror and, not wanting to alarm me, quietly said, "I'm not feeling very well." In respiratory distress, panicked, and needing oxygen, she panted into the oxygen mask and laughed weakly at the forced antics of the flight attendant who tried to distract her with his buffoonery. I held her hands, smiled reassuringly, and prayed to the Gods for her life while teasing her in a stern voice. "You really are a pain in the ass you know Muriel. This is the last time I'm going anywhere with you. Count on it." That was the moment I was introduced to the cringing dread that dogged me throughout the rest of her visit.

It was a busier holiday than either of us had ever anticipated beginning with a case of cystitis that required two trips to a walk-in clinic, as she could not tolerate the first antibiotic prescribed for her. "They're horse pills Catherine. I simply can't swallow them." A few days later she suffered heart failure, spent twenty-four hours in hospital, and was discharged the night before a cruise to Alaska we had planned for months. Miraculously, the cruise was uneventful and she basked in the attention of the ship's staff, and our four travelling companions, who left her feeling more cosseted and venerated in those seven days than she had possibly ever been in her old age. "I'm happy," she said one night, her voice bright with wonder, her face flushed with joy as we headed out for another evening in the ship's disco. While I pushed her in the wheel chair around the dance floor, my women friends danced around us.

Twenty-four hours after our return she developed acute gastroenteritis, followed by an episode of delirium during which she became convinced I was withholding necessary medical care. In total, she racked up three trips to the hospital, two by ambulance; two appointments with a respiratory specialist; three trips to the lab for blood work; two major medication changes; and two trips to the drugstore for long and anguished discussions with the pharmacist regarding the unfamiliar colour coding of her Coumadin, a potentially lethal blood thinner.

Her body is preparing for its eventual leave-taking, and I now find myself sifting through the memories, gleaning what I can of the story we've shared. There is so little time. But it is her body I always come back to in memory, that little vessel from which I flowed over half a century ago. The story of my mother's body begins with its simple warmth. The memory is old and we reconstruct it together.

I am alone eating a bowl of cereal at an old kitchen table topped with black linoleum and finished with aluminum edging. This is her work-table; the place the

six of us sit down to every night, to food she has prepared that is always plentiful, always good. "Have some more, no you can't have dessert until it's finished. Fine, no dessert. Alright then, three more fork fulls." I rock while eating and hum a tune, something she has taught me, waiting until it's time.

The route is familiar. The linoleum on the kitchen floor changes to hardwood in the hall. I remember the difference in texture and temperature on the soles of my feet; the wood is stickier, colder. A subtle smell of varnish rises as I hold the ball of the newel post and turn onto the uncarpeted stairs. Pausing briefly at the top of the staircase, I survey the hall floor stretched out before me. I know where it creaks the loudest and tiptoe noiselessly past the shaving cream and toothpaste smells of the cool bathroom, past the closed door of my brothers' room to the one that sits ajar at the far end of the hall. Sunlight floods the open corner of this doorway and gleams halfway down the hall, golden as a buttercup. The door yields to the pressure of my small hand and then I am inside the sanctuary.

I watch for a moment, sober in the presence of my sleeping parents. My father lies on his side facing me, air breaks rhythmically through his slightly open mouth below the black bush of his moustache. Mother lies on the other side, closer to the window hung with chintz curtains printed with poinsettias and stylized leaves. I make my way around to her side of the bed.

Lifting the cover slowly in the middle, not at the top where she's holding onto it, I slip a foot backward onto the warm sheet and lie there on my side close to the edge of the mattress. I don't have to wait long. She stirs and sighs before rolling towards me. Her arm circles me, pulling me towards her while my feet reach back to the heat of her legs. She gasps. "You're frozen Cass, what have you been doing?" "Nothing." "But you're so cold, darling aren't you cold? Come here." Hiking her nightgown up over her hips, she then helps me pull off my pyjamas pants, and a moment later I lie spooned in the nest of her belly, feeling the tingle from the back of my knees up to my shoulder blades. It's so hot it feels like holding an ice cube. I'm melting. My father comes up through the fog, lifts his head off the pillow. "It's alright darling, go back to sleep," she says, reaching back a hand to pat him. "Lie still Cass, try to sleep." I settle into her arms, sealed against her like a second skin, and squint my eyes into the sunlight pouring through the half-opened curtains, wondering how much longer I'll have to wait. My gaze softens and I fix it on the curtains looking for faces hidden among the poinsettias and the greenery. I find them, lose them and find them again, until I float away.

To the last day of her visit this summer, Muriel was confronted by the full onslaught of life that reached its climax with the news that one of her sons, and his wife of twenty-five years, had just separated. The daughter-in-law called with this news while my sibling was on a plane to Vancouver to take my mother back to Ottawa. We spent the rest of the day waiting for his arrival and the moment of revelation when we would pre-empt his story. "Thank God your father isn't here to see this. Damn it, why did he leave me all alone to deal with this mess. My poor family. Three divorces in a family of four. Three! I couldn't

have been much of a mother if this is how it's all turned out." She lamented until he arrived but greeted him only with smiles and words of love. I was the one who took him outside to tell him privately about the morning's phone call. "I wouldn't dream of burdening him," she confided later. But I knew she would rather play dumb than risk the relationship. "He's a man Catherine, they're not the same," she had told me often enough.

My mother always said I could tell from five blocks away when she was having a bath because somehow, and she didn't know how, I always managed to get home whenever she was getting into or out of the tub. "It's true Catherine, it's true," she would say looking up from the water she was soaking in, shaking her head in frustration at my ability to invade her privacy with such accuracy. Nodding her head for emphasis she swears it's been so long since she's had an uninterrupted bath she can't even remember. Then I'd peel off whatever I was wearing and step in without asking permission. I didn't need to. The grudging tone of her voice was as good as an engraved invitation. "Oh all right then, wash my back first, will you? Do something around here to earn your keep. That's nice. That's good." "The water is too hot." "No, the water is not too hot, don't turn on the cold water; sit down. Oh my God, this tub is too small for the both us. Catherine, I'm getting out." "But I just got in." "Alright, five more minutes. That's it."

What did we talk about? How did we sit in the tub together? Did I lie back on her fragrant body and bask in the warm dew, or were our bathtub visits face to face events with me sitting in front of the faucet complaining about the cold metal on my back. I want to remember more. The only clear fragment I have of one of these times was a bath we shared in France, in the little French house with the spooky basement that had all those cement rooms with doors that locked. I am just home from school, she is in the bathtub already clucking about her lack of privacy and my radar, while I take my clothes off smiling with pleasure. We know our cues. "Catherine it's true, five blocks away." Without being asked but forcing a hefty sigh she sits up and bends her knees to make room for me.

Fresh losses awaited her on her arrival back to the assisted living facility in Ottawa she had moved into four years earlier, following my father's death. Peter, a resident she had recently come to know and love, died within days leaving her stricken. "It's a bastard Catherine. It's a real bastard. The moment you start to care about someone around here they die on you." A month later her next-door neighbour, Anne, died at the age of eighty-eight. They had shared pre-dinner drinks every night before dinner since my mother's arrival. I'd listened to her endless stories about Anne's childishness, her small-mindedness, her mulish resistance to common sense in following her doctor's orders. "But it doesn't matter any more now, does it, all the stuff that made you crazy?" I asked my mother in the hard days that followed Anne's funeral. "No, no it doesn't matter at all," she replied, the surprise barely audible in her voice. "I just miss her."

With six people in our family, the bathroom at 796 Quinlan Road was probably the most heavily trafficked room in our house besides the kitchen. The toilet and sink were against one wall, the tub against the other so I could sit on the edge of the tub and watch my father shaving.

I listen to the sound of the razor dragging over his face and we talk, catching each other's glance in the mirror until he tells me, "Go and get Mother." I've been waiting for this and leave my seat to go and wake her, or to find her already out of bed tying a housecoat around her waist. There is a quiver of pleasure in fulfilling this important function. On the trot I come back to the bathroom. "She's up," I say and resume my post on the edge of the bathtub, half-hidden behind the open door. My father smiles into the mirror while I wait and watch her arrival through his actions. "Well. Good morning!" The ring in his voice is exaggerated but true as he watches her step into the bathroom and moves towards her. I watch them kiss, her mouth slightly opened, his puckered to avoid smearing.

I'm hiding, no one tells, and then my father leaves the room. "Let me give you some privacy," he says. But I don't have to leave because it's just us. Closing the door she looks at me for the first time as she seats herself on the toilet. She didn't know I was here. Maybe she did, but it doesn't matter, it's just so good. Her face is undressed, her hair still un-brushed and I'm squirming with pleasure at being discovered. My job is done, my reward is here. I bathe for a second in the sunrise of her full-faced gaze and feel the heat in her smiling voice. "Hi darling, were you there all along?" "Yes, yes I was."

Then, after breakfast we go upstairs so she can get dressed, but first we go back into the bathroom. I must have been preschool age, no one else is home. Filling the sink with hot water she strips to the waist. I like how she looks, standing like a dancer before the mirror, washing one arm held in mid-air, then the other, her underarms and breasts, then her face and neck with a white face cloth. Sometimes the sink is emptied and filled a second time. I am hovering and talking and watching. "I want to be a ballerina and a nurse." "Two things? Do you think you'll have time to do both?" "Oh yes. Do you believe in purple cows?" "Certainly." "You do?" "Of course don't you?"

We have been apart, this woman and I, for almost thirty years. She has forgiven me, the youngest and only girl, for abandoning her and for leaving her alone in the company of men, her husband and three sons. I have forgiven her all her transgressions, real and imagined. How impossible it seems that she and I survived the eleven year exile I endured for finally speaking about being sexually abused by my youngest older brother. I remember to this day the long distance phone call fifteen years ago when I told her I could no longer carry the burden on my own. "I was seven, I was only seven," I said, protesting when it became evident that she could not, or would not, remember the unspeakable secret I had told her one night after a bath so many decades before. She, who put a stop to it that very night by threatening to kill him if he ever touched me again. "You were six," she finally whispered back into the receiver.

How did we recover from all that, my mother and I? How did we navigate that wasteland to this place where we now greet each other as women, with devotion and gratitude, both of us awed at the enormity of what we, and time, have forged together? There is nothing more to be said, no conflict to overcome, no inadequacy to be filled. Soon she will leave me, a fifty-four-year-old divorced woman without a partner, or children. Of course she will leave my three brothers as well. But I'm the one closest to her body. I'm the one who's had constant access to it, and that makes me special. How I love to believe it even now.

For years when I went back to Ottawa to visit my parents, my mother and I would need to see each other naked, at least once during my visit. It's an atavistic call, this homing back to shared earth, which has always followed the long absences between us.

One such time was ten years ago; I walked into her bedroom when she was dressing. Grabbing an article of clothing, she held it to her breasts to hide herself, her face coy and defiant. "I'm fat," she said levelly with a child's smile, not wanting me to go exactly, nor wanting me to stay. "No you're not, let me see." "No." "C'mon you're not fat let me see." She let out a long-suffering sigh and dropped the shield. Cocking her eyebrows she thrust out her chin and shifted her weight to one hip, a belligerent fist clenched to the other. "Satisfied?" She waits for my response while I take in her shape, texture, colour, height that are all familiar as the map of my hand. This is her profile, her stance, her delicate skin. The breasts are small and she has apologized more than once for passing them onto me through her genes. Hers now lie empty on the curve of a belly that has emerged only in the past fifteen years since the heart attack. She was always compact, reedy as a youngster and slim as an adult, from a life-long practice of carefully monitoring her food intake. She told me once her doctor had even made her diet through her pregnancies and she complied. "You're father says I'm fat and I don't care." She does, of course, but I like the pugnacity. This is a woman on strike against food deprivation, refusing to be bullied any more. Her belly is rippled and the dimpled weight wraps itself around to her back. My old tree is anchored to the same legs I see each time I look in a mirror. Mine are larger and longer, but identically cut. I've always thought hers had a quick grace that mine lacked. "You got great legs Ma." "Oh they're not, look at my varicose veins, my thick ankles." "No, I mean it." "Do you really think so?" Her voice relents with something approaching pleasure but she's humouring me. I approach her with fingers poised to pinch a nipple and she smacks my hand away. "Stop it. Leave me alone." "Ok." I turn to leave but she calls me back. "Give me a kiss first."

Her body was my hearth, how could it be otherwise? Even the silky skin of her hands on mine pleases me inordinately. At ninety-one my mother's hands still elicit my admiration with their softness and vigour. She lets me examine them closely, without embarrassment. The pads at the base of her

thumbs are plump and alive, and her almond shaped nails always look freshly filed. She tells me her nails look like hell, and that her hands are red from all the work she did with them when she was raising four kids. "Yours are the beautiful ones," she tells me, but I object. Mine were ruined by two decades of cortisone cream used to control childhood eczema. She doesn't mind the papery feel, the roughness. "I love your hands Catherine, I just love holding them. They're you."

The end of another brief Christmas visit to Ottawa has come. Tomorrow morning I fly home to Vancouver, and tonight I am packing my bags while she watches from her bed. The lamp fixture attached to the wall behind her is illuminated with an energy efficient bulb that glows in the darkened room. I have failed, once again, to go through the apartment and replace all these lights with 100-watt bulbs. "She's got macular degeneration, she's blind in one eye for Chrissake, and she's using light bulbs I couldn't read a menu by," I tell my brothers. They are good to her but some things get overlooked. I will revisit my remorse when I come back next time, if there is a next time, to find the bulbs still unchanged.

Everything must be organized tonight. The morning will be hurried, she will be exhausted from rising earlier than usual and slightly confused, fretting to make sure I have everything I need, especially lunch for the plane. It is so important for her to claim her role as my mother in these final moments, and to make sense of another departure that even I don't understand anymore. We will say goodbye, maybe forever. She will suffer, and I will feel like crying when I get on the plane.

I am on my knees by her bed, the way I used to kneel when my father taught me how to pray as a child. Tonight she is my prayer. I'm smiling at her, and put my arms under the pillow to draw her towards me. My face is inches from hers. "I adore you. How am I ever going to leave you tomorrow?" "You have to go, I know you have to go, you know you have to go. That's the way it is." "But do you know how much I love you? You don't. You couldn't possibly guess. You can't even imagine how adorable you are." I am close enough to feel her breath on my face. She is relaxed in my arms, smiling slightly into my eyes. "Nutsy Fagin," she says, dismissing my words. But there is nothing in her tone that makes me believe she wants me to stop. "I don't want you to worry about anything. If you decide to go before we see each other again, I can handle it. Go when you're ready, I'll be fine. We'll all be fine." "Are you rushing me? What if I'm not ready yet?" Her delivery is deadpan to force a laugh, and I comply. "Nutsy Fagin," she says again. "Go to bed, and don't watch TV half the night. Wake me up in the morning." "I will." "Promise." "I promise! Do you think I'd leave without saying goodbye?" "No, of course not. Goodnight my darling darling, sleep well." "Goodnight precious."

My mother and I have had many dialogues over the years about how the roles between child and parent seem to reverse. But now I wonder if they don't simply start to merge and transcend. I know it was some alchemy that transformed our relationship and my understanding this summer; we had never been

happier or more grateful in each other's company. She became my "Beloved," the embodied spirit, the mythic and mystical "Other" to whom I owe my very life and who, to my eternal gratitude, was still alive to receive my thanks and care. At the heart of this knowledge was a sense of fulfillment and belonging that were both fuelled and rewarded by my efforts to please and attend her. I had fallen in love with my own mother, and I was besotted. "When did I become the child?" she asked sadly one afternoon. "I don't know, is it all right?" My voice is tender, to comfort her. I wait for her response and permission to keep offering what she can no longer give herself. "Oh yes, darling I love it," she said, her voice breaking. "I love being cared for by you." But I could also see what this was costing her, and understood at last that her vulnerability was the real gift, and her acceptance of my care a sacrifice.

Author's note: My mother, Muriel Irene Racine, died March 12, 2008 in Ottawa Ontario. I had the great fortune to attend her closely in the two weeks leading up to her death, and was present in the last moments of her life.

For My Mother

These three pieces of creative nonfiction attempt to capture the relationship between a mother who was ingenious, dramatic, and subversive and her daughter who found her inspiring, perilous, and furtive. The daughter discovers that it is through the stories she tells herself about her mother and through the act of storytelling itself that their relationship is both revealed and redeemed. These stories are for my mother.

Girl in the Snowsuit

I only have a few photographs from when I was a baby and then a toddler. I am not sure when I came to possess them. I must have pinched some from the family album one Christmas when I was home from college. I am intrigued, in particular, by one photograph. It is like the other photographs in that it is a black-and-white image and the edges of the photograph are scalloped. In the other photographs, however, I am always flanked by some, if not all, of my seven siblings. In this image, I am standing alone. It is winter, and according to the date, I am 20 months old. I am wide-eyed, smiling, with a full set of baby teeth, and looking directly at the camera.

What I actually find so striking is not so much that I am all alone, but that I am all bundled up, snug in a snowsuit with a hood fastened about my head, snow boots on my feet, and mittens on my hands. I recall a conversation I had with my Aunt Jerry when I was twelve and on home-leave from the Philippines. In an effort to remind me of the few years when I lived in the U.S., my aunt (the wife of my father's best friend, actually, but we always called her Aunt Jerry) told me about when we were little and lived in Washington state. "In the middle of winter, your mother would just let all of you wander outside without a stocking cap or mittens or scarf. And, sometimes," she added bitingly, "you



wouldn't even have your coats on." It was the look she had on her face, rather than her words, that really stung me. She had that disapproving look I would see on other people's faces when they looked my mother up and down and then turned to scrutinize each of us children, trying to discern whether or not we were aware that some type of damage was being done to us.

I first remember seeing that expression on Aunt Jerry's face eight years before when she greeted us upon our arrival at the Seattle airport. For the trip, my mother had harnesses made for each of the first four children (the other four would follow much later). At the time, Joyce was seven, John five and a half, I was four, and Jimmy was almost three. My Aunt Jerry spotted us as my mother walked through the airport with four leashes held in her right hand and her purse clasped in her left. The four of us preceded her. Joyce and John pulled to get ahead while Jimmy and I, tending to get distracted, toddled off—one to the right and one to the left. To complete her entourage, an airport porter with a cart brimming with ten pieces of luggage—all in mottled black leather with studded, brown leather borders—followed close behind. Her chin high, the point heels of her shoes tapping a determined rhythm, my mother gave no indication that she saw that pointed look my Aunt, or others, gave her. I don't imagine she actually was unaware of the looks. Harnessed to one of the leashes, I clearly saw how taken aback Aunt Jerry looked when she caught sight of us.

That look was there too when she spoke of my mother's indifference to sending us out into the elements without being fully winterized. Aunt Jerry regarded motherhood as serious. She had seven children and put their needs first. When the dentist told her that she would need extensive dental work done, work that would markedly cut into the family's savings, Aunt Jerry told him to pull all of her teeth and to make her a set of false teeth with slight imperfections so that no one would know they were false. When she told me about her teeth, she added, proudly, that no one ever had seen her without her dentures in place. Now as she remarked on my mother's skills, she appeared to reconsider what she was saying, adding that, "I should say you children never had colds in the winter. Mine always were battling coughs and fever no matter what care I took to dress them properly." Her tone became more conciliatory, but the look was still there.

I learned quickly how to respond to those judgmental looks and remarks. I no longer was the wide-eyed child in the photograph. By twelve I was skilled at disarming my opponents. I saw my Aunt's biting comment as a knife that could cut quickly and deep. To deflect the cutting words and look, I told her the story of how my mother bought us all matador and toreador outfits when we were in Spain.

My mother had a love for fashion that was dramatic. My father appreciated her flair, but refused to wear the matador outfit she had purchased for him. However, the rest of us paraded around Barcelona in our outfits—the girls in black capes with white shirts, black skirts, and black felt matador hats; the boys in gold-braided toreador jackets and tight black pants; my mother resplendent in high black heels, a black dress, matador hat, and a cape she could make snap as she draped or undraped it from around her shoulders. The concierge of the Ritz adored us in our attire and insisted upon giving us the table reserved for one of Barcelona's older families in the rococo dining room filled with large, ancient plants and paintings and mirrors in gilded frames. My mother was in her element as the wait staff fawned over her, amused at the whimsy of her gesture.

With a twelve-year-old's incipient guile, I confided to my aunt, "when I was in that matador outfit, I felt as if we all really were the Von Trapp family on a grand adventure. I imagined there were Nazis lurking about in the shadowy corners of the hotel." I saw Aunt Jerry's face soften—just a bit.

The Von Trapps sang *Edelweiss* to entertain, and thereby distract, their enemies; I learned to tell amusing stories. Even then, however, I wasn't sure whom I wanted to protect more—myself or my mother.

"Girl Scout Troop 61"

In the black and white, 5 x 7 photograph, three dozen girls—most of them white—are gathered together outdoors, in a tropical garden, and all of them are bandaged with gauze. One group clustered together in the foreground



appears to have suffered head injuries; gauze has been wound round and round the crown of their heads. In addition, a few have their arms in slings. Another set of girls, gathered under some palm fronds, have modest splints on their fingers and bandages around their ankles. The photograph is labeled: Girl Scout Troops 35 and 61.

It is a school photo. As the label indicates, the group of girls belongs to two different troops of Girl Scouts. We were assembled in the garden behind Mrs. Burton's house for a photo shoot with the school photographer. We had been learning bandaging techniques in our individual troops and had gathered together to demonstrate our ability with dressing various wounds. The girls with the bandaged heads and their arms in slings were from my troop. The girls with more modest splints were from Mrs. Burton's.

I remember Mrs. Burton well. She was head of the Girl Scouts in the Philippines. The four Burton children were sturdy girls. The two older girls, Carol and Pat, were pretty and efficient; they were cheerleaders and Class Secretary for their respective grades. Of the two younger girls, Kim was athletic and Jenny was smart. Kim always anchored the relay team in swim meets—no matter what stroke. Jenny was the one you wanted as a lab partner in Science class.

My mother turned to me when Joyce showed no interest in Girl Scouts. And as Joyce developed a keen interest in boys, my mother made vague threats about all-girls' schools and convents. In turn, Joyce became secretive. So my mother turned to me, and together we entered Mrs. Burton's wholesome world of knots, badges, teepee fires, camp songs, jungle hikes, splints, bandages, and one-pan meals over open fires. When I decided to join the Girl Scouts, I was surprised when my mother enthusiastically joined along with me. My mother didn't own a pair of tennis shoes much less a pair of shorts and I wondered

if she fully understood that we would be learning how to become skilled in surviving outdoors. I mentioned something about how she might be asked to go hiking with the troop, and my mother responded, with confidence, she was sure we always would be able to follow the trails.

She attended a meeting of the women who wanted to be leaders. The meeting was hosted by Mrs. Burton. My mother came home with a binder filled with instructions Mrs. Burton had outlined for all of the leaders. The instructions were meticulous, detailed, single-spaced on purple mimeograph. My mother didn't appear to be at all daunted by either meeting with Mrs. Burton or the materials she had brought home. Along with her instructions, my mother had the list of girls Mrs. Burton had assigned to her.

According to the instructions in the binder, our troop was to meet on a weekly basis. A variety of lessons accompanied each meeting. After the first week, some extra girls joined because they heard my mother served an array of snacks and didn't test the girls on the day's lessons at the end of the meeting.

While other troops learned about the way one should treat the flag of the Philippines ("a national flag worn out through wear and tear, should not be thrown away; it should be reverently burned to avoid misuse or desecration") and how to tie fisherman, sheep bend, clove hitch and square knots, we merely pasted our lesson sheets into the scrapbooks my mother had given each girl. Rather than being tested on the day's lesson at the close of the meeting, we ate coconut ice cream and peanut brittle while braiding one another's hair and telling my mother stories about school that amused her. Janet Carter would mimic the art teacher who, when lost in thought, would wind the Venetian chord around her neck as she explained the brush strokes required for sumi-e painting. June Yoon would imitate our physical education teacher who lined us up on Tuesdays to sing out—"We must, we must, we must improve our busts. The bigger, the better, the tighter the sweater. We must. We must. We must"; as the teacher sang, we pumped our arms back and forth and flexed our flat chests. Chris Easton and Cindy Graham would divulge secrets about boys they liked. Chris rhapsodized about Henry Cole's curly brown hair while Cindy recounted, in detail, every conversation she had with Mike Heller. I watched with pleasure as my mother listened to each of the girls intently, making appreciative comments at just the right point.

While I read the binder Mrs. Burton had given her, my mother rarely referred to it. The only time she tested us was when she gave us the list of "Rules of Health for a Fifth Grader." The list wasn't in the binder, but my mother offered it to us as if it were official. This was a list Troop Number 61 paid close attention to because my mother said, "These are the rules that will matter to you throughout your lives." We reverently copied them into our "GS Scrapbook":

Rules of Health for a Fifth-Grader

1. Wash face and hands before breakfast and before bedtime.

2. Bathe.
3. Wash your hair once a week.
4. Brush teeth as your dentist recommends.
5. Brush hair 50 times to make it lovely.
6. Clean nails and keep in good condition.
7. Get ten or more hours of sleep each night.
8. Clean your closet, desk, and room each day.

We regarded each rule as a promise of adulthood, of womanhood. I never learned how to tie a clove hitch, and I often failed to brush my hair 50 times each night. As I was about to fall off to sleep, I sometimes would recall the fifth rule for fifth graders, but I failed to understand how brushing one's hair was included in "Rules of Health," so I never bothered to get out of bed to find my hairbrush. The other rules, per my mother's instructions, I observed diligently.

All would have been well if we had stayed by ourselves, meeting weekly for gossip and snacks. However, at the end of the year, all the troops—five in total—were expected to go to Alligator Lake where the Scouts would gather at an official Girl Scout Jamboree. There were rustic cabins and picnic tables sheltered by thatched roofs. Prior to our departure, Mrs. Burton sent our instructions, including all of the items we were to bring—from bedrolls to insect repellent.

We were to spend the whole weekend at the camp cooking over an open fire, using our knotting skills to properly hoist the flag, creating competing Troop skits, and singing camp songs. As we prepared to leave I was nervous because I knew that my mother rarely had referred to the binder. I had liked the fact that the other girls looked forward to spending time confiding in my mother, but I worried that Mrs. Burton would soon discover that my mother really hadn't drilled us in the scouting ways.

The camp may have been rustic, but within half-an-hour of our arrival, with the help of our driver, Ricardo, my mother had our eating area festooned with linen tablecloths, candelabra, classical music on tape, an array of hors d'oeuvres, and chilled drinks. While girls from the other troops swept the cement floor of their dining shelter, we drank ice-cold Sarsaparilla and my mother drank a chilled Manhattan.

Across the way, Mrs. Burton took note. Later as we went to our cabin to make up our beds, I saw her come over to the dining area to speak with my mother. I quickly returned to the shelter and pretended to be busy tidying up the empty Sarsaparilla bottles. My mother turned to Mrs. Burton, "Gail, would you care for a Manhattan? I just fixed a batch?" (My mother actually should have said "another batch," but she believed that when referring to alcohol consumption, one should never indicate quantity. Thus, whenever she asked a guest if they would care for a cocktail, she always asked as if it were their first.)

In spite of the fact that it truly would have been her first of the evening,

Mrs. Burton responded firmly, “No thank you Terry.”

“Well then, would you care for some toasted cheese sticks or lumpia?” my mother inquired.

Again Mrs. Burton refused, adding, “Terry, this isn’t the usual Girl Scout fare.”

In response, my mother turned up her charm. Her hands flew about and jewels sparkled as she purred enthusiastically: “Oh, you should see Janet’s ability with the semaphore flag symbols and Cindy’s finesse with sheep’s hitch knots.”

Mrs. Burton’s look of displeasure turned to one of surprise. Before she could say anything, I interrupted, declaring that the girls needed my mother right away because they wanted her to supervise as they prepared the camp fire. I didn’t want her to say anything more about semaphore codes that were not part of the curriculum or misname the knots we were supposed to have learned.

Her attention diverted, Mrs. Burton remarked that she too needed to rejoin her troop in order to oversee the lighting of their fire. Yet, as she turned to go, she added, in the tones of a parent speaking to a naughty child, “I hope you brought your binder with you as it might be helpful if we review some of the curriculum together.”

My mother didn’t register she had heard Mrs. Burton. She was on her way to her girls. I ran after her and heard her confide in them, “Oh, you don’t need to worry about the fire my darlings. Ours will go up quickly. I have had the tinder soaking in kerosene all morning.” She gathered us around and told us that what we really needed to focus on was our skit. Each year there was a competition between the troops and my mother fully expected her troop to win. “No scatological humour. It might win you the giggles of other girls, but it won’t win the competition,” she warned. Chris asked what “scatological” meant, and my mother explained it was humour to do with urine and all things related to people’s bottoms.

The other girls still were trying to get their fires going while we ate prawns and vegetables on skewers that my mother had instructed the maids to prepare that morning. While we ate we tried to come up with a winning skit. The history of the Filipino flag? No. The history of the Girl Scouts? No. How to bandage injuries? No. How to build a fire? Absolutely not. The history of Jose Rizal? Yes, that we could sink our teeth into. We developed a script in which we covered the many vicissitudes of the national hero of the Philippines—from his many lovers (none of whom were native Filipinas which always caused a bit of a flutter—he was the national hero, after all) to his medical expertise to the torture he endured while imprisoned by the Spanish for his efforts to inspire an insurrection for Filipino independence.

Janet played Jose Rizal while the rest of us doubled as his many girlfriends and also his executioners. Our skit opened with Rizal as he completed his training in ophthalmology. He became an ophthalmologist, in part, to be able to

treat his mother, Dona Teodora, whom he saved from blindness. My mother lay across a bench, a grateful Dona Teodora, as Janet laboured over her, making wide gestures—with a fork in either hand—performing surgery.

Then came a parade of lovers. I was Gertrude Beckett, “the blue-eyed, buxom girl” he met while studying in London. June played O Sei San, the daughter of a Japanese samurai, who taught Rizal sume-i-e painting and Japanese. Chris played Suzanne Jacoby, one of two Jacoby sisters, both of whom fell in love with Rizal while he lived in Brussels.

When our turn came, each of us would slink onto the stage area to be wooed by Rizal. One by one, as Rizal finally rejected us, each would make a long exit, placing the back of her hand across our forehead in a gesture of despair while favouring Rizal with longing looks and languishing sighs. After each lover departed, Janet would shake her fist at the sky and, quite incongruously, would call out for the end of “Spain’s cruel rule over the gentle Filipino people.” Cindy, who played his last great love, Josephine Bracken, the “petite Irish girl,” reenacted Josephine’s final visit to her lover in his prison cell.

After her tearful departure, and as the skit came to an end, we all returned as his firing squad. We turned Janet so that her back was facing us, for Rizal was to be executed as a coward. As we finished singing out, “3, 2, 1,” Janet twisted around in order to take the volley of bullets into her chest like a true hero. As she fell to the ground, we turned to take our bows, and were met with raucous applause and cat calls.

The other troops’ skits included reenactments of Girl Scouts being trustworthy and kind. In one series of vignettes, the troop members demonstrated the Girl Scout readiness to rescue a cat from a tree or to put a splint on a broken finger. Jenny Burton played the part of the scout who rescued the cat. She climbed high up into a spindly tree, and came down again, pretending to cradle a cat in her arms. We politely applauded each skit.

When the skits were over, each troop stood to receive a second round of applause. It seemed the applause for us would never stop. Mrs. Burton finally stood and asked the next troop members to stand in order to receive their response. We were, without question, the winners. When we stood, one last time, to take a bow, my mother/Dona Teodora winked at me, and holding my hand tightly, made the deepest bow of all.

That night as my fellow scouts fell asleep, I pulled the binder from mother’s ample suitcase, and began studying the lessons in the binder for our activities the next day: “Campfire Cooking: One-pan Bacon, Eggs, and Toast” and “Reading Compasses.” My mother came in and saw me looking over the lesson and gestured for me to come outside, “Oh, just put away that binder darling,” she insisted. “There isn’t anything to worry about. Ricardo will set up all the pans and then wake us.”

Ricardo was tireless. He worked for us for twenty years. During that time, he would drive my mother, my father, and each of us children here and there from dawn till dusk and then find time to take care of errands my parents

needed done. He was devoted to both of them and did whatever he could to hide my mother's foibles or to warn against my father's ire on those rare days when it flared; "Sir is hot," he would caution us.

As my mother reassured me, I looked up, surprised to see Ricardo climb down from a tree. Before I could ask, my mother remarked, "We have just finished stringing scarves about. Ricardo figured out the compass points. In the morning, be sure to tell the girls that blue marks east, red west, white north, and green south. Tomorrow, we will, once again, all be terribly clever." And with that she kissed me on the cheeks and burrowed into the makeshift bed Ricardo had put together for her. Ricardo made his way out to the car where he would sleep on the back seat until it was time to set up our One-pan breakfasts. The next day we were, as my mother predicted, terribly clever, Mrs. Burton remained perplexed by each of our abilities to so unerringly identify the points on the compass. All the while my mother smiled beatifically.

"My Mad Bertha"

It was during my Junior year of high school that my mother grew so ill that she rarely left her room. That year I read *Jane Eyre* in English class and was drawn to Jane. I recognized Jane's sense of exile, her sense that she would never truly belong anywhere, never truly belong to anyone. I appreciated her desire to study and later to teach. I identified with her homeliness. I also felt that I too had my own Bertha. However, while Jane was inquisitive about the mad woman in the attic, I studiously avoided the one in my home.

During that final year of my mother's life, she spent her life split between being in the hospital or secluded in the master bedroom. By that time, my father had moved into the guest room, and thus she spent her days alone. The maids would check on her each day and bring her trays of food. I rarely saw her. And, unlike Jane, I was too fearful to be inquisitive. I knew that if I were to enter her room, I would find her in her nightdress, in bed, in a darkened room. Upon my entrance, I probably would catch sight of her furtively pushing something behind the bed-side table, as she tried to sit up and look innocently pleased to see me. And I would know that what she was hiding was a bottle.

At night, like mad Bertha, my mother would steal about the house, hoping to be unobserved. When my father was finally and firmly convinced by my mother's doctors that she should never drink again, he put chains and padlocks around the cabinets in the wet bar, a bar that equaled those bars that I would tend years later in Georgetown. It was during the night, in stealth, that my mother quietly and determinedly would pry open the doors of one of the cabinets and wedge her hand in or a broom handle, just so, in order to pull out another bottle.

In his long tradition of stockpiling, my father had filled cabinet after cabinet with gin, vodka, scotch, and bourbon. During his weekly or bi-monthly travels, he studiously had picked up the two bottles of duty-free liquor he was

allowed to bring back into the country. The day he locked the cabinets, they were filled with three hundred or more bottles of liquor. But there were no more parties where guests were offered cocktails. He worked late, very late, most nights, and thus was too tired for a cocktail when he returned home. As a result, he never disturbed the locks he believed were so securely safeguarding the supply in the cabinets.

Not only did she have access to all those bottles of liquor, she also had figured out ways to secure her own private stash. There were a few days, after she had been hospitalized and had a series of blood transfusions, when she would feel better. On those days, when we were off at school and my father was off at work, she made herself up with great care and drank just enough to stabilize her nerves. She then asked Ricardo to drive her to the homes of various women in the community: Connie Butler, Luce Luzuriaga, Carmen Gaspar. After exchanging pleasantries, she would come to the purpose of her visit. In her own beguiling way, she would reveal that my father was, once again, out of the country and that she didn't have spare cash, but out-of-town guests would be arriving and while all of the necessities had been purchased on credit for the meals, she hadn't been able to buy vodka, scotch, or gin for the cocktails on the black market, would it be possible to have a bottle or two and she would pay them back, in kind, as soon as my father returned?

The women were not fooled, but they also did not care to challenge my mother. No one was willing to take on her alcoholism.

She was so alone at the end of her life. I wonder if, as she prowled through the house, making her way to the wet bar, if she ever stopped, on the way, to quietly open the door to one of our bedrooms in order to look in on us, to check to see that we were okay.

It was toward the end of that year that my mother died. At the moment of her death, my brothers, sister, father, and I sat with the family priest and three of my mother's doctors in a conference room at the Makati General Hospital. My father had convened the meeting with Father O'Grady and doctors to decide whether my mother could, according to Catholic decree, and should, according to medical practice, be taken off life support.

My mother always had been the one to deal with the deaths in our family. There had been the deaths of unborn children. When my parents still were living in the States, my mother had miscarried a number of times. When I was twelve, she told me she could not bear that—according to Church law at the time—those fetuses would never bear names nor could she accept that they would be buried in unconsecrated ground. Each time she miscarried, she insisted that the doctor give her what remained of her fetus rather than dropping it into a medical slop bucket. She then secured formaldehyde, and placed her unborn in a large Mason jar filled with the chemical. She hid the bottles in the depths of a closet behind her numerous pairs of fashionable shoes. I learned from my Great Aunt Gaye, one summer when I visited her, that whenever someone in the family was ill all of the relatives speculated among themselves who would

be next as they all knew that if the family member died, my mother would come to the viewing with one of the bottles wrapped in a scarf or shawl. I could well imagine her in one of her more dramatic outfits, high-heeled black shoes, black stockings, a black hat with a veil, short black cotton gloves with sequins around the edge, a plain-yet-elegant black dress, and a big black bag with her child carefully wrapped in a much-loved shawl waiting to be buried. When it was her turn to view the body, she would lean in and tuck the bottle carefully into a corner of the casket.

Aunt Gaye grouched that she hoped my mother didn't have any more dead babies secreted away when it came my Aunt's time to die. I was surprised by her grumbling as I was proud of Mommy's ingenuity. My mother wanted her babies buried where they could rest in peace. This was the only way she knew how to get it done, and she got it done.

In later years, there had been the deaths of the family pets. She was the one who would go with Ricardo to the veterinarian to have the dog or cat put down. For days we all would have been saying that something needed to be done, that the cat or dog's suffering needed to be ended. My mother would do what needed to be done, and when we came home and learned of the pet's passing, we would clamour and scold: "Oh, why did you do it today?" "Why didn't you wait until we had a chance to say goodbye?"

So when we were gathered there in the conference room discussing whether to take her off life support, my father didn't know what to do. Dealing with death was my mother's job. Since she wasn't there to make the decision, he wanted us to. Unlike my mother, he wasn't going to wait till we were off at school to make the decision, to protect us from deciding her death. He compelled us to be party to the decision. He gave us that beseeching look, making it clear that he was not going to shoulder this burden alone.

My father wanted us to take a vote. Father O'Grady explained that according to Vatican II, my mother's soul would not be endangered if she were taken off of life support. Father O'Grady and the doctors were exempt, but each of us children were to raise our hands, yea or nay, to terminating the life support. It was clear we were to vote, yes, and I hated being compelled to do so. The moment we voted, the doctors were going to go to the room to shut off the machines. My father wanted us all to accompany them.

I had not seen my mother during this last stay at the hospital. I had had one fleeting image of her before she went to the hospital. The maids were in her room helping her to get up and showered. At some point she must have taken a very bad fall because her face was terribly bruised. I saw through the door that her forehead and left cheek were dark purple and blue with bruises, and then one of the maids closed the door. Later that day, an ambulance came and she was taken to the hospital. She had been at the hospital for four days. Joyce, John, and Jimmy had gone to see her on the second day she was in the hospital. Jimmy, who never showed any emotion, came home and made everyone promise that I was not to go see her. He wanted someone spared the memory

of seeing her as she lay there all bruised and barely conscious.

So when we all raised our hands, yea, acceding to my father's unspoken wishes, I was afraid as we left the conference room. We walked down the hall, grim and enforced conspirators afraid of what we were going to see. But when we arrived at the desk of the ICU, ready to file in to say our final goodbyes, the nurses at the desk stopped us. While we were in the conference room, my mother had her final heart attack and died alone, on her own.

Upon her death, I don't think any of us wanted to say, "Oh, why did you do it today?" "Why didn't you wait until we had a chance to say goodbye?" We were relieved, once again, of bearing the burden. En masse, we all turned and walked away, not one of us willing to go into the room to look upon her in death.

When we got home, people came by to pay their respects and my father took out the keys and opened the padlocked liquor cabinets, it was then we discovered that every single bottle was empty. I remember wanting to laugh, thinking there was a wry justice there as we stood looking, in surprise at all of those empty bottles, but I didn't laugh because I feared, on some level, they also were an elusive metaphor for something about our family, for an emptiness and stealth we all shared. At the end of her life, we had secreted her away, much as Rochester had done with his wife. We had become so ashamed of her, we were no longer able to see how central she always had been to our lives.

Hail Mami, Full of Grace

In this work in progress titled, "A Cuban Heritage for an American Daughter," the author's journey back through memory to her childhood in communist Cuba serves as springboard for recounting the joys and challenges of growing up Latina in the United States and parenting an American-born child. This excerpt recollects a self-sacrificing Cuban mother who, inculcating feminist views to her daughters in exile, can now be appreciated from the author's adult perspective as a mother herself. While the immigrant mother literally crossed national borders to give her children a better life, the bicultural daughter's mothering in mainstream America often entails difficult crossings of linguistic and cultural borders. The practice of renegotiating ways of being within the family and community creates a flexibility whose example, ultimately, will serve the next generation well.

We're all born into language. Over time the first language of instruction, songs, caresses and reprimands creeps into our memory where it is stored, internalized and eventually reproduced by us to in turn communicate with others. From that repository of words we articulate instinctively our needs, desires, and thoughts. We can identify a mother tongue when we feel a visceral connection to it like the stirring you feel when hearing the national anthem, the deep-in-your-gut language that we use to express, even in thought and without words, the kaleidoscope of our humanity.

For me that's Spanish, the language of my inner child's first loves and fears and adult vulnerabilities, the one I learned from family members, Cubans and Spaniards all. Once I became a mother, speaking Spanish to my child was innate, not like the array of other caretaking tasks that, far from instinctive, I had to learn. With the birth of my daughter, Katrina, I discovered the strangeness of mothering in English, the impossibility of baby-talk in a second

language. I had navigated successfully in English from first grade to a Ph.D. and yet lacked cuddle words to communicate with an infant. Because I had been mothered by a Cuban woman, the vocabulary of nurturing gushed out of me only in Spanish as if giving birth had cracked the floodgate of a reservoir until then dammed. My daughter's cooing tapped the natural flow of my native language and I delighted in teaching her to name the world differently. Why did I assume that our bond in Spanish would carry us through life, as mine with my mother and hers with her mother, and as far back the family line as oral history can summon? The growing precariousness of our language alliance worries me deeply as English engulfs her, draws her in, and claims her for the Anglo community.

It began at about age four, the southern twang in her voice. My child sounded foreign, as if a miniature version of her pre-school teacher rode home with us to play with her toys, sit at our supper table, and call me "mama." Till then she had always called me by the Spanish mami. Video recordings taken of her are the only proof I have that Spanish was the language of her initiation into the spoken word. But once in pre-school Mrs. Joy would come and go in her voice, catching us by surprise. Why were her daddy and I baffled? She is a certified Georgian, after all. Got a birth certificate and a note from a former U.S. president recording her legitimacy: "To Katrina Hélène Schweitzer: Welcome to a wonderful family, a fine state and a great nation." Signed: Sincerely, Jimmy Carter. Whenever I teased: "You're a Georgia peach, and I'm a Cuban mango," between giggles she insisted, "no, no, I a Cuban mango." It took her awhile to conjugate the verb "to be" in her sentences. My American-born daughter, who will you grow up to be? For fear of losing her to another language and culture, I attempt a legacy of words in English as a bridge to another language that revives recollections and lessons learned from my exiled Cuban mother.

"Mami, sheee mami." Katrina slurs the Spanish "sí" for "yes" on the home video at age two. At six she still asked to watch herself as a toddler and I always conceded, anticipating the pleasure of reliving through the recorded images a time when my little girl's attempts to speak Spanish linked her to me, to my mami, her grandmother, abuela Lala, officially Rosa Eulalia Muiños González de Norat. The outdated possessive "de Norat" came to be added later, with marriage at nineteen in a pre-feminist era.

Back in the '50s a young Cuban woman's moment of glory came with a walk down the church aisle, the longer the better to showcase the gown and its yards-long trailing train—an appendage, signifier of the burden of marriage and literally the weight sure to be put on with children—that visibly slows a bride down, a real drag. Just weeks before the wedding ceremony Lala realized it was going to be a mistake. She had specifically requested a green-toned ceramic floor and celery colored walls for the master bedroom to match the Sea breeze green bathroom tiles already installed. The mahogany wardrobe was being lined in a satiny quilt of similar hue. Clothes closets were in common use then, but the tradition of the wardrobe as a fine piece of furniture

for lingerie and linens was popular among brides. No powder puff pink or sky blue for a married woman. Lala certainly did not want that. The double RR's for Rosa and Rafael had been embroidered pale and green on sets of towels. Lala's color scheme showed up too on the bed linen needlework, and on other decorative appointments, final touches in the bedroom suite. The china had been bought, the furniture picked out, kitchenware sat in boxes. Her white bridal gown fitted to perfection. The bride-to-be jotted the most important details on a notepad. Others floated in her head as would in a few weeks the layers of tulle of her bridal veil.

Meanwhile, Rafael, the future groom was busy working at his father's bodega, the grocery kiosk right next door to her dad's butcher shop. That's how the grocer's son had met and fallen in love with the butcher's daughter. For Rafael keeping the house construction on track had become a second full-time job, buying materials, ironing out issues with laborers, firing a few independent contractors and finding new ones. Whether it was a matter of price or convenience, Rafael didn't think twice about Lala's color preference. She dropped in one day to find an expanse of Camellia Rose tiles, still gritty but quite permanent, laid with artistry on the master bedroom floor. The coordinating pink walls pulled it all together in a revolting show of inconsiderate male insensitivity. "Bells and whistles went off with that affront. It was a big slap in the face and I should have called off the wedding," the indignation still crisp in mami's voice. "All my linens, the wardrobe, the bathroom tile were mint green and then the floor and walls of the bedroom a horrid pink. Can you imagine how I felt? "Pero," she aspirates the "but" of life-long resignation, "I was nineteen. I didn't have the guts to walk away. My parents had spent money. Family and friends knew of the wedding ... I don't recall if the invitations had been mailed, and I don't remember the song and dance your father gave me, but I backed down. Hija, listen daughter, don't accept Camellia Rose if your heart is set on Sea Breeze Green."

That tile incident set the tone for fifty plus years of married life. Rafael would get his way by ruse or force and Lala would concede, her ego pureed time and again, subtly, and sometimes blatantly, molded into thinking that her choices, preferences or dislikes were sub par, stupid, flighty, worthless, short of feeling that she was a leech as a stay-at-home wife. "Never stop working," papi firmly said when I announced plans to marry Albert, "men don't respect women who are burdens." And it was just like him too, that famous tirade that mami described over the line in a long-distance whisper. How could a daughter be so selfish, setting a wedding date in May? Didn't I know that he always left the States by March? In May he would be in Spain again at his retirement cottage in the village. Why not plan an October wedding when he'd be back in the States for his annual visit? "Mami, tell him I'm getting married when it's convenient for me, after the spring semester is over at the college. He's invited, but is free to decline." Easily said from Atlanta. And of course he blew his top. In the months leading to my May wedding mami and my sister

Hilde assure me that life with him was hell. Mami, the family peacekeeper, usually played referee in our household clashes and hated it, caught as she was between husband and daughters, Cuban culture and American influences, and generational differences that added up to her own struggle with the double bind of biculturalism.

Until Katrina was born our family had only one “mami,” the best four-letter word in life. Without a mother meaningless would be the essence of *casa* and *amor*. It’s the same with the “mama,” heard in the United States’ South. “Mama,” in her bosom one finds a first “home” and “love”—also four-letter words in English. Hard to find a linguistic equivalent for “single parent” in Spanish, but that’s what mami was for nearly five years in Cuba till the day we reunited with papi at Kennedy Airport in New York. Holding a small portfolio of documents, mami had clocked in many hours standing in lines on polished marble floors of government offices in La Habana of communist Cuba. Finally, far from the familiar *Camellia Rose* of her bedroom floor, we stood on a new expanse of ceramic tile among the comings and goings of travelers in a busy foreign airport. Our plane’s touch-down on American soil was the culmination of mami’s difficult choice between staying in Cuba with her parents and joining her husband in the U.S.A. She was in New York, and we at her side, because she had judged it best for us to grow up with a father. For mami, the welfare and happiness of others has always come first. I’m sure analysts and feminists could say plenty about that, but in Hispanic culture a mother’s sacrifice is expected and respected. Ironically, although acutely aware of papi’s *machismo*, mami would not be able to explain its feminine counterpart, the *marianismo* that she has practiced as a way of life because self-sacrifice is what a good wife and mother does without a label.

Lala was being the perfect wife when she moved into the back room of the small grocer’s kiosk, cooked on a double kerosene burner, slept on her old maiden bed, and bathed in a tiny rundown bathroom. All the while, boxes of house wares and every stitch of the newlyweds’ furniture sat stored in her parents’ big old house on Finlay Street. Seven months earlier, in July of 1952, she had walked down the aisle, said a quivery “I do,” then gone on a honeymoon, and returned to live in a fully furnished new home, finished under deadline. Rafael had continued working with his father, Juan, at the *bodega*. For convenience he had built his house right across the railroad tracks from the store. He could get home in a hop and a skip when at one o’clock shopkeepers closed for the *siesta*.

Within four months of the wedding Rafael had a falling out with his father, dissolved their partnership and arranged to buy a small kiosk in another part of town. His rudimentary survey of housewives in the area yielded their willingness to patronize the *bodega* if it reopened, but some ladies warned that the corner at Cisnero Bettancourt and Asunción Streets had proved bad luck for the two previous proprietors. Frequent break-ins had left those merchants paying for stock bought on credit and stolen from storage before ever making

it to the kiosk's shelves. Rafael figured that if he didn't guard his investment somehow, he too would be wiped out. He couldn't afford to be robbed, not with his credit to the hilt after fixing up and stocking the store. That on top of debt he already owed his father-in-law for money borrowed to finish the new house. As insurance, a cot in the backroom of the kiosk would have to do for awhile.

Los Laureles was inaugurated without much fanfare. Rafael and Lala kept the previous store's name, either because there was no money for a new sign or because the one it already bore reflected well the beautiful cherry laurels shading the property. At first, Lala crossed town twice a day to take Rafael lunch and dinner. Then around Christmas she began staying longer, helping behind the counter whenever she saw her young husband working feverishly to keep customers from waiting too long in line. Rafael had discounted merchandise to attract people. And it did, like termites to wood.

Lala realized he could not keep up that pace as a one man show, at least not till the celebration of the Three Wise Men in January that marked the end of the holiday season. She also knew that with the stockroom brimming, Rafael was not about to let any son-a-va-bitch Grinch make out with his goods. The overnight arrangement on the cot had stretched on for months. That's how Lala, virtuous bride turned perfect young wife, sacrificed the comfort of a new home to follow Rafael to the store's backroom. Another grave mistake within the first year of marriage because her sacrifices, taken for granted, set the stage for happily never after. Over the years Lala followed Rafael to various business ventures and moves to the United States, Spain, back to the States, then back to Spain, all with a stoic sense of duty and at a cost of great mental distress. As modeled by the Virgin Mary, *marianismo*, a sugarcoating for oppressive cultural practices, expects women to endure indignities in silence, or at least with grace.

And endure Lala did, especially on one particular night in the cramped store backroom. Lying under the covers in their bed she felt rotten with the flu. Across from the bed sat a small TV and several of Rafael's relatives watching the nightly baseball game. It had turned into a routine, them showing up after dinner, cramming into the couple's studio. That evening they found Lala ill, but like greedy children they settled in front of the only TV set in the family. They disregarded her condition and need for privacy. She resented their frequent intrusions and her husband's complacency, but never as bitterly as that night when her body pleaded for quiet and sleep. *Caballeroooo otro jon ron!* With every home run the fans in the room and the stadium cheered together. Several months later Rafael's dog fell sick. He nursed it with care, spooned-fed him the prescribed medication, and turned away his relatives when they arrived to watch the baseball game at night. He explained that his dog was sick and needed rest. They could hardly believe it and poked fun at him. Mami couldn't believe it either and filed away the indignity in silence. Over the years, her feelings have been bruised or crushed at infinitum. "I have never gotten used

to your father's ways," she says like a Chinese wife speaking bitterness.

I am myself a married woman now. My anger runs deep, seething, a residual of growing up female and Hispanic. Injustice, I will not sit quietly and take it. At home our precious enclave of peace can easily shatter. I growl and lash out at the slightest criticism or offense. Once when I complained that unseasonably hot days for an Atlanta winter had brought ants back to our kitchen, Albert pointed the finger. "I've noticed that you sometimes leave crumbs on the floor or in the kitchen sink. That's why we get ants. Why don't you try cleaning them up before leaving the house in the morning." Katrina's breakfast crumbs, the ones I don't see or don't wipe up because there's no time today, because we're running late for our 7:30 a.m. commute to school, late because she either didn't want to brush her teeth or wanted to play dollies two more minutes, or got her coat zipper snagged and started to cry, or refused to wear the knit cap in three shades of blue, even though I explain that it's so cold outside that she will see her breath. Those stressful little glitches that occur many mornings as I, a working mother, try to make it out the door on time; those slight delays my husband does not experience because he leaves the house childless and promptly at 6:55 a.m. He, who has dedicated every waking moment of his morning to himself, his swimming, his shower, his grooming, his newspaper, his breakfast, is surprised by my anger. Those crumbs that make me the culprit of our ant problem, come at me, hurled like rocks, jagged, hurtful, to stone the imperfect wife. At such moments my mouth, like a geyser, shoots forth mami's fifty years worth of suppressed grievances. Katrina's daddy must be living with a madwoman.

Push the right button and I escalate a difference of opinion into a battle, the skirmishes mami never fought for herself. I go for the jugular. My anger is raw. I am sorry that I sometimes scare Katrina. At times I've scared myself. Growing up no one yelled in our household of four. Feelings and frustrations were zipped up tight, smothered and left to fester under the skin. It was useless to protest because papi's Will was done, no matter what, his would be the Last Word. "For the sake of peace" or with a similar phrase mami would dash any hope for intervention, negotiation, or some affirmation that others—the three females in the family, the majority—had rights too. Growing up I was convinced mami that prayed: "May my Lord and husband accept the sacrifices at my hands and the silence of my daughters for the praise and glory of his name, for the good of our family, and everlasting serenity. Amen." Are my outbursts as harmful to Katrina, as my mother's silences? She probably could not help acquiescing for the sake of peace in the home any more than I can help raising my voice in the name of equity.

Accepting oppression with grace, how difficult in practice. Women with children, no professional skills and little English scarcely have a way out of an unhappy marriage. The ageless trap. Endless variations. "Avoid my predicament with education," mami insisted. Mami washing papi's shirts by hand, the only three he would wear, no washer or dryer in the apartment, not until

we graduated from college and bought her one, all the while a German-made all-in-one washer and dryer sitting unused in the brand new condominium in Madrid ready for mami whenever papi decided to retire, but in the meantime mami kept taking the 7:00 a.m. bus to the fuse company, la factoría, five days a week, eight hours a day of humdrum repetitive finger work that caused tunnel carpal syndrome in one hand and from the loud machinery, migraines that she hauled home and suppressed with medication while she finished cooking what she had started that morning, when she rose at 4:30 a.m. in order to prepare his thermos bottles with the home-cooked lunch that he insisted on six days a week, often seven when he worked Sundays, no, no sandwich would do, no ordering take out food, no, not for him, he wanted a hearty meal because he worked very hard.

Complicity dies hard. One Friday after school I take Katrina to visit the abuelitos. My parents are on their annual visit to the States. They pine to see their only grandchild. That day Katrina insists on playing soccer, then basketball. They insist on the barbecue, the dessert, the cafecito. It's getting late, we need to get home because Albert is due at the house at 6:00 pm. But the sandwich and salad I have in mind for his dinner is unacceptable to mami. No, a man needs to be fed after a day's work. She packs food for him so that I won't look bad, so that I, who also work full time, can play the faultless wife. Instead of appreciating her thoughtful gesture, I'm peeved. A tinge of guilt caps my visit. Biculturalism sometimes sucks—le zumba.

Every mother/daughter relationship, by the very nature of its intimacy, has conflicts. I'm surprised how little open friction mami and I have had. It is within motherhood that we share the most common ground. In raising my daughter I attempt to emulate her invaluable legacy of giving us roots and wings. Like most Latinas of her generation, mami didn't think in terms of feminism, a foreign concept she could sketchily explain. From her perspective, women postponing marriage, waiting longer to have children, afterward placing them in day-care to continue working, or skipping the spouse and kids package deal altogether to instead pursue a fast-track career seemed at odds with the sacrifices wives and mothers were supposed to make for their families. None of that was applicable to her. What got mami fired up was wanting better for her girls. Her feminism wasn't in the practice, but in the advice. No labels needed. "Hijas, estudien, estudien. Study, get an education, that's what men respect. Don't be like me. No, not like me." Yes, mami. I'll try. I promise. And I learned the lesson well.

Today I can roar in either Spanish or English. Now, how do I ward off the anger? From a young age mami's instructions were clear, never a husband before a college degree. "Secure economic independence so you won't be trapped like me," and her anecdotes honed in the message. "I remember the humiliation as a newlywed in Cuba when your father begrudged my asking for money for a haircut or a new dress." "But I like your hair long," or "Your closet is full of clothes," he would snort, even as he polished his new Studebaker squeaky

clean. “I felt as if I were asking for alms, and even though I helped your father out at the store, I didn’t get paid a centavo, not a penny.”

When Hilde was ten and I nine and we were living in Union City, New Jersey, mami walked us to the neighborhood Savings and Loan one afternoon, opened two savings accounts and taught us to religiously deposit part of our weekly allowance. “Niñas, listen girls no one has a right to the money you earn and save. If you get married share expenses, but keep your bank accounts separate for peace of mind—because you never know.” We were still playing with dolls when mami began plotting our escape route from a potentially bad marriage. She took on the role of financial advisor and strategist for our future independence—this from a woman who has never written a check herself. Poor mami, she had left her parents in Cuba to save us from communism and we still grew up fearful, imprisoned in island culture under papi’s totalitarian rule. But out of oppression empowerment is possible. Mami’s crowning glory: two college-educated daughters, fluent in Spanish, grounded in their native heritage, completely functional in Anglo society, with personal investments, and under no man’s thumb. Mami, a feminist? By instinct. Hail mothers around the world, across borders here on earth, as they pray in many tongues with hope everlasting that all their sacrifices will not be in vain.

Shifting gears

The clutch gave out at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a small
glancing scrape on the downhill offramp,
a sound like almost nothing before the uphill
shrieking, the smell of burning
metal, my mother's fuck-filled
come-on urging
(the same she used on us when we were late
or lazy). An Amoco station at the top of that hill,
my little sister's uh-oh eyes.

This was the blue Subaru and us, grinding
to a halt
twenty hours in to our thirty hour trek
to Mom's parents. Friday morning, and Eau Claire
was supposed to be fifteen minutes — gas, bathroom, snack
and *back in the car, kids*. Pavement
pouring out behind like Mom's personal triumph
and always the same rules: one can of Pringles,
gone in the first hour; one restaurant per day; one hotel
per trip. We had a schedule, we had a budget. At 15,
I could pitch a tent in five minutes, even
in the swarming dark. (Once, we set the tent
in a field of Grasslands cactus and Mom
held our wrists so we could squat, pee
without piercing our bums. All night
the ground stayed treacherous

beneath our sleeping bags and nearby coyotes howled.)

We'd had our hotel the night before Eau Claire —
Not even a pee-stink one, my sister'd whispered.

From the car, I could see Mom
working on the mechanic, sunglasses
holding back her hair and her brown eyes
extra wide, climbing up the height of him.
I rolled down my window.

We've got six hundred miles ahead — she shook
her curls, keys jangling from one finger as her palms
turned to pleading. *I can't afford a new one
and we can't get stuck here all weekend. Oh
please.*

The voice that made you do things, the reason
I always kept my headphones on.
She followed that mechanic
back inside, surrender
uncertain.

A long time and then she came out,
smiling, hands pulsing like she was splashing
water on her face, each splash telling us
to get out of the car. She popped the trunk, snatched
the Walkman off my head, didn't even ask
first. *He's found some parts, says he can fix it cheap,
but not before tomorrow. Says there's a campground a few miles
down the highway.* The trunk was deconstructing — the tent
in my arms, a sleeping bag for my sister. A perfectly good motel
practically across the street.

I said I wasn't walking. I said *This
is stupid.* My sister said *Sshh.*

I dropped the tent in the gravel, reached back
into the car for my Walkman.

My mother shrugged and all her limbs
came unexpectedly loose. She threw the tent back in the trunk,
dust with it and walked away, and then that mechanic
drove us to the campground. Mom put her hand
on his thigh and tipped her head
sideways, her lips tucked under

but saying something anyway.

There wasn't a pool or mini-golf or anything
to do but sit by the tent
so I told Mom it was gross, her hitting
on that mullet-haired mechanic and she rose
to her feet, unfolding like a slow-motion leaf
and grinned. *Somebody's gotta get the car fixed. Besides
he's pretty cute, don't you think? Let's follow that path, see
where it goes.*

The path led to a creek where a turtle sunned itself
on a rock, just a single foot
dangling
in the water and Mom stopped, pointed: *Look
at that, girls. Did you ever see —?* Her sentence dangling
too, a voice like she'd swallowed
something thick, breathed in
fumes; like all the coffee in her veins
had turned to syrup. Like a whole day
lost didn't matter so much.
Before dark we walked to the store
for ice cream sandwiches, and Mom insisted
on holding hands, on swinging
all our arms forward.

The car wasn't ready until two
the next day, which meant an extra long lunch,
my sister and I alone in a too-bright diner an hour
after they took our plates and Mom told the waitress
no more refills — told us to wait at the table
while she went to check
on the car.

Back on the Interstate, Van Morrison sang
"Bright Side of the Road" and we danced, laughing,
giddy just for getting going, glad for every bump
under the tires. That night we slept in the car at a rest stop full
of sleeping families and by sun-up, the windows were dripping
from our honeyed breath.

My Daughter, How Do I Teach You What I Haven't Learned?

A Personal View of the Impact of Child Abuse on Mothering

The many and varied after-effects of childhood abuse and neglect have been well documented. There is little, however, that discusses how childhood abuse and neglect affect one's parenting and in particular one's mothering abilities. There are even fewer voices of mothers in the literature. This article addresses this gap. It explores one mother's experience of "breakthrough" (rejecting the judgemental medical term "breakdown") to long-buried memories of childhood abuse and the subsequent impact on her relationships with her children, focusing in particular on how the mother-daughter relationship was changed. It discusses how confronting and healing the past can help to make the difference between "surviving" and "thriving" and why we as mothers owe it to our children to do so.

At the bottom of the garden of my house in England, at the end of the straight path from the back door, some bushes or hedges separated the garden from a narrow laneway. Maybe there was a gate? The edges of the memory have faded with the years. I am very young, three years old maybe. I am alone at the bottom of the garden. It's been raining and everything is shiny and wet. The rain has brought out the large snails, the kind with the beautiful spiral shells. I carefully lift several from the branches on which they leave a glistening trail. The snails retract their heads and tiny horns and disappear into the safety of their home. I gently place them, one by one, on the ground. And then I kill them—deliberately, methodically. I calmly stamp on each one with the heel of my shiny clean shoe. I bury them under the wet leaves and walk back up the path, towards the house.

Today, that memory fills me with a mix of shame and deep, deep sadness. Viewing it through a lens brought into sharper focus by maturity and several years of therapy, I know that I was an angry, scared child. But I didn't know it

then. I didn't feel much, back then. I didn't feel much of anything for almost 40 years, when I was left with no choice but to admit that childhood sexual abuse and emotional neglect had marked my life in a number of ways.

The many and varied after-effects of childhood abuse and neglect have been well documented. We know that survivors can develop certain behaviours, have certain feelings and beliefs that are remarkably consistent across a wide spectrum. Initially protective, these behaviours, feelings and beliefs can become harmful to the self and to others over time. There are probably hundreds of books, articles and papers describing these after-effects (to cite a few: Briere, 1992; Gold, 2000; Herman, 1997; Pynoos, Steinberg and Goenjian, 1996). There is little, however, that discusses how childhood abuse and neglect affects one's parenting and in particular one's mothering abilities (although Jan Hindman [1989] writes with compassion on the topic in her work, *Just Before Dawn*). There are even fewer voices of mothers in the literature, as noted in *Mothering Against The Odds* by Cynthia T. Garcia Coll, Janet Surrey, and Kathy Weingarten (1998). The purpose of this article is to add to the knowledge base by offering a personal view of the issue.

I emigrated to Canada from England as a six-year old with my parents and a younger brother and sister. Despite my youth, I was already certain of a number of things: I had to be quiet and never bother Mummy, even if I was sick. If I got hurt, I must have been doing something wrong. Daddies were in charge even though Mummies did most of the work at home. I had to do what I was told and never answer back. Adults were always in charge, children never knew the right answer, and boys were somehow better than girls although I didn't understand why. I was thus the perfect target for the pedophile in the family with whom we boarded for a few months after our arrival in Montreal, Quebec. As a shy, quiet child who had received little loving touch and rarely a kind word, I never had a chance. And, thanks to the survival skills with which all children are born, I was able to push the memories of all this far, far away. I got on with life.

I experienced my first flashback just after my fortieth birthday, triggered by the story of another survivor. At that point in my life, I was divorced and the mother of a son aged twelve and a ten-year-old daughter. I entered therapy and embarked on the journey of "remembrance, mourning, and reconnection," so aptly described by Judith Herman (1997).

As difficult as it was to come to terms with the sexual abuse, confronting my life before it happened was even harder. By the age of 6 I had somehow learned that, given a choice between staying with someone who was hurting me and calling out to my mother in the next room, the safe choice was not to call for Mum. How had I come to learn such a lesson, at such an age?

Early life lessons

I like John Briere's description of childhood abuse as "acts of omission and acts of commission" (2002: 1). It helps me make sense of my life. I didn't

have the horrific, tortured childhoods that too many children suffer. Although the British “stiff upper lip” ruled my home, I always had enough to eat and a place to live. Both of my hard-working parents transmitted values I claim as my own today: the importance of hard work, independence and thrift, an appreciation of stability and security. But while my physical needs were met, emotional needs were completely ignored.

Like many men of his generation, my father was a distant, forbidding figure. Despite his derisive attitude towards women in general and to my mother in particular, he was the one who performed the “nurturing” work, although I experienced it as an obligation rather than as compassionate caring. Someone should tuck the kids in at night, I guess, and he did it because Mum didn’t. I learned that taking care of children was just another of life’s many chores.

Today I know my mother is a victim of emotional abuse. Like most victims of abuse, she is a strong, proud woman. For the most part, she suffered in silence, storing her hurt and humiliation in pursed lips and bowed shoulders, taking her anger out on her three children at times. I felt invisible to her most of the time. The mothering I received led me to believe there is no such thing as maternal instinct. I share the opinion offered by Adrienne Rich, author of *Of Woman Born* (1976), that motherhood is earned through a rite of passage that includes learning to nurture, “... which does not come by instinct” (xiv).

Based on my experiences, I believe my mother did not learn how to nurture. She is extremely creative—she can knit a four-piece baby layette in one evening. My sister and I had the best-dressed dolls in the neighbourhood. But when it came to caring for the bumps and scrapes of childhood, I soon learned not to expect sympathy or compassion, and knew I would have to take care of myself, even during the terrifying asthma attacks I suffered. A cry of “Mum! I hurt my...” or “Mum ... I can’t breathe ...” would most often be met with a sigh and an accusatory “You should/should not have been ...”

In writing this I am in no way attempting to blame my mother; rather, it is offered as context. Although I may never achieve a loving connection with her, I can view her with empathy and compassion today. I will not join the “mother-blame” that is so rampant in our society. As Garcia Coll et al. (1998) have noted, a 1985 study of articles published in a range of clinical journals found that mothers were blamed for 72 different kinds of psychopathology, and the ratio of mentions of mother to father was five-to-one. (3).

The impact of child abuse

Robin Badgley’s 1984 work reported that one in four girls had received unwanted sexual attention before the age of 18. I would like now to consider the ways in which this abuse might impact on such a girl’s mothering abilities later in life.

Survivors of childhood abuse often find it hard to trust others; as a result, forming and keeping a healthy relationship can be a challenge (Herman, 1997:

52). How, then, does an adult survivor of abuse establish a healthy relationship with her children? I'm not even sure I knew I was supposed to develop a "relationship" with my children. Children were ... well, just there. I expected them to do what I told them and of course I loved them, that was taken for granted, but beyond that? I had to learn, painfully, that what I thought was a healthy relationship was really one of control and enmeshment. Despite my determination to be a different kind of mother than the one I had grown up with, I found myself reacting to ordinary parenting situations in sometimes extraordinary ways. Hindman's (1989) words describe my experience:

When the victim becomes a mother herself, armed with vows to be different, she may find herself evolving as a mother very much like her own mother. She may actually perceive her children being distant from her, much the same as she felt with her mother. (140)

From the time my children were infants, my parenting style could probably have been described best as "command and control," a common general behaviour pattern for survivors of childhood trauma. The more I could control, the safer I felt and the better it was for me. And, I believed, it was also better for my children. This is perhaps effective when children are pre-verbal and immobile and need to be kept safe (a debatable point, I am sure, and beyond the scope of this paper), but as a parenting strategy for teens, it is bound to fail. As all parents of adolescents know, the harder a parent tries to control, the harder the child will fight back.

Children of emotional neglect don't have parents who can teach them healthy communication skills. If one of our coping skills in childhood has been to numb out or dissociate, it's not hard to understand that we will have a hard time standing up for ourselves as adults, even if the person before us is our child. When confronted with the need to say "no" to my daughter, my childhood skill of numbing out was most often expressed as giving in, no matter how unreasonable her demand. She soon learned that, with enough cajoling on her part, my "no" was quickly and predictably transformed into a "maybe" and then into an "I can't stop you, so it's a yes."

In early adolescence my daughter seemed to change overnight from a sweet, loving, obedient child to a raging, out-of-control teen. Of course, this did not happen overnight, but it was during this crucial period in her development that I was often pre-occupied with the work of healing my past—experiencing and processing flashbacks interspersed with long periods of fatigue and grief. I was eventually diagnosed with depression. By the time she was 13, she had become involved with a new group of friends and was engaging in a variety of what I considered to be dangerous behaviours—staying out late, refusing to provide contact information, attending all-night parties with adolescents much older than she. I suspected drug use but had no idea what to do about it if my suspicions proved true. I did my best to pretend that this

was “normal adolescence,” whatever that was. I flip-flopped through a range of emotions—terror, powerlessness, anger, and guilt. I had lost control as a parent and our communication pattern ranged from hostile silence to outright screaming matches. I felt completely incompetent, as a mother and as a person. I was sure everything was my fault, even as I was screaming at her that she was the one to blame.

During this time I was seeing a therapist who was helping me sort through my experience of childhood sexual abuse, and I can remember thinking, “How can I be a mother to her? I’m the one who needs a mother.” I wanted to tell my daughter how much I loved her, how I was afraid for her, of my hopes for her future—but she didn’t want to listen. I wanted to help her, but she didn’t want my help. She was on her own path. Our relationship deteriorated over a period of about 15 months to the point where I believed she would be emotionally harmed if she stayed with me; I felt I had no other choice but to allow her to be placed her in a Children’s Aid Society foster home.

Of the several dark periods in my life, this ranks as one of the worst. The feeling of being backed into a corner, of having no options, was all too familiar. When I wasn’t numb, I was in extreme physical pain. I felt an utter failure. At times I had such a pain in my chest that I thought I was having a heart attack. But I wasn’t—my heart was broken, of course it hurt.

My experience of mothering my daughter during this time of chaos triggered in me long-buried childhood feelings, beliefs and expectations: the feeling that I was invisible, unloved and unlovable; the belief that I was stupid, that I was not worth listening to; the expectation that something really horrible was about to happen to me. At a time when my daughter—and son, embroiled in his own way—needed me most, I was caught in a web of complex emotions that belonged to the past. During this time, I know there were many occasions when I was a less than effective mother. Part of my journey to health and wellness has been to forgive myself for what I put them through, for effectively abandoning them at such a crucial time in their lives. Today I know I did the best I could, but I also know that my children must have felt motherless at times because they in fact were.

What I know now

I persisted in the work of healing my past; indeed, I often felt that this too was beyond my control. I had to learn to let go, to trust that I was safe and well and that my children were too. I am grateful to have been able to make amends with both my children, but healing the relationship with my daughter has been especially rewarding for it was more difficult. After all, her brother didn’t have to spend a year in a CAS foster home.

There’s a line in a Bob Dylan song, *My Back Pages*: “Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now.” This describes how I feel. The more I have learned about myself as I have dealt with my past, the younger I feel. I used to believe that if I only acted in the right way, said the right thing, was

a certain way, then my parents would acknowledge me, appreciate my efforts, and love me the way I wanted to be loved.

I now know that many of the messages I incorporated as an infant and child were lies—told with the best of intentions, perhaps, by people and institutions doing the best they knew how, but nevertheless untrue—at least for me. This is what I know now:

No one is to blame—not my mother, not my father, and certainly not me—that I am not the son my parents longed for. I am not “less than” as a result and I do not need to carry this burden any longer. I know that I have intrinsic value, just because I am alive. If there is blame to assign, put it on those who uphold the social and economic forces that combine to make it acceptable to place a higher value on sons than on daughters and, as a result, perpetrate violence against women all over the world.

Babies and young children understand far more than anyone gives them credit for. They know what’s going on around them and they find a way to adapt their behaviour in order to keep themselves safe in their family and in their world. Sometimes what they learn may not actually be true and may even be harmful to them as adults. Along with values of honesty and hard work, I learned from my parents that to be accepted meant to take up as little space as possible and to stay quiet. At the age of 6 I learned from a pedophile that I was dirty, shameful and bad. I learned to fear that to speak out would lead to my death. I am grateful that my parents were able to provide life’s basic necessities—always enough to eat, a home, stability. I survived. But I only began to thrive when in adulthood I was able to grieve and release the past.

Parents do the best they can with what they have—and what they have is what they learned in their own families of origin. Some parents have had a healthier source of learning than others. Some have more resiliency than others—more insight, more ability to face their fears, a desire for an honest emotional connection with their children and ultimately with themselves that transcends their fear. For some the fear of experiencing deep emotions like grief, hurt and abandonment, which may be rooted in their own childhood, is just too great to overcome. In facing my fears I have been able to reconnect on a deeper emotional level not only with my children but with myself. As for reconnecting on that level with my mother (my father is deceased), I accept that it may never happen. I have learned to accept her as she is.

As for myself, I never learned how to create a family. I didn’t know what a healthy parent-child relationship was; I didn’t know it was my job as a mother to create and maintain such a thing. I didn’t realize life was supposed to be fun, that children are meant to be playful and free and light. I hadn’t learned how to play. Too often when my children were small and wanted me to play, I turned them away because I wanted to read. I expected them to entertain themselves, as I had. Playing felt like wasted time. Today I know we all—adults and children—connect through play.

We do our daughters no favours by teaching them to be “good girls”—quiet,

still, and submissive. Far better to teach them to stand up for themselves, to speak out against injustice and abuse. I wish someone had given me the skills that my daughter learned. For as much as she rebelled against me in adolescence, I can see now that she was doing what I had hoped she would do—stand up for herself. Today I know she was trying to tell me that my way did not fit for her and nothing I could do would make her turn away from what she knew was right for her. She tried hard to get me to listen. Trapped in my own fears, I was not able to hear her. I learned that dreams have a strength of their own and must not be denied.

We do our sons no favours by encouraging them to be “little men”—stoic, responsible, uncomfortable in the realm of the emotions. I never intended for it to happen, but I virtually ignored my son during the chaos of having to handle the simultaneous crises generated by my mental health issues and my daughter’s acting out, because he had those characteristics. I thought he was just fine, coping admirably. I know now that he tried to make my life easier by taking up as little of my time as possible. Another inter-generational pattern: this was how I survived as a child. I will probably never know how close he came to falling into a dangerous, self-destructive lifestyle.

Too many mothers are victims of abuse on too many levels. Mothers are easy targets of blame and we are too easily dismissed by those with authority—be it social, judicial, economic, or medical. As a child, I witnessed my father’s dismissal of my mother on a daily basis. His words and actions made it clear that he believed that, like most women, she was stupid and had nothing worthwhile to contribute to a conversation. I often wonder what it must have been like for her, when she was pregnant with me, knowing that she was expected to produce a son because nothing else would do. Did she consider herself a failure when the longed-for Christopher failed to materialize? I have compassion for her today. I know she did the best she could.

Worth the effort

My relationship with my daughter not only survived the chaos but has grown stronger with time. Families marked by childhood abuse and neglect do not offer opportunities for children to learn how to be honest with themselves and others, to take risks easily, to be creative, to believe in themselves, to be comfortable with change. Mine certainly didn’t. But it is possible to learn these skills. We owe it not only to ourselves as women and mothers, but to our daughters. We can’t teach them what we don’t know.

I used to spend much time wishing I could change the past, wishing that my healing journey could have happened before I ever had children, or once they had reached adulthood and were away from home, where they wouldn’t have had to experience my chaotic behaviours, my bouts of depression and grief, my uncontrollable rage. But I have learned that in order to heal deeply and truly, we have to be able to take the risk of letting it happen in its own time and on its own terms.

Almost a year after my daughter returned home from care, we celebrated my birthday. She apologized as she pulled out an envelope, saying "It's not much, Mum; I don't have a lot of money." A letter, and a drawing of a smiling rabbit. I started to cry almost as soon as I began to read:

Well Mum—another year for you to plug through. I just want to say I admire your strength and courage. You're an amazing woman and Mum. You've always been there for me even when I didn't want you there. So thanx for helping me be who I am today and I know sometimes I'm not much fun. But I will always ♥ you 3 x ∞, Alyson

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My Guardian Angel *The Uncertainty of Exile and Memory*

This essay addresses emotional and physical states of disability of both mother and daughter as well as establish connections between a political history and the psychological realms of an inherited trauma established by both physical illness and exile. The text delineates the traumatic experience of witnessing my mother's stroke and subsequent brain injury. My mother has now lost her vision, her short term memory, coordination, and motor skills casting a deep impact on my relationship with her and understandings of motherhood. Coming to terms with illness has also meant engaging and dealing with the complexities of my childhood upbringing, which entailed years of political activism and sacrifice as the daughter of Chilean political refugees.

The following chapters delineate the traumatic experience of witnessing my mother's stroke and subsequent brain injury. My mother is now disabled, she has lost her vision, short term memory, coordination and motor skills casting a deep impact on my relationship with her and understandings of motherhood. Coming to terms with illness has meant engaging and dealing with the complexities of my childhood upbringing, which entailed years of political activism and sacrifice as the daughter of Chilean political refugees. I will address emotional and physical states of disability of both mother and daughter as well as establish connections between a political history and the psychological realms of an inherited trauma established by both physical illness and exile.

Nothingness, exile and memory

You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces,
to realize that memory is what makes our lives.
Life without memory is no life at all...

Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action.
Without it, we are nothing...

—Luis Buñuel

“Nothing” as a way to describe an exile condition, may sound inappropriate when I think of an entire generation of people tortured, marginalized, silenced, and collectively scrutinized for their principles, ideals and dreams for a better world. Yet to a certain extent the exiled became “nothing” as they were stripped of the familiar, having to escape to save their lives, leaving behind their extended families, their possessions, familiar sounds, smells, tastes and faces to encounter a disabling uncertainty which would devastatingly mark their lives and those of their children forever. They began their lives in exile with only what they carried with them, feeling deeply isolated and estranged from their surroundings. As Thomas Pavel points out, there are differences between immigrants and exiles. He states: “immigrants begin a new life and find a new home; exiles never break the psychological link with their point of origin” (Suleiman, 1998: 26) Susan Rubin Suleiman (1998) describes exile in its broad sense to entail “every kind of estrangement or displacement, from the physical and geographical to the spiritual” (2). Enforced travels and foreign languages signified abrupt changes, which disrupted people’s social behaviors. The moment the exiled arrives to a foreign environment, the intense personal learning and adaptation process that begins to occur accompanied by a personal crisis of remembering what was left behind, intensifies the sense of loss and uncertainty (Suleiman, 1998: 360).

The first group of Chilean exiles to arrive to Toronto in 1974 found themselves numb and silenced, overwhelmed by below Celsius temperatures with no place to go. As they arrived to this foreign country, which thirty-one years later only a few can now call “home,” immigration officers changed the women’s last names to that of their husbands, and adjusted their maiden names to shorter, simpler versions. English courses were only offered to men, since the women had domestic responsibilities to attend to while at the same time having to earn a living cleaning toilettes. To adapt to a foreign environment with the knowledge of the inaccessibility of what was left behind, becomes heart sickening and leaves the community of exiles attached to an unreachable past.

Amongst Chilean exiles there was a constant reminder that the temporary status of living in Canada would end as soon as exiles were allowed to return, a reassurance that kept people’s hopes intact. Many exiled families felt a deep sense of remorse, of guilt for leaving and settling in First World countries such as Canada. To them it seemed unbearable to think that their lives were spared while other families suffered great losses. Devaluation of personal suffering happens when one refuses a state of victimhood. In this case, refusal occurs not because a healing process might enable one to reach a state of empowerment and reject “victim” status, but because of an abiding belief that the punishments



Tamara Toledo, "Breast Feeding My Mother," 48" x 60", oil on canvas, 2005.

they endured do not add up to the "real" suffering of those left back home. A well-paid job, although degrading at times, a house, a car and other unnecessary extravagant amenities contradicted the anti-materialistic, socialist ideals that their generation fought for. Therefore, remorse led to an incessant attempt to sympathize with and help those in "real" pain. Octavio Paz (1985) claims: "our redemptive power of solitude clarifies our obscure but vivid sense of guilt" and as such "solitude is a punishment but it is also a promise that our exile will end" (196). And so, in my own community of exiles, people organized, marched, protested, boycotted, educated, and helped save thousands of lives, sacrificing

their own and those of their families. The exiles thought of their own lives as secondary to the lives of the people who stayed and suffered in the distant homeland. Their memories, hardships and nightmares became a silenced knowledge, an absent memory that had no space for retrieval. The priority would always be to protect those in greater need while denying their own.

Ironically, in the context of the complex and highly personal experience of exile, the left-wing Chilean community did not encourage the slightest suggestion of differences amongst individuals. Dependence on the community signified adjusting our individual identities to the ethos of the collective providing a place where one felt safe and welcomed. Through the exiled collective notion of community, total strangers replaced the grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles and cousins left behind, with people we might have never met had we remained in Chile. For me, to live in exile with my parents meant to adapt, to construct a new identity, to start with nothing and to be born again.

A guard and a guardian angel

In 1998 my mother took on the task to tell me a story, the story about how I was born and what followed shortly after. One would tend to believe that the birth of a child brings tremendous satisfaction and joy. Yet, being born in the mist of a military coup d'état that destroys the stability of a nation and injures the dreams and lives of thousands of people, limits the happiness of such an arrival, of motherhood.

I was born in 1973, only three months after the September 11th military coup d'état, which overthrew the Chilean government. The government in power during 1970-73 was the UP (Popular Unity), a coalition of left-wing parties led by Salvador Allende, the world's first democratically elected socialist government. With the aid of the United States of America, a brutal dictatorship with General Augusto Pinochet at its forefront, took over the country. At the time, both of my parents were university students as well as political activists. My mother, six months pregnant, was finishing her fourth year as a fine arts student.

A year after the coup, my grandmother found herself searching for the whereabouts of my mother's brother, seventeen years old at the time. He was disappeared and severely tortured at the clandestine torture centre, Villa Grimaldi. He was later sent to Cuatro Alamos, where the tortured prisoners had time to recuperate, and then sent to Tres Alamos, where surviving prisoners were finally able to receive visitors. My mother's brother-in-law was sent to Chile Stadium, which had been converted into a concentration camp. As a child I overheard conversations about both uncles being detained and tortured. The subject was openly talked about amongst adults, ignoring the presence of children, yet the issue was treated as part of a collective political problem rather than what the possible psychological impact it had on individuals. I knew that one of my uncles had lost all his teeth because of frequent blows to his face during torture, and my other uncle, although detained for months, subjected



Tamara Toledo, "Giving Birth to Wounds." 60" x 48", oil on canvas, 2005

to horrendous torture, claims his suffering could never compare to the greater losses of others. Although we were all aware of other's suffering, nobody asked intimate personal questions, much less talk about individual experiences. For instance, my aunt had to deal with the ordeal of becoming the sole protector of her two- and three-year-old daughters, while she traced the whereabouts of her husband during his detainment, and was never asked about her experiences years later. Not only was our direct family being persecuted in Chile, but also neighbours, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances were targeted; everyone lived in fear and isolation.

Amongst the confusion, unrest, and silence, although she has no clear memory of exactly when, my mother, seven months pregnant, was also detained and tortured. Thirty-one years later I asked my aunt, my uncle, and my grandmother, if they were aware that she had been arrested ... nobody knew at that time, and nobody was surprised that this had occurred.

During a breakthrough at a therapy session, my mother recalled her own experience of detention while pregnant with me. When my mother, Rosa Toledo, tells me her story, she states that for twenty-five years, her memory had refused to go back in time but now, although difficult to remember with precision, she shared her testimony. It is hard for me, as it would surely be for anyone, to internalize such a recounting of my own mother's suffering, yet I understand why my mother waited many years before speaking about her

experience, and perplexed that it ever came out at all.

Nevertheless, she feels it is her duty to explain to me what happened, since I too was present, still in her womb and defenseless during torture. I have always witnessed the deep responsibility my mother feels towards her children. But more than mere responsibility, I never understood her sense of culpability until that very moment. My mother tells me her last memory after being held at gunpoint was arriving at a military barrack peeking underneath her blindfold and witnessing bodies piled on the floor before losing consciousness. She does not know how many blows she received, whether she was raped, suffered electrical shocks, was drugged or tortured in any other unimaginable way. All I can do is read other testimonies of women also pregnant during arrest, think of my mother, and contemplate on the idea that we both felt trauma neither of us can recall. She does not know how many hours or days passed until the day she was left abandoned and soaking wet at a *población* – shantytown– where locals helped her back home before the night curfew. Once again my grandfather withheld this information from my father so he would not hand himself in and my mother kept her incarceration secret, haunting her for twenty-five years.

At dawn on December 19th, 1973, my mother's water broke, but she had to wait for the curfew to end in the morning before she could go to the hospital. My grandfather rushed her to the Barros Luco Hospital where a military medical doctor assured him that my mother would be well taken care of. The hospital where I was born was known for having many Allende supporters, left wing doctors, nurses, and administrators before the coup. After September 11th, many of the staff were detained and executed and replaced by military personnel. The first doctor to see my mother determined that she needed an immediate caesarian section; however he left her in a corridor in excruciating pain until 7:00 pm. I was born suffocating with the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck and was told that it was a miracle I did not die in the process. My mother did not see me until days later when a nurse came into a room of mothers impatiently waiting for their newborn babies. With several infants in her arms she arranged them in a row with identification bracelets and ordered the women to take their corresponding offspring.

Twenty days later, on January 8, 1974, the Canadian Air Force sent their first plane in aid of political refugees and my twenty-four-year-old mother and I, myself only twenty days old, were amongst the first refugees to come to Canada. Months later, our passports were stamped with a letter "L" by the Chilean consulate in Vancouver which would mark our identities forever as listed political exiles. Since I was already very weak, I became extremely ill during the flight and was rushed to the Sick Children's Hospital as soon as we arrived to Toronto. While I was held in an incubator for weeks, struggling for my life, my mother did not know what was wrong with me. At the time there were very few Latin American immigrants and no interpreters who could facilitate communication with the medical staff. Once again, I miraculously

survived whatever ailment I had, and my father and his guardian angel joined us a week later in Toronto.

Negligence

On May 16th, 2001, after two years of regular headaches, which she now describes as “head pains” and that rendered her unable to work as an English teacher for adult immigrants, my mother suffered a stroke that left her partially blind and disabled. As my father and I were having lunch, a meal we seldom share together, we received a phone call from my mother’s therapist claiming that my mother had fallen into a deep “sleep” triggered by flashbacks of a traumatic past from her childhood and that we should come to pick her up at her office in order for her to wake up in a safe environment, our home. We rushed to her clinic, not sure of what to make of the phone call or the situation. Before allowing us to see my mother the therapist made sure we understood that she was safe, that she had escaped the memories of trauma by falling into deep sleep and would soon wake up. Inside the room that had once heard my own confessions as a patient, lay my mother, on the floor, sleeping like a baby. I completely trusted the therapist and was convinced that what she told us was true, yet it seemed impossible for me to carry my mother (a heavy woman) down a flight of stairs and we asked the therapist if we could stay until she woke up. Time passed and the therapist told us she could no longer stay because she had a University class to teach. Nevertheless she kept waiting for something to happen; perhaps remorse from leaving us alone did not allow her to leave. My sister arrived and my mother had peed herself, “just another indication that she is in deep sleep” exclaimed the therapist. As soon as my sister burst into the room she knew right away we had to do something and my father called the ambulance. In what seemed like seconds I was asked questions by medical staff “what drugs does your mother take?” “what happened?” “why didn’t you call an ambulance sooner?” The therapist wasn’t there to help with answers.

When I saw my mother lying there, it was as if I had been confronted with trauma, in which time seizes to exist and space seems endless. Much like an earthquake that shakes your body, lifts the dust, splits the soil underneath your feet and destroys your home, when you see death approach, your whole world collapses. My mother was rushed to St. Michael’s Hospital. We were immediately sent to a room and a priest came to comfort us. My mother’s therapist joined us at the hospital and took my father aside warning him that my mother had passed away and that he should tell his daughters the news before someone else did. When my father, in disbelief, did not pay attention to her suggestions, she came into the room where we were and gave my sister and I the devastating news.

Had my mother died? My fifty-two-year-old mother, a woman I always admired and aspired to emulate, a woman who was not a grandmother yet, a woman who had suffered all her life surviving catastrophe and trauma, had she died so



Tamara Toledo, "The Smell of Death," 36" x 72", oil on canvas, 2005.

young? You cannot imagine the intense sadness, guilt, and desperation I felt at that moment. My father came in confused and in shock, without knowing what was wrong, yet deep in his heart he knew that her death could not be true.

Only a few days before we found ourselves in the hospital emergency waiting room, we had celebrated Mothers Day. Although she suffered those severe head pains that debilitated her for so long, she always made an effort to enjoy celebrations and spend time with her family. Now, in the hospital, we were the ones who prayed for her, sang to her, hoping she would listen and not leave us. After a while doctors came into the room and told us that she was alive but needed emergency surgery, which she might not survive, or that would possibly leave her with disabilities. My father and I had to make the devastating decision to sign a permission document to operate with only a small guarantee for a chance of survival. She survived, once again, and so began the rebirth of Rosacruz Durán, that same young political exiled woman carrying a twenty-day-old baby in her arms while Canada Customs renamed her Rosa Toledo.

After my mother's surgery, we all waited impatiently for days, sleeping in the hospital waiting room, not knowing whether she would be able to survive such a complicated surgery. She was finally discharged from the intensive care unit four days later. She had lost her mobility, and was not able to speak. Her first attempt to communicate happened when the therapist came to visit her. She instantly became very agitated and I was left alone with her trying to figure out what had upset her. Days later, when she was able to whisper into our ears, she told us that during her last therapy session she had asked her therapist to call an ambulance because she had begun to feel very ill. She told us that she became very dizzy, had a terrible head pain, and that her therapist had witnessed her vomit in a garbage bin before fainting on the office floor. The therapist disregarded her wish and decided it was wiser to call us and let her rest in peace. After this last visit to the hospital, we never saw the therapist again.

An "L" shaped ten-inch scar traced the right side of my mother's baldhead, the "L" being so eerily familiar, resembling the stamp on our passports twenty-eight years ago. Only a week has passed and forty-eight black staples of the incision elicit the operation. She has lost her mobility and to be comfortable, her heavy body must be rotated every 30 minutes. Yet often this is not enough, and the pain becomes unbearable, the screaming for painkillers begins, and the entire hallway can hear my mother beg us to allow her to die for the pain is too much for her to bear.

When my mother fell ill, our family doctor, who she trusted blindly, told her that her pain was psychological, and that she should seek psychiatric attention. Her family doctor and psychiatrists told her that her past experiences caused the pain and that psychotherapy would help her. Although my mother followed their advice, the headaches continued and so she asked her doctor to seek other causes for her illness. At the time, my mother requested a scan or any other exam that could indicate damage in her brain, yet they did not listen;

instead she was told that she had fibromyalgia and PTSD, which triggered the headaches. The doctor kept insisting that she was depressed, dismissing her physical pain. Two years, punctuated by doctor and psychiatric appointments, leave of absence, permits from work, alternative medicine treatments such as acupuncture, massage therapy, homeopathy, yoga, tai chi, and meditation passed by. My mother continued her search, reading endlessly, trying to find a cure for her headaches. Until the day the massive intracerebral hemorrhage took over the right side of her brain.

Milk

As I encountered illness through my mother, symptoms of my own that I had neglected for years resurfaced. I found myself inside an MRI scanner chamber where I was told to stay still; any movement would affect the image and the technician would have to retake the scan. I found out that my brain carries a benign tumor of the pituitary gland that produces a hormone called Prolactinoma. The MRI had been able to detect the size of the pituitary tumor that had caused the high levels of prolactin in my blood to stimulate my breasts to produce milk without being pregnant. In women, high blood levels of prolactin often cause infertility and changes in menstruation. I have a 4 mm. tumour sitting in the middle of my head in a bony box called the *sella turcica*. Since my eyes are directly above the pituitary gland, tumour growth may cause symptoms such as headaches or visual disturbances. I am now 31 years of age with plans of having children in the future. My memory is intensely retinal and I am afraid of what my brain could do to my vision; I am terrified of losing the ability to see how and what I paint.

As I slid slowly inside the claustrophobic scanner chamber I could not help but think of my mother, of her painful headaches and her “L” shaped scar, of her loss of vision and her loss of memory, her loss of motor skills and personality change. Why so many coincidences? Why are there so many similar symptoms and losses? And what role will secreting milk play in the healing of such trauma and illness? Maternal milk was nourishment I was never able to indulge in as an infant since my mother’s traumatic experience during labour had left her without milk, yet now, I was able to offer. The umbilical cord that once nourished and later decided to strangle me no longer connected our bodies. After 31 years, mother and child were once again reuniting, but now a cerebral hinge provided the connection, a sensorial dependence allowed support, a metaphorical association others may never get a chance to fully comprehend. The act of sliding into a hole and then sliding out made me think of my mother’s rebirth and now of my own.

After life

I find myself staring at my mother lying in a hospital bed with tubes and needles attached to her body. A deformed swollen bandaged head haunts and intrigues. She is incapable of speech and unable to move. The only sign of life

is the monitor checking her heart rate and blood pressure. Beside her, six other patients lay in their beds also struggling to stay alive. Wounded bodies on the verge of death remind my family of a past of trauma and loss. The seizures she now suffered were reminiscent of the electrical shocks she once endured. Both have left her static and mute. My family and I can only wait and witness the future that lies ahead.

Whenever I see images of the 1973 Chilean coup d'état—whether it be of the four-hour bombing and siege of the presidential palace, of bodies floating down the Mapocho river running through the nation's capital city, or of listening to President Allende's last radio address to the nation before his death—my heart begins to pound, my pupils widen and my body shivers. Bodily sensations remind me that the connections to such events are disturbingly familiar and are part of my present more so than of my past. The coup d'état has now become my mother's stroke, the presidential palace in flames is now her bleeding brain, surgery is torture, paralysis equals curfews, memory loss is the burning of books, ambulances are helicopters, the hospitals have become torture chambers, the doctors and therapists have become military and state oppressors, seizures have become electrical shocks, MRI scanner chambers are the *parrillas*—electrical torture chambers—patients are survivors, flashbacks are testimonies, her eye patch is a blindfold, the wheelchair is our exile, loss of physical abilities is the loss of a generation, loss of vision is the loss of hope, loss of short term memory is the loss of the nation's collective memory, stitches are wounds and scars my family has inherited, censorship becomes silence, and rehabilitation is synonymous of a nostalgic return from exile and a reconciliation with the past. In my mind, the scars that the dictatorship left on my mother's body, mind, and spirit, so very detrimental to her health, are inevitably bound to the collective health and politics of Chile.

What happens when memory is lost? What happens when the only person who carries your childhood memories has lost her own through illness, old age, or simply in order to survive? The fragility of memory lies in the hands of those who choose to visit her, they are the ones who carry out a process of translation and negotiation followed by a re-evaluation and adaptation of history. Recognition of the importance of memory resists silence, erasure, closure, and impunity.

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The Foxes

Gradually, door by door, she opened the house
to the pasture that ran to fields beyond.
The unlocked doors swayed like adolescent girls
on their new long legs, unpracticed.
Horses grazed by thresholds, and feral dogs
haunted the edges, coming in from pinewoods.
Into her house came the animals uncalled—
smelling her need, her tenderness,
the sweet hollow of her hands
cupped and deciduous, cradling
like a mother—in her touch that knowledge
of what's lost when you truly cannot speak of it.

A family of foxes soon made their den
in her defunct fireplace. She'd burn
no more fires, but the hearth flickered
with red-gold fur as the fox mother curled
to nurse her infants. I remember their eyes
like embers, bright and wet, the part of the fire
that can survive water, stronger than ash. They'd watch
us children come into her house and gradually let
my hand reach nearer, further, further
into the hearth at last to stroke without breathing
that fur like silken earth, the finest dirt made vivid,
Georgia's red clay tempered, a flame the hand could bear.

What burned in that house? Her husband gone,
and daughter long since dead—echoed
shots from the field where he'd caught
the girl in the crosshairs, maybe by accident.
The foxes flourished, cried for no one,
svelte shoulders liting. They shouldered
what none human could, making home
in the hearth of Demeter while Demeter
drank gin straight and smoked another,
her still beautiful, toothless face tilting up,
catching the light reflecting
from the fireplace—a darkness brilliant—
visitant sheen and flash of fox.

What's in a Name? An Intergenerational Reflection on Naming Our Daughters

My mother was only eight years old when her mother died of breast cancer. Today, at age 72, she has finally reflected on those pivotal eight years that shaped her entire life, her self image, her role as a woman, daughter, wife, and most importantly, mother. At age eight, my mother's development as a woman essentially stopped. Her identity became fossilized at that moment. At age 72, my mother finally realized the life-altering impact of this event. But this isn't just a story about a child losing her mother at such a young age, tragic as that was. No, this story continues on, weaving its legacy through three more generations. The critical incident that brought the grief to the surface is the birth of her first granddaughter. This event was the catalyst that required her to remember, and re-story her relationship with her dead mother, her daughters, and her male and now female grandchildren.

How does one mother when one never had a mother to watch and model? What impact does that have on the children and grandchildren of the motherless daughter? Drawing heavily on my mother's diary entries, these are the questions this paper hopes to highlight.

Our self-representation, the way we define who we are, . . . what we remember, what we stress as significant, and what we omit of our past defines our present. And since the boundaries of our self-definition also delimit our hopes and aspirations, . . . that history affects our future. (Lerner, 1997: 199)

This is not my story. It is not from my memory. I share this diary only as an observer at most on the periphery of this story. And yet, this memoir has lived a silent life of its own, casting its shadow not only on the child and woman

who wrote it, but on myself, my sister, and most importantly on my niece—the most recent, and perhaps the last, in a matrilineal line born of loss.

The year was 1942 and my grandmother lay encased, literally, in a body cast, a war-era attempt at stabilizing her body ravaged by breast cancer that had metastasized into her bones. She wrote on June 24, 1942:

I had a bad shock last week. I wrote Marion Hilliard my Toronto doctor asking her what I might expect from the future and she told me bluntly in a typewritten letter. She said I'd been living "on borrowed time" for months now and that unless a miracle happened I would have months not years ahead. I "can take it" as regards myself, but not in regard to the children. For five days I cried every time I thought of them and looked at them. I'd wake up in the night worrying about such trifling things—whether whoever looks after them would keep their dresses the right length, what coats they'll wear year after next. And then there were long hours wondering about them during their adolescence. I've always felt I could help them so much more than as children because I understand that age better. And now I won't have an opportunity. That was the hardest part to face.... And along with all that we are sure we live on in our friends and in our families and the memories they have of us. But children who lose their mother at 8 and 10 don't remember them very clearly. (Griffith)

She died from cancer on September 28, the day after her 48th birthday. My mother was only eight years old then and today, at age 72, she finally reflects on those pivotal eight years that shaped her entire life, her self-image, and her role as a woman, daughter, wife, and most importantly, mother. At age 72, my mother finally accepts and faces the life-altering impact of this event. At age eight, my mother's development as a woman essentially stopped. Her identity and her image of motherhood became fossilized at that moment. Everything she became in the 64 years that followed was a direct result of that event, a manifestation of an identity not yet completely formed. But this isn't just a story about a child losing her mother at such a young age, tragic as that was. No, this story continues on, weaving its legacy through two more generations.

I start in the present, in June 2005. My sister, Bona Elizabeth, gave birth to her first child, a girl, Georgia. This was naturally a joyous event for our family. My sister was older, 42 years of age, and the child was perfect. I was younger, married, and divorced, and already had two children—both boys. While my children were loved and adored by their grandmother, it became obvious that there was something significant for my mother in the fact that my sister, the first born, was giving birth. For her eldest daughter to give birth to a daughter only added to the intensity of my mother's investment in the birth. For many years, I had seen from the outside this urgency in my mother for my sister to marry and give birth.

The naming of a child has always had significance in many cultures. In the West, young parents often take great pains to select a name that creates the framework for that child's identity throughout his or her life. In other cultures, the selection of a name is even more important: the Jewish culture includes names of ancestors who have passed; in African cultures, names often have deep religious meanings that are intended to impart fortunate life events on the child; and in many cultures a specific ceremony takes place that publicly announces the child's name and family affiliation. In several African and Latino traditions ancestral connections are named as a way of placing the child in the flow of time and grounding him or her in the family line. In this case, my grandmother Bona, begat my mother Bona, who begat my sister Bona, who begat Georgia. There was much discussion about the naming of this girl-child—would she be “Bona” to continue the tradition set forth through the previous three generations? It was decided early on that no, she would not continue with that name primarily because of the difficulties experienced by my sister with such an unusual name. Other ideas and suggestions abounded and my mother, the new grandmother, was no exception in having specific desires for a name. To her credit, she tried to remain neutral and respect my sister's independent choice but my mother also had strong wishes in her heart. My sister and her husband seriously considered “Frances” as an honour to her matrilineal heritage. As this was the name of my great-grandmother who started the “Bona” line, my mother accepted this. My mother writes:

They had not fully decided on a name out of the final two choices. They had gone through so many combinations.... The choices were Frances after my Grandmother maternal and Georgia after [the father's] mother.... I heard them say Georgia was a possibility, but it didn't really register. I was sure they'd pick Frances to honour the maternal line of Bona and me! How presumptuous of me. (Duncan, personal journal, June 18, 2005)

Three days after the birth, we gathered as a family at the moment my sister and her husband formally introduced their first child to the family: Georgia Elizabeth Margaret. I was unaware of the critical incident that occurred between my sister and mother in that moment—not Frances, not Bona. I missed it, but my sister did not: my mother's face fell in obvious disappointment. As I walked with my sister to her hospital room, she said, “Mum hates it,” in a voice laden with deep pain. Georgia is the name of her paternal grandmother and thus ended that matrilineal line started so long ago. This is how my mother describes her experience at that moment:

I just stood there stunned and just looked at Bon and couldn't even mask my feelings. I've always been easy to read and Bon caught the look and it crushed her so badly that she told Sarah that her baby's first day on earth is forever tarnished.... I feel she is of me and mine. My line, my heritage, and

my body. *Bon's whole pregnancy had been a journey for me—something so deep that I feel almost betrayed. No. No—you [meaning the father's family] can't have her—she's mine and Bon's—she belongs to us, not to Georgia [the paternal grandmother for whom the baby was named]. She is of me; of Bon; and of my Mother.* (Duncan, personal journal, June 18, 2005)

What becomes clear and is intriguing here is that my mother, a highly educated and aware woman, did not understand what had happened. She felt a deep and piercing sorrow in her soul that her mother's line, through the naming of the child, would end here. Yet she did not realize that the mere look on her face imparted a crushing blow to her relationship with her own daughter, and subsequently perhaps with her granddaughter. Even in the days that followed, while some frank discussion was able to pass between mother and daughter, there now lay a huge gulf between them—one that was perhaps unbridgeable. In subsequent months my mother continued on this journey of grief that forced her to uncover why the birth of Georgia was so critical to her and the name so important. While she had tried over the years to heal the wounds of her mother's death, never before had it impacted her own life and relationships so profoundly. She discloses in writing how the loss felt:

Georgia's name is the lightening rod to a whole range of feelings of mine—jealousy—which makes me ashamed and sick at myself.... I know she is not my baby—but she's my Bon's baby.... I have a sense of ownership that I feel has been thwarted. I now have to share her with Bon and others. (Duncan, personal journal, June 18, 2005)

Indeed, never before had she been compelled, or allowed herself, to delve into that loss in an emotional way. I would submit, in hindsight, that to her the end of that name so closely associated with her own mother was perhaps the re-death of my grandmother Bona. She candidly writes, "And through Georgia's birth I was forced dramatically to deal with the continued strong cords that bound me to my mother. The matriarchal line became the most important thing in my life and it had to be preserved at all cost" (Duncan, personal communication, January 31, 2006).

My mother continued to need forgiveness from my sister, knowing the pain she caused by ruining for my sister and her husband a momentous event in their young lives. She and my sister talked about the naming and my mother reflected on this in her journal:

I said something about Georgia's name and I said it was perfect for her and she said she sometimes wonders if they did the right thing with her name. I asked if that was because of me and she said yes. I again told her how terribly wrong I was and added a new insight—that I really did not realize

until that time that my advice and opinion mattered so much to her. That my self-esteem has always been low and that they (she and Sarah) sort of had to tolerate me. Bon said, why wouldn't what I said matter? "You are my mother." The word just hit me—what did that mean for the girls? This was the stream from them to me as mother—not my flow to my mother as usual. I had no idea of Bon's relationship and love for me.... And then she said "I do forgive you, Mum ... but it did hurt." My being forgiven was such an important step in my growth. I couldn't (wasn't able) to let go of the incident until Bon freed me with the words, "I forgive you." Then my spirit cleared and I could go on. Otherwise, I would have had to carry that burden with me with grief and pain. Out of that moment, I told Bon I had no real comprehension that my reaction would be so devastating for her. I was just her mother and my opinion wasn't all that important and she said, "but you are my mother and you matter." (Duncan, personal journal, January 9, 2006)

It was in witnessing that exchange that I realized that my own mother had never truly learned what it meant to live the role of Mother. Why? Simply put, we learn to parent primarily by observation and modeling. She had never had a nurturing model, no natural mother past age eight, and no stepmother who lived with her and raised her to adulthood. Everything she did, as a woman, wife, and perhaps most critically as a mother, was intellectualized, following the directions of distant relatives or societal prescriptives of what was the "right" thing to do. When powerful emotions entered into the relationship between mother and daughters, my mother frequently misstepped and caused deep wounds or was overly emotional out of proportion to the situation. It wasn't until the naming of Georgia that my mother had to accept the consequences of her own inappropriate actions over the years and confront her loss of her own mother on a deeper, emotional level. With the assistance of therapy, she had already been journaling her story beginning with her earliest memories, but it was the incident when Georgia was named that forced her to confront the far-reaching legacy of her loss and pain.

I never really thought about being a good mother (as mothers do today), never studied mother books etc. I just loved them and cared for them—I knew how to do that because of my nursing training.... My identity as a nurse and how that influenced my identity as a mother.... I never consciously thought of myself as a mother—I cared for them as a nurse and did it well (emphasis added). Being a mother has always been reserved for Bona Mills—not Bona Mary. Even when each of the girls was born I ached for my mother, but not to say I am a mother too—but to say, Oh, see, as your daughter I have been blessed to birth these girls. (Duncan, personal journal, February 22, 2006)

My own field of study is adult education—specifically parent education—and early on in my experience I was presented with autobiography as a technique in qualitative research. I never dreamed I would be investigating my own family as an educator. Journals and autobiographies are established as academic documents, most notably in the fields of literature, psychology, and history. It is particularly through the personal observations of women that we now see historical periods and events in a whole new light, understand the inner workings and emotional development of women over the centuries, and have a whole body of classic literature that consists of the personal life writings of women both real and fictional. Though personal narrative has achieved prominence, most of us never think our writings worthy of publication. Published or not, the stories we tell ourselves profoundly shape how we live our lives. Our stories shape our identities.

Developmental psychology says that children become aware of their place in time and their extended selfhood by about age three. Prior to age three, children are learning and internalizing experiences, creating memories that allow them to function effectively in their daily lives (i.e. talking, crawling, walking, feeding, playing, etc). These memories are not part of identity-building and therefore are not retained in the same way as what is termed “autobiographical memories” (Eakin, 1999: 108). How many of us actually remember learning to eat or crawl? Autobiographical memory is in fact a particular type of memory function and is specifically designed for recording and storing episodes from one’s own life. By age three or four, children have learned, through observation, that sharing stories is a key social event and an important ability in making one’s place in the family and social order. By toddlerhood children have a more enduring sense of self, which is critical for the formation and retention of autobiographical memories. Children have observed that many stories are in fact interpreted memory, therefore autobiographical memory becomes not a recitation of events but a social and cultural construct, a reporting from the constructed self (Eakin, 1999: 108).

The development of this type of memory does not happen in isolation, however. According to Eakin (1999), noted educator Jerome Bruner places special emphasis on the role of the family. The role of the parent is fundamental to the creation of memory and identity. Developmental psychologists agree that it is a truly constructivist process because both parent and child must engage in the construction of autobiography. Parents do this through what has been termed “memory talk,” which essentially is a supported conversation between parent and child, with the parent assisting the child in formation and interpretation of his or her own memories. It is not a purely one-way dispensation of information from parent to child (Eakin, 1999: 108). Given this, the question then becomes, what happens to the constructed self when the parent is no longer there to teach and scaffold the memory talk and no replacement is available to the child for that activity? In my mother’s own words:

The other thing from yesterday was discussing my continued awareness of my again unresolved awareness of my role as a mother to Bon and Sarah. There continues to be a gap between eight years of age and when Bon was born and I was 29—the apparently “normal” growth of a young girl and woman in her slow preparation for menarche, puberty, adolescence, first love, —sex, marriage (oops!) and pregnancy was for me subtly (and not so subtly) damaged and undeveloped. So when I did by the grace of God meet [my husband], marry, and have Bon and then Sarah I was not naturally prepared psychologically or emotionally for the joy of being mother. Me?—no—I’m the child—I’m the little girl who “lost” her mother; whose mother died (so life for me stopped); whose empty life labeled me special; who now had no model; no roadmap; no guide; no love to share with me... It’s only now that I see I was not complete, I shortchanged myself. I probably shortchanged the girls, but at the time I thought the lack in their lives was due to [other things]. (Duncan, personal journal, February 22, 2006)

In his work called *The Words*, Jean Paul Sartre (1964) investigated what children do with their life histories and found, among other things, that these stories continue to shape our lives as we grow. Sartre and others confirmed that we continue to create our autobiographies as we live them (Eakin, 1999: 109). The importance of narrative in the creation and development of identity is further elaborated in Eakin’s research as he notes the work of developmental psychologists and neurologists who see a lack of self in people who have lost the ability to create their own narrative as the result of illness or injury. Kay Young and Jeffery Saver explain the “memory > narrative > identity” link by examining its absence, concluding that “Individuals who have lost the ability to construct narrative ... have lost their selves” (qtd. in Eakin, 1999: 126).

As my mother noted in her journal, while she experienced eight years of familial history and shaped her identity around that, her mother’s death was the critical incident that impaired any further identity formation, particularly within the woman/mother/daughter triad. Autobiography—the personal, life-writing process—is much more than remembering life events or recollection. It is indeed—if we dissect those words as re-membering or a re-collecting of events—an opportunity to reshape and recreate one’s life in whatever form one wishes. If, as in this case, the relationship is abruptly ended, then those few memories have to serve to constitute a lifetime of experiences. The self-examination that is required in journaling or writing one’s autobiography must effect a change on the events themselves:

Every autobiography is a work of art and at the same time a work of enlightenment; it does not show us the individual seen from outside in his visible actions but the person in his inner privacy, not as he was, not as he is, but as he believes and wishes himself to be and to have been. (Gusdorf, 1980: 45)

As my mother wrote about her earliest memories of her mother, the relationship they developed over the first eight years of life, and the feelings of

intense loss she carried with her throughout her life, she was (and continues to be) able to grow beyond the identity of a motherless daughter she had carried with her for 65 years. In that moment of Georgia's naming, she again misstepped and caused undue hurt, but that moment was pivotal in her ability to re-story her loss and the life that followed, hopefully allowing her to look upon the roles of Mother and Grandmother with fresh eyes. No longer does she need to preserve the fossilized images of her own mother; no longer does she need to follow the intellectualized rules of how to "do" motherhood correctly for fear of her own ignorance. Perhaps now through re-creating her own identity through self-examination she can move beyond images and expectations frozen in time and truly know what it means to be a mother.

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Magnolia

Beside the window, a star magnolia, bare
branches, a few stubborn leaves
once green, now edged with brown,

tips of the branches like down,
like your head under my hands:
blonde fuzz. Wide-eyed baby, eyes

that looked upon the new light
like a conqueror, just landed
on a blue shore. So long ago.

Now, we talk, we are careful to show
only the safe side of our hidden worlds.
“Don’t tell me that,” you warn, a fence

of silence, of things too tense
to mention, even in a poem. The old leaves
stiffen against the wind, rain

softens its fist, but for now, restraint
is our only growth, one small white star
at a time.

Mothers and Daughters at Menarche

An Indigenous-Inspired Quiet Revolution

In Western, industrialised society, menstruation and birth are commonly seen as unstable, pathological processes requiring medical control. Girls learn to see menstruation as embarrassing and undesirable, and as they grow into young women, find their cyclic variations at odds with a linear economy. Menarche is a nodal event around which girls' beliefs and attitudes to being female are organised. The perception of menstruation as a liability therefore has foundational implications for future female experiences, particularly childbirth. Both menarche and childbirth are potentially powerful psychological initiations that require the sacrifice of a previous physiological state and sense of identity. Across a range of cultures and times, menstruation and birth have been recognised as transformative spiritual phenomena. Some Indigenous perspectives in particular demonstrate that menstruation can be experienced as sacred blood and a source of authority and power. This article draws on indigenous examples and personal experience to challenge patriarchal norms about menstruation as a liability. Mothers are perfectly placed to gift their daughters with a woman-honouring perspective that affirms their status at menarche as valuable human beings, capable of life-bearing within their bodies. By recounting how I negotiated the passage into menarche with my own daughter, I offer a space for dialogue and reflection contributing to the cultural reform of derogatory attitudes to menstruation and women.

Menarche (or first menstruation) and childbirth are pivotal experiences in the life of a woman. Along with menopause, they are sometimes known as women's "blood mysteries," liminal states of enormous potential (Noble, 1991: 11). They represent critical transitions during which the unconscious is provoked to provide "an opportunity for regression and pathology, or reintegration and further emotional maturity" (Offerman-Zuckerberg, 1988: 1). However, the

natural processes do not automatically confer reintegration and maturity; it must be enacted and embodied. As transformative thresholds, these initiatory experiences require the conscious sacrifice of a previous physiological state and sense of identity (Rutter, 1993: xvi).

In a range of cultures and times, menarche, menstruation and birth have been recognised as spiritual phenomena of great personal, social and cosmological significance (Gadon, 1989: 2; Noble, 1991:11). In Western patriarchal societies, however, these uniquely female experiences seem to have been drained of their meaning and spirituality. They are commonly seen as medical concerns, dubious processes requiring surveillance and control (Murphy-Lawless, 1998: 23; Martin, 1987: 46-49; 58-61). Menarche usually occurs as a private event without social acknowledgment or celebration (Owen, 1998: x; McKeever, 1984: 39); menstruation has become associated with pathology, shame, and the profane (Shuttle and Redgrove, 1978: 29-30; Owen, 1998: 14-15; Martire, 2006: iii); and in most Western countries, birth has become a techno-medical emergency managed by “men, machines and hospitals” (Wagner, 2004: 1; Banks, 2001: 1). In this paper, I focus on menarche and its pivotal role in shaping girls’ perceptions of what it means to be embodied as a woman.

Menstruation

Our usual discourse on menstruation in the West depicts it as an embarrassing liability, a kind of “nose-bleed of the womb” (Shuttle and Redgrove, 1978: 29). Culturally we value ovulation and its potential child production as the *raison d’être* of the menstrual cycle, with menses seen as a waste product. Like other excretory processes, it is perceived as something distasteful coming from our “nether regions.” As Shuttle and Redgrove (1978) observed: “Menstruation is regarded, not only by physiologists and many doctors, but also by some feminists, as a sickness, a blank spot, a non-event that the woman must endure and would be better off without” (30). In the paragraphs that follow, I challenge that perception and offer a woman-affirming alternative.

Feminism has a crucial role to play in freeing menstruation from its maligned status (Koeske, 1983: 3, 13). For example, Shirley Lee’s (2002) study exploring the meaning of menstruation and premenstrual syndrome (PMS) for some Canadian women found that two groups emerged across a continuum from negative to positive (3). The negative group were more self-critical, expressing feelings of low self-esteem and self-hate. For these women, the “diagnosis” of PMS was important because their symptoms were not taken seriously without a biomedical explanation. In contrast, the positive group expressed feelings of self-appreciation and valued their menstruation, rejecting the “sickness” label. Their positive view was closely linked to a feminist perspective: “The importance of feminism in the lives and backgrounds of the extremely positive women provides a crucial component in the process of unravelling their attitudes toward menstruation and understanding its transformation from an ‘unwanted’ to a ‘valued and wanted’ condition” (Lee, 2002: 9).

Menarche

Menarche is historically viewed as the transition to womanhood (Shapiro, 1988: 70). A study of women's recollections of menarche found that almost all of the 137 participants remembered their first menstruation in detail including "where they were when it happened, what they were doing, and whom they told" (Golub, 1983: 17-18). Clearly it is an event loaded with personal significance. Yet in the West, preparation for menarche and menstrual education are usually restricted to the biological facts and hygiene measures (McKeever, 1984: 39), with little discussion of the emotional, psychological, sexual and spiritual dimensions. This focus on the physical to the exclusion of other dimensions is inadequate and has a fragmenting effect.

McKeever (1984) noted the critical role of menarche in the formation of mature womanhood:

The first menses is important because it serves as a "nodal event around which the psychological and biological changes occurring more or less continuously throughout adolescence, are organized and assimilated" (Koeff, 1983). In essence, it confirms a sense of womanhood in the adolescent female. Prior to menarche the adolescent seems to be unable to consolidate the extensive but less focal feminizing changes that have been ongoing since the beginning of puberty (Rierdan and Koff, 1980; Rosenbaum, 1981). (37)

However, this consolidation at menarche seems to be built around derogatory associations of femaleness in which shame plays a key role. The average woman spends about 2,400 days or six consecutive years of her life menstruating (Martire, 2006: 1). Considering that menstruation and the menstrual cycle are defining body process that span decades of a woman's life, it seems extraordinary that "a major characteristic of being a mature female remains a source of shame, embarrassment and secrecy" (McKeever, 1984: 45). Mothers who have reframed their understanding of menses with a feminist perspective can play a crucial role in reforming these derogatory attitudes by modelling and teaching a healthy, holistic approach with their daughters.

The mother-daughter relationship

The mother-daughter relationship at menarche is a vital but complex one. Martire (2006) noted two studies suggesting that "menarche and menstrual attitudes are communicated from mother to daughter and are a source of either connection or disconnection" (46) psychologically. Discussion of menstruation between mothers and daughters has been shown to evoke maternal anxiety (McKeever, 1984: 35) and feelings of unpreparedness (Golub, 1983: 34). Mothers may find it difficult to discuss menstruation with their daughters if they have experienced menarche as a fraught occasion themselves. I vividly remember the subdued, determined tone with which my mother gave me a

little book about menstruation. Taking me aside one day, she said with gravity: “I want you to read this little book because this will be happening to you soon. My mother didn’t tell me anything about it and when it happened to me for the first time, I thought something terrible was wrong with me. I don’t want that to happen to you.”

Central to maternal discomfort in discussing menstruation is the issue of sexuality: “Bodily changes bring new sexual feelings, and a new array of intellectual and emotional capacities” (McKeever, 1984: 38) which a pubertal girl may not be able to articulate. Menarche marks the onset of reproductive maturity bringing an awareness of sexual differentiation (Golub, 1983: 32, 29–30). Mothers (and fathers) may be keenly aware of their daughters’ sexual vulnerability and the potential for early pregnancies. At the same time, they may struggle to think of their children as maturing sexual beings with desires. Girls, too, at this stage of development tend to place higher priority on peer relationships than parental ones, displaying their necessary growth towards greater autonomy (Ferder and Heagle, 1992: 87). Despite these issues however, there is clearly a need for menstrual education “to move away from the focus on hygienic management to that of healthy sexuality and acceptance of self” (Cumming, Cumming and Kieran, 1991: 1).

Acceptance of self is a key concern for pubescent and adolescent girls. How can they embrace the transition to womanhood signified by menarche in the absence of any mentoring, initiation process, or social acknowledgement that something of major significance in their life-span has occurred? Most of the time, menarche is “an unritualized, uncelebrated non-event” (Owen, 1998: x). Lara Owen postulated that girls’ plummeting self-esteem and the epidemic of eating disorders can be traced to this vacuum at menarche (x). Eating disorders may reflect girls’ “hunger” to make meaning and sense of the extraordinary transformation they are undergoing. Psychoanalyst Sue Shapiro (1988) notes that a girl’s first menstruation is her own “personal experience of this central female process” (79), an event on which future experiences—like childbirth—will build. Derogatory attitudes to menstruation and the lack of celebratory rituals at menarche contain powerful, often unspoken messages about the value of her status and what she can expect as a mature woman in Western society.

This issue also has broader cultural implications beyond the family. According to Richard Tarnas, the crisis of modern humanity is an “essentially masculine crisis” (qtd. in Clements, 2002: 26), based on a dominant, but now alienated masculine world view. To redress this imbalance, it is important for our society to remember the ancient wisdom about the spiritual power of menstruation (Owen, 1998: xi) for what it brings to the planet. We need to create the attitudinal changes and appropriate rituals to make it relevant for us now. Owen (1998) observed: “Reintegrating a truly feminist, woman-honoring perspective on menstruation means turning a whole system of thought upside down” (x). This is no easy task in a culture that for thousands of years

has denigrated the female body and processes like menstruation (Reilly, 1995: 209), and idolised maleness both for the Deity and the human subject (Reilly, 1995: 62-78).

Indigenous perspectives

Many Indigenous cultures have long recognised menstruation as a spiritual phenomenon. Some of the traditions described below may no longer be extant, but they nonetheless offer a valuable contrast to Western discourse that stimulates our imagination and challenges us to think outside the familiar.

Australian Indigenous cultures

Thirty years ago, Rita Gross (1977) refuted the androcentric claim that traditional Aboriginal Australian life was based on a male/female division corresponding to a sacred/profane dichotomy. Using a woman-centred methodology, Gross maintained that Aboriginal women represent a “different kind of sacrality than that associated with males” (Gross, 1977: 147), one rooted in the somatic experiences of menstruation and birth, where the experiences themselves were felt to be religious and were therefore ritualised. Gross further claimed that these female experiences were used “in non-derogatory ways as bases for symbol and theology in men’s culture” (1151).

In a more contemporary context, Hannah Bell (1998) described the Indigenous perspective of the Ngarinyin people of the northwest Kimberley region of Western Australia:

Womb blood is necessary to feed the unborn, to give it identity, form and spiritual connectedness with the physical world it will soon enter ... Menstrual blood is considered very powerful because it is believed to create perfect human beings. It is unique to women, and its power is feared and revered by men. (23)

Moreover Bell (1998) noted that for the Ngarinyin people, gender relations are akin to right and left hands: physically and functionally different, but without hierarchy.

Southern India

In southern India, poetry from 2000 years ago depicted a sacred power (*ananku*) associated with women’s sexuality which was greatest during menarche and menstruation (Jenett, 2007: 1). Understood as the Goddess’s power, it warranted a time of seclusion and separation from others. Jenett (2007) noted: “The bodies of women in ancient Tamil Nadu/Kerala were considered particularly potent and full of *ananku* at menarche, during menstruation and after childbirth” (1). Goddess worship is still practiced in Kerala today with rituals to honour the menstrual flow, and the metaphor of the red earth signifying the womb of the Goddess (Jenett, 2007: 2). Savithri de Tourreil observed: “The

Nayar world view interprets menarche and menstruation as empowerment, as an onrush of sacred power, cyclical like the seasons, elemental and uniquely female” (qtd. in Jenett, 2007: 3).

The Navajo

For the Navajo people, the Kinaalda menarche ceremony was one of their most important celebrations and a key feature of their cosmology, agriculture and social life (Rutter, 1993: 39). Lasting five days, the whole community participated in this initiation through an elaborate sequence of songs and rituals that re-enacted the story of “Changing Woman,” the first menstruant, a female Deity, daughter of Mother Earth and Father Sky. The Kinaalda ceremony is wonderfully rich in its symbolism. For example, the initiate received a special kind of massage, known as “molding” from her mentor, during which she lay on a pile of blankets supplied by guests and family members so that the initiate’s touch would bless them. After the “molding,” the girl in her turn “stretched” the young children by moving her hands from the waist to the top of each child’s head, bestowing the blessing of healthy growth upon them (Rutter, 1993: 58).

In recognition of the girl’s vulnerability at this liminal time, the women elders gave continuous teaching and instruction in which negative thoughts, words or actions were prohibited: “Attributes of kindness, generosity and co-operation are repeatedly modeled for her and emphasized in her teaching” (Rutter, 1993: 63). Through this ceremony, the initiate learns that becoming a woman identifies her with the Goddess and she “awakens to a sense of her own feminine divinity when her people ceremonially endow her with symbolic items of jewellery, clothing and song” (40, 54). By the end of the ceremony, the initiate “who has ‘walked into beauty’ is entrusted to hold Changing Woman’s power as sacred” (67).

The cultural contexts of these Indigenous perspectives are local and specific to their own times and places, but they nonetheless model a spirituality that has relevance for contemporary Western women. Charlene Spretnak (1996) noted: “No matter what kinds of ‘social production’ shape gender within a culture, the physicality of the female body with its elemental capabilities (to grow people of either sex from one’s flesh, to bleed in rhythm with the moon, to transform food into milk for infants) is a core reality to which culture responds” (323). My personal experience of menarche as a spiritual awakening did not receive any external validation at the time, but was affirmed by learning about these Indigenous traditions. As my daughter grew towards puberty and menarche, I felt a moral imperative to provide her with an understanding of the potentially sacred significance of menstruation.

A personal mother/daughter story of menarche

Over the last few years, my daughter and I have had many conversations about changes in body shape, different body parts, puberty, menstruation and

sex. From the time she was born, Caitlin has seen my workbooks lying around the house—anatomy and physiology texts, fertility books and birth videos, charts and diagrams. She has always known the correct anatomical words for her body parts, inside and out, and she has grown up seeing both her father and me naked and comfortable in our own flesh.

However, in recent months there have been more questions about strange new sensations inside her body, about desire and sexual difference, and about the challenges—hormonal, emotional, and physical—of what is happening for her at this special time in her life. The mystery of her transformation into a young woman has been accelerating. Although we have had many intimate conversations and reassurances, I feel we need to create a more symbolic context in which we can couch the deeper meaning of her menstruation in a way that nourishes her soul and contributes to power of her spirit. So we set aside a time for a special talk together.

As Caitlin was born late in my life, we now find ourselves counterpoised at the polar ends of the menstrual continuum. As I negotiate the hormonal and psychic turbulence of the peri-menopause, Caitlin is undergoing puberty and menarche. She is maturing early, ahead of most of the girls in her class. My “little” girl’s body is blossoming into rounded hips and growing breast-buds and I am very proud of how she carries and conducts herself. Puberty came much later for me. I was fourteen before my first menstruation finally ushered me over its threshold. I had been waiting a long time and I will never forget the profound impact of that spiritual initiation....

When my best friend began menstruating at age eleven, she complained and moaned about the pain and the mess. One by one, the other girls in our class got their period too. They also moaned and complained, yet there was still the sense that they now belonged to a secret club from which I was excluded. I carried a pad in the bottom of my school bag, hoping to entice my bleed. The pad disintegrated and was replaced several times. Every day, I prayed for it to come; the waiting seemed interminable.

One year, two years, three years.... Brought up in a Catholic family, in desperation I made a plea bargain with God: “If you give me my bleed, I will NEVER moan or complain. I will treasure it as a gift for the rest of my life. Please let it come—soon!” Without understanding why, even at that age I had already intuited that menarche and menstruation were something auspicious. That vow, uttered from the depths of my young spirit, is something I have remembered and honoured ever since, and its implications continue to unfold in my life in ways I could never have foreseen then.

It was Christmas holidays—the summer of my 14th year. I was wearing a floral dress with an orange ruffle around the bottom. Magically, it appeared one day—the dark stain on my undies. I could hardly believe it! There was no pain, no cramping, no mess, just a quiet, gentle wetness. I was thrilled and my spirit soared. The wonder of this elusive process was at last happening to me and it inspired a deep sense of awe. Within myself, I felt infinitely proud, as though I had just stretched a foot

taller. The mystery of fertility, the conferring of womanhood, the power of biology, akin to the phases of the moon, the rise and fall of the tides, and the changing of the seasons—these were what my first menstruation signified for me.

Later that day, I went for a walk along the beach with my eldest sister, paddling in the water, chatting together. The unwieldy pad and belt were uncomfortable but I didn't care. I felt like I had been initiated into the innermost secrets of the Universe. My first menstruation seemed to expand my sense of self through a fundamental connection with nature to the heartbeat of all creation. In some enigmatic way, it meant I was involved with the greater, enduring processes of Life itself.

I received the gift of my menstruation with deep thankfulness and respect. Like sap in the trees, it quickened my soul, the sheer grace of it coursing through me, saturating my consciousness. As I matured, I knew I felt differently about my bleeding than my friends or family. There was no social or cultural validation of any kind for what I had experienced; it was a secret, personal appreciation. However, from that day on, I never forgot the blessedness of that first bleed, nor its spiritual power to transform....

As the mother of a pubescent girl approaching menarche, I feel the imperative to pass on that benediction to my daughter. Caitlin and I met for our special talk. To evoke an atmosphere of spirituality, I created a simple ritual by lighting a candle and setting it beside a spray of pink frangipanis. We snuggled up together on the couch and I invoked a simple prayer asking Spirit—and I named the Deity as “beautiful Mother Spirit”—to be present with us as we talked about menstruation. After our prayer, I walked her through the hormonal changes of puberty and the menstrual cycle—dipping first into one book, then another, to read a passage or show a picture. None of it was new to her; she volunteered much of the information herself, displaying her solid knowledge of the topic. But as we talked, I allowed my awe and wonder to become transparent. I spoke in soft, animated tones about the beauty of menstruation, and of how this blood is different to any other kind of blood—not like a cut finger or a nose bleed. This blood has the power to cradle new human life. It is really sacred.

I tell Caitlin that if it wasn't for the thickening of my uterine lining, she would not be here. Each one of us began our lives as a tiny cluster of cells burrowing into that rich, red lining, absorbing nourishment, oxygen, the right hormones and a safe place in which to incubate ourselves into fully formed human beings. I also tell her that when I was just a tiny embryo inside my mother's womb, I already carried one of the eggs that went on to become her, giving her a sense of her female genealogy.

We looked at colour photos of the endometrium, at fertilisation, implantation and the stages of pregnancy. She asked a few questions and displayed her knowledge as we talked. I spoke of the amazing power that is coming alive in her now, and told her that whether she decides to have children or not, her femaleness endows her with beautiful creative capacity. I talked about the

Navajo tradition, snippets of which she had heard many times before, and I told her again the story of my own menarche.

My daughter knew this was a different kind of conversation. As we finished talking, she smiled and gave a big sigh expressing a mixture of nostalgia for childhood, apprehension of the unknown and excited anticipation. “Can I play on your lap-top now?” she asked. It was time to move on! I laughed and gave her a hug, then put my hand gently across her belly and offered my homage: “May your menstruation always be a blessing for you and remind you of your connection to the Great Mother Spirit.”

Afterwards, I decided to begin a “menarche box” for Caitlin. When I was a little girl, my older sister kept a “glory box” in preparation for marriage: a wooden trunk containing new linen, utensils and other household items that she bought from time to time. I found a dark red wooden trunk, which is temporarily housed at a friend’s place—the same friend Caitlin has asked to be her mentor, a woman she likes very much and feels she can confide in. The menarche box contains a variety of practical and symbolic items which I add to as I find them: a quilt with varieties of red patterns made specifically for her menarche, some dark red towels embroidered with her name in blue silk, some colourful cloth menstrual pads, a beautiful set of red Russian dolls to symbolise her female genealogy, some ruby jewellery, a menarche journal, a funny book on womanhood, a red pillow in the shape of some lips with a small teddy-bear attached, a shell necklace and a rose quartz crystal.

We plan a special ceremony to honour Caitlin when her menarche comes, a ritual we will prepare together attended by some close friends—mothers and daughters—followed by a sumptuous meal and celebration. During the ceremony, I will surprise her with the menarche box which she knows nothing about. A tailor-made red satin curtain is waiting to decorate the room, along with red crepe paper, streamers and balloons. A few months ago when we were shopping, Caitlin saw a lovely red dress and asked if we could buy it for her ceremony, which we did. When she tells me that the girls at school say periods are “yucky,” I remind her that menstruation is sacred. She is excited and looking forward to her big day. When Caitlin “walks into beauty,” she knows she will be supported to embrace and honour her maturing femaleness and all it symbolises.

Conclusion

In the West, menstruation is struggling to break free of hundreds of years of patriarchal oppression. A key site of this labour is the family home and the mother-daughter relationship. Feminism has to be the vanguard of this struggle, for the sake of women to come and for the Earth itself. Arguing for a radical revision of feminism, Vicki Noble (2003) proclaimed:

Rather than trying to become just like men, proving that our perceived differences (like the menstrual cycle, and the fact that we are

capable of giving birth) are irrelevant and merely “constructed,” what I aim for as a feminist is no less than a reinstatement of our original biological right to rule this planet. What could be more timely in this hour of threatened planetary destruction at the hands of horrific male technologies of war? (12)

Whether we agree with her radical position or not, we have an obligation to reframe the significance of menstruation, especially at menarche, because of its critical role in shaping the meanings associated with womanhood. As mothers, we are ideally placed to enact a quiet revolution with our daughters in the privacy of our homes. Despite the maternal constraints discussed in this article, when mothers transform their own attitude to menstruation from an “unwanted” into a “valued and wanted” condition, the change can be contagious for their daughters and provide the ballast for secure identity formation. This personal transformation has a powerful ripple effect on successive generations and on others with whom we come into contact. “Walking into beauty” may hold the key to changing women’s position in our world for the better.

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Mothers and Daughters Finding Each Other Through Intercountry Adoption

Through a process of self-inquiry and narrative analysis this paper highlights the experiences of five mothers who adopted girls from China. Results from these narratives are discussed as a way to begin to understand the emotional process of intercountry adoption for both the children and the mothers. Commonalities and differences in the experiences of the adoptive mothers are delineated. Using the results from the narratives and relevant research, this paper delineates emerging themes showing how adoptive mothers often need to forge a new identity that entails a great deal of personal growth and reflection. Discussion arising from the emerging themes found in the narratives uses current resilience literature as well as Feminist perspectives to highlight how resilience plays an important part in both the adoptive mother's ability to adapt as well as the way in which children find new ways to assimilate to their new environment. The strength of the emotional attachment between the mother and child as well as becoming a multi-cultural family were integral protective factors leading towards building resilience. Resilience in both the adoptive mother and child is necessary in order for the new family unit to become a healthy, thriving and creative extension of the community. In addition, women's relational approach to personal and professional roles provided a secure family structure for these children.

Intercountry adoption is currently a topic of conversation at the coffee shop or in the media, due to “celebrities” now adopting children from other countries. It is also a way of parents finding children to adopt, as it has been increasingly hard to adopt children from within North America. Ironically, this is in part due to stricter regulations regarding adopting children of the same ethnic group or culture, although adopting from another country generally means bringing a child into a family from a different culture.

Due to the increasing interest in both the process and outcome of intercountry adoption, this paper examines the way in which mothers and daughters can become emotionally connected through this course of action. Through qualitative research completed with mothers that adopted girls from China, protective factors linking the strength of the emotional attachment between the mother and child to resiliency were discovered. Using the data gained through narratives, themes and clusters of themes were found that guided an understanding of how the data related to the issue of resilience. In particular two main topics or themes were found and a paradigm was developed to depict the relationship between these themes and resilience. The first main topic discovered was “Emotional Attachment.” Within this broad theme the sub-topics of “Becoming a mother,” “Family restructuring,” and “Caregiving” were found to be integral in supporting the positive emotional attachment of the mother and child. The second theme of becoming a “Multi-cultural family” had “Cultural identity” as a sub-topic and was also seen as a way in which the child could assimilate in a positive manner to her new environment.

Information from the literature on resilience as well as issues connected to caregiving and gender will be discussed as ways to understand how the emotional attachment between the mother and child progresses in these families. As well, the relational approach to personal and professional lives used by these mothers was found to play an important part in how well the children adapted to their new environment. This sense of cohesion within the family unit will be examined in conjunction with issues pertaining to protective factors and building resilience.

Background

In Canada from 1993 to 2003 approximately 19,500 children entered Canada for the purposes of adoption (CIC, 2004). Currently about 2000 children are adopted by Canadian citizens and permanent residents of Canada from other countries ever year (CIC, 2006). In the United States intercountry adoption has been in place since the 1950's. However there has been a dramatic increase of intercountry adoptions beginning in the 1990's (Stolley, 1993). While only a small portion of children in North America become part of our society in this way, children who are adopted from other countries often present unique challenges as well as exciting opportunities for growth in our society.

Research in the area of intercountry adoptions is a relatively new field of study in North America. Due to the increasing interest in intercountry adoptions, scholars are suggesting a need to understand the issues of attachment, acculturation, racism, and resilience of children adopted from other countries. For example, Emily Noonan (2007) states that “the practice of transnational adoption needs to be analyzed for the ways it is embedded in the globalization of capital, people, cultures, and ideologies” (651). Other authors attempt to

examine the sociohistorical circumstances and inequities that make intercountry adoption possible (Dorow, 2006). Drucilla Cornell (2007) writes about the need to honor and recognize the rights of the biological mother. However, when the child is an orphan, as they are when they come from China, there is no information available on the biological parents. Therefore, we do not have any written documentation to give to the child about her birth mother. This does not preclude us, as mothers, from honoring the child's biological mother in the form of storytelling or finding other ways of helping the child understand the importance of this "other" mother.

From a less macro perspective, Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Lynn Gidluck (2007) have recently completed research in the area of mothering children adopted from China. Some of their results show the paradoxes inherent in North American's understanding of mothering a child from a different culture and country. For example, through their research they found that many mothers had not considered how the differences in ethnicity between them and their daughters would impact on their daily lives.

Resilience

Over the past few decades the study of resilience, often defined as the ability to successfully adapt to a crisis or "bounce back from adversity," has propelled researchers into considering which characteristics or attributes of children allow them to adapt to new situations. Anne Masten (2001) suggests that resilience is common and usually arises from the normative functions of human adaptational systems (227). Protective factors in a person's environment help to ameliorate stressful life events. Roberta Greene (2002) suggests three primary characteristics associated with protective factors. They are: "(1) personal disposition, i.e., positive temperament, social responsiveness, ability, and self-esteem; (2) a supportive family milieu, including warmth and cohesion; and (3) an extrafamilial social environment that rewards competence and reinforces belief systems" (34). Another approach to understanding resilience is seen through the work of Froma Walsh (1998, 2002). She has suggested a family resilience framework. The term "family resilience refers to coping and adaptational processes in the family as a functional unit" (Walsh, 1998: 14). Within the family resilience model, it is family processes that predict resiliency, i.e., family belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes.

Questions about the normative functions in intercountry adoptive families and how families restructure and adapt to change can help to inform our understanding of mother-daughter attachment and how it is connected to resilience. Identifying specific protective factors for families can lead to a better understanding of how to "build resilience" in these families. More research is needed to explore the ways in which children from other countries connect with their new mothers as well as how these attachments allow the children to exhibit resilient characteristics. Understanding attributes and precursors

of resiliency provides policy makers with information to institute programs and resources needed in order to build resilience in children and other family members. Results from research in this area can also inform potential and current mothers of how to help establish positive and sustaining relationships with their daughters.

The research process

As a mother of a child from China and a scholar interested in the area of resilience, I engaged in a self-inquiry in an attempt to understand issues associated with mothering a child from a different country. Following Adra Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2000) work, I believe that reflexive self-inquiry makes a significant contribution to knowledge creation, in that it provides an avenue from which a researcher can analyze his/her own experience within the context of society's interlocking structures of power, gender, race and class. Further, by placing myself in the position of a research participant, the hierarchical relationship is reduced that often exists between researchers and those researched, as well as providing a way for the participants to become more empowered (Kirby and McKenna, 2006; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Thus, I participated in this study by completing my own narrative. Four other mothers of children from China were also asked to be part of this study. They all live with their daughters in various provinces in Canada. Some of them are single parents and others have partners that are also parents to these children. All of the mothers were over thirty years of age as this is one of the requirements for adopting from China. In this sample, all of the mothers were over forty years of age when they wrote an account of their experiences. All of their children were under ten years of age.

I passed on my self-inquiry to these other mothers a way of introducing some of the issues and ideas that had emerged from my experiences. Through their self-inquiries they wrote their accounts of how their lives had changed due to the advent of their daughters. They were asked to comment on various issues of mothering including: caregiving, economic issues, social support networks, cross-cultural implications, and family restructuring. Through their narratives they discussed all of these issues as well as highlighting the emotional components of becoming a mother and the complexities inherent in this form of mothering.

Results

The following themes that emerged from the data provide a way to begin to understand how resilience in family members is linked to both emotional attachment and becoming a multi-cultural family. Figure I on the following page shows how the themes are interrelated as well as related to resiliency through a paradigm. The following descriptions of the themes highlighted through narratives of the mothers demonstrate the way in which these mothers and children have found ways to adapt and become resilient. These two main

themes or categories are “Emotional Attachment” and “Becoming a Multi-cultural Family.” Sub-topics within each main category are used to further understand the strength of these themes.

Emotional attachment

Although the mothers discussed various themes suggested to them, they gravitated to particular issues that had been challenging, rewarding or that dominated their journey. One recurring theme was the intensity of the relationships between the mothers and daughters, the emotional attachment between the mother and child. As well, issues associated with “Becoming a Mother,” “Family Restructuring” and “Caregiving” were related to the idea of mothers and daughters becoming attached emotionally to one another. While emotional attachment is often discussed in conjunction with motherhood, mothers who adopt often seem unprepared for the intensity of the reciprocal emotional attachment between themselves and their daughters. This is exemplified through many of the mother’s narratives. One mother wrote, “*I can’t believe how much I have come to adore my daughter. She is also very attached to me. I call her my ‘velcro child’ as she is never far from me when we are together.*” Another mother simply wrote, “*Our daughter is clearly as madly in love with us as we are with her.*”

Becoming a mother

It became apparent that the decision to become a mother was often associated with the decision to adopt a child from another country. One of the mothers wrote, “*After much soul searching my husband and I realized we do not live in a perfect world. Therefore, the question to adopt from China became less about the legitimacy of cross-racial adoptions than about filling needs, both ours and hers.*” Other mothers discussed the issue of infertility and how they had struggled with that issue. Yet other mothers were single and did not have the option of becoming a biological parent. Adoption was an alternative for all of these women. Intercountry adoption seemed to be a faster way to locate a child as the wait lists for provincial adoptions are often long, some of them having a ten-year waiting list. To illustrate this point one woman wrote, “*My decision to adopt a child from China was based partially on wanting a girl and partially on knowing that I was too old to be eligible to receive a child from Canada due to wait-lists.*”

One of the mothers made her decision to become a mother at later in her life based partially on a past experience visiting China. She stated,

I chose China as an adoptive country for several reasons. I traveled there in 1987 and visited an orphanage as part of a tour package. The stark conditions and over-crowding made a lasting impression on me. I really felt my maternal instincts emerge and since then have felt a special bond with children of Chinese heritage.

Family restructuring

Many of the mothers commented on how drastically their lives had changed with the advent of their daughter. They expressed feelings of surprise, joy, exhaustion, and thankfulness in how much their daughter had changed their family structure. The following two examples from the narratives show how their family has been restructured with many family members benefiting from this new structure.

One of the mother's wrote,

My daughter's presence has brought a new dimension to the relationship between my partner, his children, his father and his sister and I, as well as to their own relationships. My daughter is a combination daughter/granddaughter and is the only grandchild in the extended family structure.

Another mother wrote,

As is the case with most parents of young children, the time my husband and I have for each other has changed dramatically. However, our marriage has not been strained by the demands of childrearing: the addition of a child has enriched our lives together more than we possibly could have anticipated.

Many of the mothers spoke about some of the changes in lifestyle and the additional monetary costs of caring for an additional person in the household. While they did not see it as a burden, they did see monetary issues as needing to be addressed within the restructuring of the family unit. For example, one mother has been able to be a "stay at home mom" since the adoption of her daughter. Another has changed her lifestyle to enable her to work part-time along with spending more time working from her home. Yet another mother took on various part-time employment opportunities in order to incorporate her daughter's schedule of child-care. While these changes are not unique to intercountry adoption, they do suggest that the mothers have prepared themselves for a dramatic shift in lifestyle in order to ensure their daughters have a feeling of security within the family unit by being able to spend more time with them.

Caregiving

While some of the issues of caregiving have been implicit while discussing the other themes, i.e., mothers changing their work schedules to incorporate caring for their daughter, this issue was discussed at some length by some of the mothers. Many of the mothers have taken on the primary role in caregiving, even if another parent was part of the family structure. For example, one of the mothers said, "Even though I now have a full-time job, as does my husband, I still have the majority of the caregiving responsibilities, i.e., making decisions about

our daughter's childcare, buying clothes, ensuring doctor's appointments are made." Another mother wrote, *"While it is obvious that my daughter and her father have a positive relationship, I still provide the majority of the caregiving to my daughter."* As well, as two of the mothers were single parents, they were the sole providers of both the emotional and physical care for their daughters. The single parents were more apt to talk about their social support networks and how important they were in helping them with specific tasks. They often used more childcare resources and/or family support systems. Support systems were discussed only briefly by these mothers. Many of them did not have many extended family members living in the same vicinity. Others talked about creating new networks for themselves and their children by becoming involved with the Chinese community or other parents who had also adopted from China. The mothers who needed to work outside the home, either on a full-time or part-time basis discussed using more formal support networks, e.g., home daycare or pre-school alternatives.

Multi-cultural family

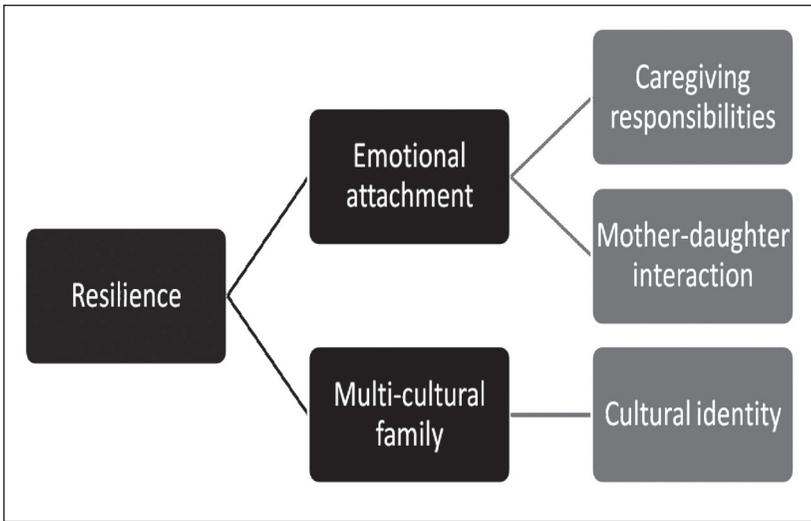
Becoming a multi-cultural family was another major topic found through the analysis of the data. The way in which the family adapts to the addition of a child from another country was seen through the ways the parents incorporated the child's biological cultural identity. The ability of the family to restructure itself around a different culture appears to have a high impact on how well the child can adapt to a new culture. This is a protective factor and builds resilience in the child as well as within the new family structure.

Cultural identity

All of the women discussed how important it was for them to find ways to have their daughters exposed to as well as be part of their culture of origin. This included taking them to play groups in which other adopted children from China were present, having the child take Mandarin lessons or ensuring the entire family took part in Chinese holidays or other cultural celebrations. The mothers disclosed some positive experiences for the children as well as some challenges they felt their children had to overcome with respect to cultural integration. For example, one mother stated, *"It is very clear that our daughter loves being in Mandarin language classes and fully understands the differences in appearances between Chinese people and others. She does not put any values on these differences, but simply sees them as differences."* Another mother stated, *"Although we have not encountered any overt discrimination, my daughter has said she feels, 'different' from her classmates. She seems to sense that some of her peers would rather not spend time with her and thinks it is because she is different."*

Discussion

Figure 1 shows the pathway in which resilience can grow. As is depicted in this paradigm resiliency is a bi-lateral process that flows from the intensity



*Figure 1: Paradigm
Promoting Resilience through Mother-Child Attachment*

of the emotional attachment that is tied to the level of the mother-daughter interaction and grows from the caregiving responsibilities of the mother. From a feminist perspective, caregiving needs to be addressed due to the way in which society perceives it as being a woman's job. For example, Nancy Hooyman and Judith Gonyea (1995) indicate that society identifies caregiving as a women's issue, and in doing so overlooks the fact that it is a social problem. In these women's narratives caregiving was seen as a way to help the family adapt, restructure and to promote the changes needed in order for their daughters to feel secure. Building on a feminist perspective, questions need to be asked with respect to why these mothers took on the majority of this role and responsibility. For example, could the fathers have taken on a larger role to ensure the attachment of the child was in place through providing more of the caregiving? Was it just assumed that the mother would carry out the larger caregiving role due to decreased outside work demands? Further, does the resilience of the child and new family structure depend on the mother assuming the larger caregiving and emotional nurturance role?

The other aspect of this paradigm shows how the resilience of the child can be tied to the family becoming a multi-cultural family. As families incorporate cultural elements into their day-to-day lives, this allows the child to tap into external resources, such as the local Chinese community or Chinese cultural centre, in order to exhibit resilient attributes of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Allowing the child a way to embrace part of her heritage also helps her find ways to use protective factors and build her resilience.

In order to gain a better understanding of the interrelationships of the above-mentioned themes, information from the work of Pauline Boss (2002)

was examined. Part of her approach suggests that we need to highlight the importance of perception and meaning in determining how and why families respond in a resilient manner. Using this contextual approach we can see how resilience, or the ability to adapt to a new situation, is part of how these families live. An example is again pulled from the narratives of the mothers. Due to prior home studies needed to complete the intercountry adoption process, these mothers had to articulate how and why they wanted to adopt a child from a different country. This allowed for introspection and a way to begin highlighting issues that needed to be addressed in order to incorporate a child from another culture into their current family structure. As an example, one mother stated, "In retrospect we have come to appreciate just how valuable was the reflection asked of us by our social worker as to what kind of parents we wanted to be and what our chief aspirations for our daughter were." In other words, resilience can be viewed, as suggested by Boss (2002), as a process that implies growth, as well as being stronger for having had the experience (4). These families have all adapted to their new family situation by finding and creating new problem solving and coping mechanisms. Evidence of this is seen through the writings of these mothers. They all discuss the exciting process of going to China, meeting their daughters, and then growing stronger as a family unit by finding solutions for many of the challenges of parenting a child from a different country. Although issues of attachment and caregiving are identified as needing more attention due to the developmental needs of an older infant or child, these mothers all found ways of overcoming these challenges. Many of them did so by changing their own lifestyles and career directions in order to spend more time with their daughters that in turn, allowed their daughters to feel more secure in their new environment. As well, all of these mothers have attempted to incorporate their daughter's original culture into the dominant family structure, thereby creating a multi-cultural family. As one mother explained, "*Although we created a cross-cultural family when we picked up our daughter from China, as we began to identify and incorporate Chinese traditions, occasions and language into our lives, we now see ourselves as a multi-cultural family.*"

Implications

Due to the increased interest in intercountry adoptions this topic is fast becoming an area of scholarly and personal interest. Although the information obtained from the mother's narratives only represents a small sample of those who have adopted from other countries, it provides us with a starting point for those interested in the emotional processes of various family members involved in intercountry adoption.

The relational approach to personal and professional lives used by these mothers appears to be integral to building resilience in both the child and the family unit. How these mothers were able to strengthen both their informal and formal support networks, as well as changing their lifestyles, allowed

them to find ways of providing time for their daughters to feel secure. In other words they provided a sense of cohesion to their family unit, which has been shown to be tied to adaptive functioning and resiliency. It is also interesting to note that all of these mothers were mature women, well-educated, and able to adapt and cope with new situations. These qualities helped them to understand their daughter's needs as well as providing a secure and positive home environment.

This study has shown that through intercountry adoption mothers and daughters find each other, as well as falling madly in love with each other. The emotional experiences of both the mother and daughter appear to be fascinating and exhilarating. As one mother stated,

I love my child more than I ever thought possible to love anyone and I know that my daughter loves me just as much." But it didn't start that way. When we first met each other in China, she couldn't stop crying and didn't want to have anything to do with me for two days. I wasn't sure if I had done the right thing by going to China and taking her away from her foster parent. Who could have imagined how drastically feelings can change?

The other side of this issue is how the child will understand issues associated with her "other" mother as she grows older and begins to have questions about her birth family and why she was taken to a different country. Information gained from this study may help us as mothers of these children. We know that "building resilience" and maintaining a cohesive family unit can help our daughters feel secure, loved and able to adapt to new situations as well as stressful life events. In this case part of building resilience for our children means giving them access to Chinese culture and community, building their self-esteem and self-efficacy, and finding ways to enhance both their internal and external resources. Building resilience as a family unit means communicating openly about the intercountry adoption process as well as honoring the "other" mother through discussions and storytelling.

As is seen through the self-inquires of the mothers involved in this study, children adopted from other countries can do well in terms of attachment, adaptation and feeling loved and secure, if the mother builds on protective factors that allow the child and other family members to exhibit resilient behavior. While this study only begins to examine how themes emerging from the narratives are interconnected, it provides some insights into how connected these mothers become to their daughters and why they feel they have "found each other."

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Accessing Mother Within A Study of Midlife Daughters' Use of Maternal Belongings in Mourning

This qualitative study, using a phenomenological approach explored the use of physical objects (maternal possessions) in mourning by midlife daughters after their mother's expected deaths. This facilitated the acquisition of a deeper understanding and a greater knowledge of the daughters' intentions and their lived experience. The study questions were: 1) How do midlife daughters describe their use of objects in their mourning process? 2) Is there a role that physical objects serve in an internalization process? Twelve midlife women participated in in-depth interviews which were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. In the analysis, particular attention was directed toward understanding object descriptions and meanings. The analysis revealed three broad thematic categories: 1) overarching themes related to object use 2) relational themes related to object use and 3) internalization themes related to object use. The third broad category of internalization themes will be discussed herein. It is suggested that object use in mourning assists daughters in their construction of an internalized relatedness with their deceased mother through a psychodynamic understanding of introjected maternal dimensions and a process of maternal identification.

The loss of a loved one challenges the emotional frontiers of any person's experience. For mid-life daughters whose mothers have died, this challenging journey of loss is often a journey of substantial sadness, with daughters articulating being dramatically changed by their mother's deaths (Lutovich, 2002; Edelman, 1994). For some time, moving forward with life may be difficult, as these women negotiate the shadows of their sorrows.

In an effort to cope with this emotional turmoil, mourners may embark on a creative search for solace in physical objects (things) that belonged to the deceased with specific maternal belongings becoming increasingly important. The significance and origins of interest in physical objects is

worthy of investigative inquiry, as very little is known about this behaviour, yet evidence of mourners reaching to and finding comfort in the belongings of their deceased abounds.

Parental mourning and gender

The scope of this exploration was limited to adult female participants as there was substantiating empirical evidence that males and females mourn differently (Moss, Rubinstein, and Moss, 1997; Stroebe, 1998; McGoldrick, 2004). Miriam Moss et al. (1993) adds to our understanding by defining female maternal bereavement as marked by the central dynamics of holding on and letting go. The research suggests that daughters do “hold on” (13) to their deceased mothers as evidenced by the existence of comforting thoughts/memories and the continuation of internalized interactions. Substantiating the female grief experience as requiring the formation of a internalized maternal presence, Pamela Deitrich et al. (1999) highlighted maternal loss as representing the loss of a relationship that had unique meaning for daughters since so much of a daughter’s personal development was profoundly and uniquely shaped by this first intimate relationship (Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1978). Thus, for these women the “formation of their mothers as an ongoing presence in their lives constituted the full work of mourning as the women rebuilt their inner worlds and continued on with their own development” (93). Thus we see here, women’s experience of parental bereavement as being more intensely shaped by a need for continuing ties and inner relatedness. These studies suggest ongoing internal relatedness as crucial to female mourning, and it is suggested that the use of maternal objects may facilitate this inner maternal transformation.

Physical object use

Theoretical understandings of the use of objects in mourning can be obtained by reviewing the writings of Vamik Volkan (1981) and Donald Winnicott (1971). Volkan (1981) was the first to identify the phenomenon wherein physical objects of the deceased became significant to mourners and coined his own theoretical term “linking objects” in his quest for meaning and understanding of this behaviour. According to Volkan (1981) the use of objects was often a harbinger of a complicated mourning process. He maintained that the adoption of a linking object served to keep what was a complicated grief process, frozen in an unresolved state, while at the same time the object protected the mourner from a massive depressive episode.

In contrast, the writings of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1971) suggest that the use of objects in mourning may be linked with children’s acquisition of “transitional objects” in their early life. Transitional objects are those possessions that young children choose to attach themselves to, and are usually secured at the point in time of their early development when mother is less available at the initiation of their states of separateness i.e. teddy bears,

blankets. It could be suggested that the use of physical objects in mourning may in some way be indicative of a regression that is summoning patterns set in infancy. As Winnicott (1971) conveyed, “a need for a specific object or a behavior pattern that started at a very early date may reappear at a later age when deprivation threatens” (232). Using the thoughts detailed above, previous understandings of object use in mourning situate the behaviour as either a harbinger of a complicated mourning process or as a regression to patterns set in early life.

Other understandings are offered by anthropologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (1981). Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1981) conducted extensive research related to understanding people’s attachment to things. While this study did not incorporate a mourning context, it did look extensively at the meaning of special things to people and the interplay between domestic symbols and the self. Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1981) found that individuals repeatedly found meaning in the objects that surrounded them with most of their participants cherishing at least one object because it reminded them of a close relative. Photographs in particular were items that were identified repeatedly for their significance in the lives of the individuals in their study. They state: “because they bear the actual image of a departed kin, they can acquire an almost mystical identification with the deceased person” (69). Here the researchers suggest the importance of photographs to the kin of the departed for the processes of identification. This idea was re-iterated by Deitrich et al. (1999) wherein the use of “*remembrances*” (89) was mentioned as a means by which the daughters kept their mothers near. Physical objects thus served to assist the daughter in maintaining affiliation, a vital affiliation that reflected a “strong sense of continued need for identification with and attachment to mother” (89).

Inese Wheeler’s descriptive study (1999) looked at the function of linking objects for bereaved parents. The majority of her study’s respondents reported having some kind of linking object that assisted them in their bereavement. “Seventy-eight percent of the parents reported one or more objects, with eighty-six percent of females reporting objects” (292). Here the presence of linking objects was evidenced as a response to bereavement when faced with the loss of a child, with female parents in particular using objects in grief. How these objects were used was also assessed in this study. Wheeler (1999) concluded that bereaved parents often had the object centrally located and interacted with their objects intimately. The study demonstrated that “the parent’s evaluation of their objects was more positive than negative, with parents strongly identifying the object made them feel connected with the deceased child” (295).

In summary, previous literature has defined the use of objects in mourning as suggestive of complicated mourning (Volkan, 1981), a return to regressive patterns set in early childhood (Winnicott, 1971) and/or facilitative of an internal connection or identification with the deceased (Csikszentmihalyi, 1981;

Deitrich et al. 1999; Wheeler, 1999) with women, in general, being more likely to access object use (Wheeler, 1999). However, the subjective experience of object use in mourning by midlife daughters who have lost their mother has not been described and researched previously.

The specific research questions for this study were:

1. How do midlife daughters describe their use of physical objects in their mourning process?
2. Is there a role that physical objects serve in an internalization process?

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover and explore the unique and common understandings of women in regard to their use of physical objects in their mourning experiences after the expected death of their mothers. Assuming an interpretive phenomenological approach, knowledge of the lived experience of these individuals and their intentions within their mourning processes was sought. Phenomenological methodology was used to engage participants, as it promotes reflection and explication of the participants' lived experience (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). This methodology allows for a description of the meaning of the lived experience, (in this case the use of objects in maternal mourning) through the shared essences among participants. This method then uses language to interpret the connotations of the participants' experiences.

Sample

The sample was a maximum variation sample consisting of 12 mid-life women. These women self-identified their interest in participating in the study from recruitment flyers posted in the waiting areas of two local counseling centers and a regional cancer center. In keeping with the study's request for mid-life participants, the participants ranged in age from 39-60 years of age with a mean age of 48 years. The mean age of the mothers at the time of their deaths was 74 years, with a range of 57-93 years. On average, the participants' mothers had been deceased for six years with a range of two to twelve years at the time of the study.

The socio-economic status of the participants was broadly distributed. Of the twelve participants, three identified themselves as being upper-middle class, five identified themselves as middle class, and four identified themselves as living in poverty. There was little racial and sexual diversity within the sample, with all twelve participants identifying themselves as Caucasian. Eleven of the participants identified as heterosexual, with one participant identifying herself as lesbian. The marital status of the participants included six participants who were currently single, five who identified themselves as married, and one was living common-law.

Data collection and analysis

All the interviews were conducted in the participant's homes at their convenience. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by an independent transcriber. Each transcript was then independently reviewed and coded by the authors to determine key concepts and/or themes emerging from the data. The next step in the analysis involved a meeting of the researchers to compare and contrast their independent coding, culminating in a consensus that informed the development of the coding template. Emergent themes were identified and highlighted along with expressive quotes that were exemplary in their content. The techniques of immersion and crystallization as detailed by Benjamin Crabtree and William Miller (1999) were used throughout the analysis. Theme saturation was achieved by the twelfth interview. The data was managed through the transfer of information onto chart paper enhanced by colored markers which hi-lighted transcript data, narrative data, identified objects, meanings and all other relevant information. This facilitated the easy recognition of themes as the data was visually present simultaneously.

Findings

Description of identified objects

An initial analysis of the transcribed data revealed the specific objects of mourning that the daughters identified. Physical objects that were repeatedly mentioned for their significance to mourning included: maternal jewelry, photographs, maternal clothing, crocheted/knitted articles, furniture, blankets, china/figurines, food-related objects (including cooking implements, food objects connected to special events and mealtime rituals) and mourning artifacts i.e. Christian crosses. These items proved to be the broad object-specific categorizations that were used in the initial construction of a template to organize and identify the emerging thematic categories.

From these broad categories, repeating themes and understandings emerged. Through a line-by-line analysis, and a member-checking process (Crabtree and Miller, 1999), categories and condensed template structures were constructed, which more comprehensively described the meanings identified. The thematic analysis moved from the literal identification of objects to three final thematic categories. These three categories were: 1) overarching themes; 2) relational themes; 3) internalization themes. It is the third theme, that of internalization that will be more fully elucidated within this article.

Internalization as self-soothing introject: Accessing the maternal

Many of the daughters identified using physical objects in mourning as a means to soothe their emotional distress. These objects fostered or assisted the daughter's capacity to self-soothe in the face of the emotional reactions associated with their grief. The participants' use of maternal belongings appeared to assist them in accessing the self-soothing capacities or character-

istics of mother which they had taken inside themselves. In psychodynamic terms this process can be viewed as an introjection. Joan Berzoff (1996) defines an introjection as an often unconscious internalization of aspects of significant persons within the self in such a way that the internalized representation takes over functions of the external person. (152). Physical objects thus served as a vehicle that transported the daughter to introjected aspects of her mother, ultimately inducing soothing dimensions of comfort, protection, warmth or care that the daughter could then access for herself in the face of her grief.

The use of physical objects to self-soothe by accessing introjected aspects of mother appeared to be most acute in the early mourning period. With the passage of time, these maternal belongings were not necessarily used with the same intensity or frequency. The more acute the emotional distress, the greater the frequency the daughter would call upon the self-soothing properties of the maternal belongings in her efforts to soothe her internal distress.

For example, one participant identified having taken a blanket from her mother's home to her mother in hospital. Her mother had died with this same blanket on her. For this participant the blanket held a particular smell of both her mother's house and of her mother, which was very important to her. She explained:

It's her house, the smell. It's her. If I'm feeling upset, more so at night or have a funny feeling – I take the blanket. I sleep with it because I can smell it... When I'm grieving a lot at night time, before I go to bed, if I'm really missing and grieving her in that moment, then I'll usually take the blanket out. It literally makes me think that everything's okay.

Here we see a daughter who takes out the blanket in periods of emotional distress. She finds some measure of comfort and soothing in accessing the blanket's scent as it transports her to the familiar, and to mother herself. It is suggested the blanket transports her to the introjected dimensions of her mother that calm and soothe her.

Another participant identified a crocheted afghan as a significant object in her mourning process. The crocheted afghan was given to her by her mother. Her mother had created it some 28 years previously, upon the birth of one of the participant's children. Of the afghan she shared:

I would shroud in it before. It was protection. I wanted to ward off everything—the world; the pain; the hurt; the tears; everything you know. Not even realizing that I had to go through those things in order to get out the other side.... So I think now when I wrap myself in this blanket its about the essence in me that's the warmth from my mom and not so much a protection as I needed once.

This participant no longer “*shrouded*” herself in this blanket and no longer did she require its’ protection from the world around her. The afghan’s significance shifted from being that of protection to an object of mourning where she found some accessibility to the warmth inside herself that she had been introjected from her mother. She stated:

For me no matter whether I put it [the afghan] in the washing machine I still feel warm. You know, I still feel her essence and her warmth. Then I came to realize that that essence comes from me.

The participant attempted to convey that over time she has realized that it is not so much the afghan but something inside of herself that allowed her to feel “warm.” The afghan assisted her to viscerally access “warm” feelings but she now realized that the feeling was always inside herself.

Another participant identified her mother’s clothing as objects that evoked soothing for her. In the acute phase of her mourning, shortly after her mother’s death, the participant identified that she used to have all of her mother’s clothes in her own closet. She stated:

I took my mother’s clothes, like these wild dresses that she used to wear... I dispersed them throughout my closet. That’s what I did. I thought this is pretty weird, but I could go in and just smell my mother being there... And I just needed to do that, and it felt great. One day there I just took them out. I cleaned out my closets out and gave the clothes to the shelter or Goodwill or whomever, and I was fine with that.

This quote demonstrates the soothing introjected presence that comes from the scent of her mother’s clothing is something this participant needed to access in the early experience of her grief.

For another participant clothing was once again identified as important to her own mourning process because of feelings of comfort she experienced from actually wearing a housecoat that belonged to her mother. She explained:

I feel so cozy and I feel close to mom. I can picture her. She used to sit on the couch with her arm on the couch and knit, in her housecoat with the cat curled up at her feet. And that’s how I picture my mom when I wear that housecoat. You know, it just brings back that family secure feeling of me and my mom.

Here the dimensions of meaning in this article of clothing are revealed. The housecoat provides access to cozy and close feelings of security that suggest maternal introjects, accessible through object use and less accessible otherwise.

Thus we see here examples of physical objects in mourning that were very

diverse in their composition and yet similar in their function. All the objects stimulated the daughter's senses in a manner that evoked feelings of security, warmth, comfort, or closeness. Eliciting these feelings soothed the mourner, as the maternal possessions provided the daughter access to her own introjected dimensions of mother. In this manner, the physical objects provided access to the maternal introjection, internalized for the provision of self-soothing in the midst of grief.

Internalization as identification: My mother and myself

For some participants physical objects evoked an internalization process of maternal identification. Berzoff (1996) defines identification as when "selective and valued parts of another are internalized" (152). In these daughters, identification was evidenced in the daughters assuming the qualities or characteristics of their mothers. This was most poignantly evidenced in one participant's interaction with a unique wooden chair that had belonged to her mother. She shared:

There was a long time [three years] when I couldn't really look at it or sit in it or anything. This [the chair] feels good now. It's an important part of the house now and my life. It feels good. . . . The chair was hidden in a corner and no one ever sat in it or used it—ever. Now we always pull it out and use it a lot. . . . It's nice, and when I sit in the chair I feel like my mother, and then I sit like my mother. I sit like this in that chair [strikes a pose that was her mother's]. And then I say "Oh my God—it's my mother."

This quote powerfully illuminates the maternal identification that exists within this participant. The wooden chair was strongly associated with her mother, and now she herself felt like her mother when she used it, even striking the same maternal pose when sitting in it. It seemed that the chair's capacity to elicit a maternal identification had always existed, however it was too painful for the participant to bear in the early years of her loss. Five years had passed since the loss of her mother, and she now interacted with the chair much differently. No longer did the chair need to be hidden. It was now given a place of prominence from which the participant derived pleasure in her maternal identification.

Another maternal identification was evidenced in one participant's interaction with a china figurine. This participant shared that one of her important objects of mourning was a little china girl figurine dressed in a red coat. The figurine's significance was rooted in the fact that she remembered being entranced by it during her childhood, and that her mother let her play with it, despite its fragility. She inherited the figurine after her mother's death. She stated: "It was something that she [mother] treasured so therefore I cherish it. If it had meant nothing to her it would not be as special to me." Here an identification with mother was apparent in this participant's choice to cherish that which

was treasured by her mother. Not only did she emotionally treasure it, but she also identified with mother in the placement of this object in her home. The participant placed the figurine on the fireplace mantle of her home, mirroring the same spot that her mother had placed it some 45 years previously in the home of her childhood. Treasuring the same object that her mother did, and placing it in the same spot as her mother had evidenced a maternal identification. This serves to illuminate the dimensions of identification as internalization that are operative in these daughters' mourning processes.

Conclusions

This phenomenological study sought to better understand the use of objects in mourning by midlife daughters as they encountered their biological mother's expected deaths. Of particular focus was how objects assisted these daughters in their creation of a sustaining internalized relatedness. For the purpose of this study, these references to internalization were conceptualized utilizing the psychodynamic understandings of introjection and identification. It was apparent that object use for these daughters was not indicative of complicated mourning processes as detailed by Volkan (1981), nor did the daughters' object use seem to reflect Winnicott's (1971) transitional objects.

The idea of physical objects functioning to assist in the creation of a sustained internalized relatedness is incongruent with Sigmund Freud's (1917) early ideas about mourning, as he postulated that the function of "identification, when it occurs, was to facilitate the work of detachment" (Gaines, 1997: 552). However, Anna Freud, in her own private correspondences to friends after the death of her famous father, suggested the necessity for some kind of identification. She suggested that mourning could only be made bearable "by the moments...when one feels fleetingly that the lost person has entered into one and that there is a gain somewhere which denies death" (Young-Bruel, 1988; 314). Therein, Anna Freud substantiates the idea of the necessity for a process of identification to occur in mourning; Identification being one means by which the deceased other is internalized, fostering the ongoing internalized construction of a different relatedness.

As described, objects that functioned as maternal introjects were objects that seemed to offer a self-soothing function for the mourner. Often this soothing was required when the participant was particularly sad or vulnerable in her grief. Catherine Sanders (1999) described the use of self-soothing objects as evident in Colin Murray Parkes' (1972) "Searching and Pining Stage of Mourning." Sanders (1999) contended that it was during the searching and pining stage of mourning that the mourner felt drawn towards places or things associated with their lost loved one. Sanders (1999) described touching or wearing the clothing of the deceased, or displaying prominent objects of special reverence in places where the deceased preferred to be as behaviors that were evidenced during this searching phase. Whether the behavior induced a self-soothing introject, as is the interpretation of this study, or was more reflective of the

mourner's need to search for the loved one who had been lost to them, the behavior still functions from both perspectives to soothe the mourner in the face of affective turmoil. As such, congruence between object use as a means to self-soothing is noted. Incongruence exists around interpretations of the behavior along theoretical lines. Did the use of objects stimulate a self-soothing maternal introject or did this behavior fulfill a searching requirement as detailed in Parkes (1972) mourning stages? The interpretation of such behavior exists with the mourner.

Congruent with this study's findings is the work of Dennis Klass (1993). Klass' study identified the use of objects in mourning as necessary for the solace that they offered the bereaved. Klass (1993) viewed the use of objects as a means by which a sense of the presence of the deceased was created, which induced feelings of solace. The physical object also induced solace by maintaining the inner representation of the loved one. While Klass (1993) didn't specifically identify this sense of presence or the maintenance of an inner representation of the loved one as a maternal introject or a maternal identification, he is clearly talking about similar comforting dimensions of internalization that are stimulated with object use.

Therein, analysis of this study's findings suggest that object use for these daughters is very much associated with the stimulation of internalized dimensions of the deceased mother, with these internalized dimensions being critical to the daughter as she negotiates an internalized accessing of a relationship that was and remains vital in the ongoing formation and development of herself.

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Surviving My Mother's Legacy

Patriarchy, Colonialism, and Domestic Violence in Lee Maracle's Daughters are Forever

*This paper examines the role of the mother figure in Native Canadian women's fiction. Lee Maracle's *Daughters are Forever* addresses the issue of multiple marginalization experienced by Native women, and explores the violent impact of Western patriarchy and colonialism on the relationship between mothers and daughters in Aboriginal societies. Maracle's text demonstrates a link between the mother's legacy, cultural legacy and the legacy of trauma experienced by Native women in the past and in the twenty-first century. Specifically, Maracle's text exposes the socio-cultural and historical processes and structures that have shaped Native women's subjectivity and that underlie the cycle of domestic violence and abuse within Native Canadian families and communities.*

Web of Continuity: The Mother Figure In Native Women's Literature

The Mother, the Grandmother, recognized from earliest times into present among those people of the Americas who kept to the eldest traditions, is celebrated in social structures, architecture, law, custom, and the oral tradition. To her we owe our lives, and from her comes our ability to endure, regardless of the concerted assaults on our, on Her being, for the past five hundred years of colonization. She is the Old Woman Spider who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection. (Allen, 1986: 11)

Lee Maracle's *Daughters Are Forever* is haunted by history and memory, and by a mother figure that embodies both. The mother figure is central to Native North American oral and written cultures. Identified throughout various

Native oral traditions as the Earth Woman, the Serpent Woman, and the Old Spider Woman, the mother's multiple manifestations position her as the site at which all things are interconnected. In Native women's literature, the figure of the mother is often represented as the bearer and protector of Native cultural traditions, values and practices who, as Native-American writer Paula Gunn Allen (1986) suggests, "weaves the threads of the ancestral past through the maternal legacy to the present and future, and forges bonds between women by connecting distinct patterns of female experience" (11). In forging these bonds, the mother's web functions as a survival mechanism, a perpetuating force of female agency that enables the resilience of Native peoples and the continuity of Native cultural traditions. Similarly, Maracle posits that cultural survival is possible through the chain of cultural transmission, in which every woman partakes:

Tradition is on-going commitment, and in women's own terms. The story is beautiful, because or therefore it unwinds like a thread. A long thread, for there is no end, another opening, another "residual deposit of duration." Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and of transmission-in other words, of creation. (2002: 149)

In this essay, my aim is multifarious: I argue that Western colonial and patriarchal forces, resulting from European contact, impose a radical break in the maternal legacy to which Maracle refers above. Consequently, this break disrupts the continuity of tradition and threatens the survival of Native cultures. Furthermore, I draw from Jeffery C. Alexander's (2004) claim that "trauma is a social and political process" (32) to explore the enduring effects of the original trauma that Aboriginal societies experienced after first contact. Violence against Aboriginal women and the disruption of family and community is represented in Maracle's novel as one of the principle outcomes of Native and Western colonial relations. Maracle demonstrates that the violence and abuse experienced by Aboriginal women is rooted in social and historical processes, and that there is a direct correlation between the historical experience of Native Canadians and current patterns of domination and violence within Native Canadian communities. Specifically, Maracle illustrates the extent to which patterns of violence constitute a breach of trust between female intergenerational relationships. I posit that the trauma that resides within Aboriginal women repeats itself within intergenerational female relationships and manifests itself as a wound on both the female body and collective psyche.

The mother's legacy as a physical, psychological, and metaphorical condition is the central narratological concern in Maracle's text. *Daughters Are Forever* moves beyond traditional counter-narratives to colonialist ethnographic narratives in its focus on the maternal figure as the embodiment of Native women's lived experiences. Maracle's critical initiative is to explore and expose the psychological, physical, and spiritual impact of colonization's

physical assault on the lives of Native women. Maracle's depictions and allusions to rape as the primary form of colonial exploitation is significant, each helping to explain the domestic abuse that marks the mother's present story in the text. The mother's story is framed by Native oral stories, offering a nuanced narratological perspective that moves beyond traditional figurations of the mother to reflect a conflicted protagonist, who is at once, the transmitter of Native cultures and of the physical and psychological trauma that results from colonial and patriarchal processes. As both the victim and perpetrator of domestic abuse, Marilyn, the primary mother figure in the text, reenacts the physical violence that occurred in her colonial past. As such, the mother figure, trapped between the constraints of History and her story, must reconcile her identity with socio-cultural and political realities of her past and present. Neil J. Smelser (2004) explains that a common result of psychological trauma is a double compulsion—to both avoid and repeat or relive the trauma (53). Marilyn's internal conflict, or what Smelser refers to as "antagonistic tendencies" (53) is reflected through the opposition between the mother-daughter kinship bond and the heterosexual relationships in the text. Maracle's narrative suggests that discourses of heteronormativity, upon which patriarchy and colonialism are predicated, is a principle social force that intervenes between mother and daughter. In her discussion of mother-daughter relationships in minority cultures, Natalie Rosinsky (1980) maintains that, "intergenerational bonds between mother and daughter are estranged by patriarchal and imperialist norms for female behaviour and Native women's identity" (280).

Specifically, the men in the novel sever cultural ties by imparting physical and psychological trauma on to the women. The collective trauma that is the legacy of cultural imperialism is represented by Native women's individual experiences of domestic abuse with in heterosexual relationships. Thus, the physical violence experienced by Native women works as an allegory of the collective violence of native history and experience. As such, Native women are doubly colonized by both patriarchal and imperialist regimes. However, the consequence of multiple oppressions on Native women's identity is paradoxical in that history both severs and unites, and constrains and liberates the Native women in the text. The point of resistance, which Maracle identifies as the point at which the victims "devictimize their consciousness" (1992: 91) is represented through the reunification of Marilyn and her daughters, which renews contact with the lost matrilineal tradition. Marilyn's renewed connection between her self and her daughters is established through their shared laughter at the end of the novel, a laughter that negotiates Native women's position as both insiders and outsiders of the continuum of history. Marilyn's laughter represents the reconstitution of her identity through her reconnection with her scarred body, and facilitates the reintegration of her fragmented psyche. Metaphorically, laughter sustains the mother's web of kinship and keeps cultural continuity intact (Bannan, 1980: 271), making possible a transformative feminist politics. Maracle examines the extent to which these transformative politics

are bound up with the politics of women's laughter. The text posits laughter as an ironic, humorous, and visceral response to trauma, as a feminist gesture that breaks through social and cultural barriers and foregrounds an indictment of the exclusivist postcolonial paradigms of past/present, us/them, east/west, native/other, and tradition/modernity by positioning it against patriarchal and colonial ideas of normal behaviour. Thus, in Maracle's text, the Native woman's body is not only the site of struggle and resistance, at which patriarchal and colonial discourses are negotiated, but also the touchstone of Native women's history, memory, conflict, and legacies.

Intersecting feminist and postcolonial politics

It is the body which is the inescapable, visible sign of oppression and denigration. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffen, 1995: 321)

From a feminist perspective, the imperialist colonizer/"colonial other" divide is further complicated by the need to make space for a female consciousness. In *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory*, Julia V. Emberley positions Native women's writing as "an important site of cultural intervention for examining both the ideological contradictions and dominant social formations as well as the various subjugated modes of resistance and alterity that emerge to combat patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial oppression" (1993: 4). However, historical context and cultural specificity are contentious issues within current feminist dialogues. In *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada*, Helen Hoy raises important concerns about the potential risk of the dismissal or blurring of fundamental distinctions amongst various Native tribes. The prioritization by Native women "of tribal differences and national sovereignty" (2001: 21) undermines imperialist and feminist universalist representations of culture and sisterhood, and challenges the view that all women's oppression is rooted in gender discrimination. Accordingly, the problem with the universalizing of women's oppression is that the category of gender is privileged over the categories of race and class. In her polemical work *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*, Maracle troubles the premise that patriarchy is at the core of all oppression. While Maracle acknowledges that patriarchy is older than racism (1996: 20), she considers patriarchy and racism as two overlapping systems of oppression. The text troubles the view that women have always and everywhere been oppressed by men, and illustrates that "the influence of Western patriarchy is one of the most significant consequences of colonization; that prior to first contact, women have held a great deal of power in Native cultures" (Allen, 1986: 253). This post-contact shift in power is symptomatic of the historical effects of patriarchy's ideological forces on colonial discursive formations (Emberley 48). In *Daughters Are Forever*, Maracle strategically attributes the devaluation of Native women by Native men to the impact of colonization.

The legacy of trauma and tradition

The words passed down from mouth to ear, womb to womb, body to body are the remembered ones.... Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and of transmission. (Minh-ha, 1989: 136, 121)

The process of cultural transmission is made possible when a thought is made familiar to another person's sense of touch, feeling, taste or sight, when something that is not physical is turned into a physical experience for another person. (Armstrong, 1990: 26)

Maracle's novel, *Daughters are Forever*, evokes the female body as the medium through which the transmission of culture occurs and female social systems of power are reconstituted, however, it explores the extent to which the transmission process is positive and transformative as well as threatening and destructive to the relations between Native women. Postcolonial feminist theorist Trin T. Minh-ha (1989) stresses that "what is transmitted from generation to generation is not only the stories, but the very power of transmission" (134), signifying the potential power of the female body to strengthen ties between women through the transmission process. The connection between women's physical and psychic trauma as it is carried across the spatial and temporal continuum is established at the beginning of the novel through Maracle's feminist revision of the Christian creation myth which re-mythologizes, through the use of Native oral tradition, a lost matriarchal paradise "rooted in the goodwill of safe womanhood" (Maracle, 2002: 13). Maracle's revisionist myth portrays Turtle Island, the setting of an idyllic pre-colonial contact space, in which female bonds and cultural traditions are forged and maintained through the transmission of oral stories. The break in the maternal legacy which causes a separation from the ancestral past is depicted as a physical rupture, reinforcing the body as the primary vehicle of oral transmission: "in their bodies lived the memories; in their blood coursed traces of old agreements" (14). Drawing from Cathy Caruth's (1996) notion that history implicates us in each other's trauma and that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own" (24), the novel demonstrates how the body testifies to the experience of individual trauma and functions as the channel through which the characters witness each other's trauma. Accordingly, memory is deeply embedded in both the individual and the collective's sense of identity.

In keeping with Caruth, the female body offers a voice to history in that "the trauma emerges from the wound itself and repeats itself exactly and unremittingly, unknowingly and against the will of the victim. (Caruth, 1996: 2-3)

The blood imagery marks the moment at which colonial conquest forces

the separation between Native culture and tradition and mothers and daughters, as well as between Native women and men. Blood further provides the link between Native women's bodies and cultural heritage, blurring spatial and temporal distinctions. Temporal displacement is reinforced by Marilyn's dream-memory, which is the framework through which the creation myth and colonial conquest narrative is revealed. Marilyn's sense of Native history, as revealed by her dream-memories, is empowering in that "it overflows the boundaries of patriarchal time and truth" (Minh-ha, 1989: 149). We are told by Maracle's narrator that "men don't see life; they barely feel their existence"; that men "mark time and that time is the enemy of the dispirited" (2002: 25). The destructive impact of colonization is that Native women internalize patriarchal notions of time, resulting in the loss of their future and spirit.

The continuity of physical trauma is further emphasized by juxtaposing the images of blood resulting from the first colonial encounter to the post-contact condition of Native women. For instance, the voices that sang the first ships into the village became "blood-filled throats" (Maracle, 2002: 19) and upon the first destructive encounter, the unbroken and untainted bodies, which were free of physical and social contagion (Hoy, 2001: 135), were left in pieces with blood leaking out chronically (Maracle, 2002: 28). Images of Native women's "bloody corpses" (18) are juxtaposed to the blood that later surrounds Marilyn's mother's abused body (33). The blood motif is further associated to the songs that were sung by the colonized Native women, whose voices, through mass rape and assault were "shocked into silence" (17). The dream-songs, which continue to haunt Marilyn in the present, evoke painful memories of the body and represent the trauma that is transmitted across generations, constituting her conflicted identity. This sense of contradiction is exasperated by Marilyn's simultaneous embodiment and disembodiment of the complex historical processes at the core of the colonial and patriarchal project. The haunting dream-songs suggest that Marilyn's body is symptomatic of the multi-layered experiences, both physical and psychological that mark her body, which, at once, carries her own oppression as well as the oppression of her mother and culture:

Marilyn tossed and turned. The dream-song tried to reach her. It hummed about in the thin layer between her muscles and her skin but could not reach her unwilling mind. The stilled woman who left her body spiritless so she could survive carnage and procreate, haunts, but she cannot communicate with Marilyn or Anne. Dream-song memories can be cruel. This one assumed governance of Marilyn and Anne's bodies before it registered in their minds. (Maracle, 2002: 36)

Dream memories demonstrate the extent to which "trauma has a way of intruding itself into the mind, in the form of unwanted thoughts, nightmares, or flashbacks" (Smelser, 2004: 53). Marilyn's dream memories of physical

violation, which invade the body, establish the connection between Native women's victimization, reinforcing the ongoing legacy of trauma.

Surviving the stillness: Reclaiming the body's history

Marilyn did not feel safe inside her emotional being. She might betray herself. In fact, she had a history of letting herself down. (Maracle, 2002: 165)

As the female cycle revolves in the novel, the continuity of collective trauma is represented not only by the sexual exploitation Native women were subjected to in the past, but the transmission of trauma is a process that culminates in the physical assault they exercise on their own daughters in the present. As both the victim and perpetrator of abuse, Marilyn participates in the traumatic reenactment of self-negation by losing sense of her own physicality, and in doing so, exemplifying the extent to which history leaves its mark on the body. Native women's experience of a history of physical victimization and cultural domination results in the inculcation of colonial and patriarchal values of racism and sexism. As such, these values establish physical patterns of suppression and redirection of pain. Marilyn's suppression of feeling is a result of colonial and patriarchal discourses that render the body as shameful. The colonial encounter blankets the bodies of the Native women of Turtle Island with "a layer of shame" (Maracle, 2002: 24) that render their bodies with a "pain-filled stillness that replaced the body's natural desire to move" (19). The shame that rose from "between the legs of skirtless bronze bodies" (19) triggers the stillness that marks the female legacy of trauma. The internalization of this racist-sexist logic in the text is intensified through women's disembodiment, and, in turn, is projected on to the daughters through physical abuse. Thus Marilyn unwittingly perpetuates the cycle of physical and psychic pain by beating "stillness" into her daughters.

Colonization for Native women signifies the enforced docility of the female body. Stillness, a recurring motif in the novel, signals this docility; to the suppression of excitement and to what Maracle refers to as the "absence of and negation of Native women's desire" (Maracle, 1996: 20). As such, stillness represents the internalized fear and self-erasure passed on through generations. Minh-ha (1989) argues that this process of internalization is perpetuated because mothers "carry their own guilt and self-hatred over into their daughters' experiences" (244). It is the stillness of the body that severs the emotional ties between mother and daughter and causes Native women's disassociation from their bodies. After her father's death, we are told that "Marilyn mimicked her mother's silence" (34), which "robbed Marilyn of the nurturing she needed to become herself" (34). Maracle not only emphasizes the extent to which stillness pervades the female body, but makes the point that stillness is an effect of heterosexual relations that

...filled both mother and daughter. It became their governess. Their bodies adjusted almost automatically to it. It felt old, familiar...too strange to truly contemplate. Its heavy presence weighed down upon them. The thickness of it stopped their skin from acknowledging their own presence. The skin lost its ability to feel its way through life.... "Don't move" became the command of Anne and Marilyn. (Maracle, 2002: 35)

Unable to come to terms with her past, Anne's stillness enforces a break in the mother-daughter relationship and poses a continuous threat to the female body. Adrienne Rich (1976) argues that "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy" (237) and according to Natalie Rosinsky (1980), "this loss is one of psychological nurturance" (280). The loss of the daughter to the mother is illustrated by Marilyn's relationship with her daughters. While stillness ostensibly performs the positive function of ensuring women's protection and survival, the novel makes clear how the transmission of stillness came to define Marilyn's relationship with her daughters and how the trauma process plays itself out in the present. We are told that "women, the keepers of cultural survival, passed on stillness as the ultimate way to protect their daughters" (Maracle, 2002: 22). However Anne's "Don't move" command that silences her daughter, which echoes Native women's historical calls to "Be still" as a response to colonial invasion, are less protective than destructive in the way that they "change the voice of motherhood" (27) so that possibilities of laughter and connection are superseded by silence and stillness. Marilyn's memories of "don't move" thwart her ability to confront her past and recover her Native female identity. Nevertheless, it is Marilyn's vocation as a social worker that first forces her to confront her history. Despite her position as neglectful, alcoholic mother, Marilyn finds meaning in her work, which ironically entails her governing the relationship between Elsie, another Native woman and alcoholic mother, and her children. Paradoxically, in confronting Elsie's case file, Marilyn's "stillness" leaves her body for a brief moment when her own fear of losing her daughters is momentarily realized (48). The parallels drawn between Marilyn and Elsie function to create a bond between Native mothers' complex struggles, which the text indicates "had taken over one hundred years to create" (55).

The temporary physical separation between Marilyn and her daughters evolves into "an invisible bridge that continued to divide them" (Maracle, 2002: 49). Having led a "life of pain and hate" which is "all she had to share" (109), Marilyn projects her pain onto her children. Despite this transmission of trauma, Marilyn recognizes that she still carries feelings of love "banged around the walls of her belly" (109), which move her toward transformative action. This movement counters the stillness and accuses her stillness of being "guilty of conjuring her hate" (109). Thus Marilyn's conflicted bodily processes of physical restriction and no restraint, reflect her psychic processes.

Marilyn's relationship with T. J. (the text's male protagonist) counters her other heterosexual relationships and ostensibly triggers a balance between these two modes of corporeal responses. While it momentarily offers her the possibility to reclaim her desire and reawaken her body's "deadened ecstasy" (19), the physical relationship is not actualized in the novel. In fact, Marilyn's movement towards governing her own body and reclaiming what Maracle terms as "her sacred and significant self" (Maracle, 1992: 91) is stunted by her heterosexual relationships. Based on her heteronormative fantasies, Marilyn constructs T. J. as an ideal in her mind, moved by his image rather than his actual physical presence. Marilyn's construction of T. J.'s image is one of several recurring experiences of "drifting images" which she admits is an "unnamable and unreal aspect of herself that she had kept secret from everyone" (Maracle, 2002: 128). Marilyn continues to romanticize her relationship with T. J. even though she admits to not wanting to meet him (130). After she establishes a connection with her daughters, Marilyn recognizes that T. J. only offers her a momentary respite (207), and realizes that it is not through his presence that her body is renewed, but through her idealization of him. Rather, the complex process of renewing contact with the body culminates in Marilyn's reconciliation with her daughters. This process traces the transformation of Marilyn's anger and hostility into a complex recognition of maternal responsibility (Irvine, 1980: 244). Although she attributes her awakened desire to a brief heterosexual encounter, which is not consummated on a physical level, Marilyn minimizes this awakening by reminding herself that she is "in the middle of a Harlequin romance; a goofy love story" (Maracle, 2002: 153), realizing "that she was not hungry for a man at all, but hungry for her daughters" (246).

Laughter catharsis: Reclaiming memory and identity

Laughter is closely bound up with power. So it may come as no surprise to discover that women have not always lacked a sense of humour. (Gray, 1994: 6)

Laughter is the bodily function, directly connected to psychic processes that ultimately reunite the mother-daughter relationship. Laughter, according to Frances Gray (1994), is closely bound up with power (6). In the novel, the integration of psyche and body, the recuperation of history and cultural tradition is represented by the laughter that Marilyn shares with her mother, her girlfriend Gerri, and most potently, with her daughters. While the laughter with men that Marilyn claims she is lonely for (Maracle, 2002: 174) represents the expression of her heteronormative desire, the laughter she shares with her daughters secures the bond between Native women through their shared oppression and transmits the powers of their cultural traditions through their foremothers (Minh-ha, 1989: 135). The recollection of the power of

her mother's laughter, which continued to "gain volume and clarity," enables Marilyn to confront her childhood experiences as a witness to domestic abuse. Thus, for Marilyn, female laughter is a transformative bodily response that offers release from physical containment and makes the survival of individual and collective trauma possible. This distinct female laughter also has a similar affect on Marilyn's girlfriend Gerri, whose sense of humour "saves her from embracing pure hatred" (Maracle, 2002: 174-75). No longer victim to her concealed feelings, Marilyn's laughter challenges the silence that separates her from others and renews her connection with mother-history, experiencing her personal rebirth as a result.

The laughter shared between Marilyn and her daughters in the final scene performs a recuperative act of renewing the body's spirit and releasing the women from stillness. This function is emphasized at the end of the novel during a cathartic scene where Marilyn feigns a reenactment of her past assault by suggestively exposing the wooden spoon, her primary instrument of assault, to her daughters. Marilyn's uncovering of the wooden spoon reactivates their memories of the trauma, and as psychoanalyst Judith Herman (1992) explains, is an example of the way in which "traumatized people relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions...they often feel impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or disguised form without realizing what they are doing (39-41). Marilyn's and daughter's response to this shocking moment was laughter: "Their laughter came out squeezed between tense, still-nervous vocal chords. It gained volume as the fear floated up and out. Somewhere in the laughter, Marilyn realized she wasn't hungry for them at all, but for herself" (Maracle, 2002: 234). Marilyn's disguised repetition of the colonial act of violence is a radically transformative moment that performs a healing function that culminates in the reinstatement of the mother's power, and reinforces the maternal roles as healer and protector of cultural tradition. The very act of their laughter as a group suggests cultural cohesion and communal identity. Furthermore, Marilyn's revelatory action elicits a laughter of recognition such that it enables the daughters to recognize their mother as a fellow victim, making reconciliation possible. Women's laughter, according to Luce Irigaray (1985), is "the first form of liberation from a secular oppression" (163). The laughter shared by Marilyn and her daughters represents a reunification with the maternal body that signifies Native culture, community, and collectivity; it is a laughter that playfully yet powerfully overturns patriarchal and colonial culture in a deconstructive manner. Maracle's text demonstrates that Native women's laughter releases their trauma from the body and perpetuates cultural continuity. By paralleling the silence of the scarred collective psyche to the stillness of the body in pain, the former disciplined by psychological violence and the latter by physical violence, Maracle offers a narrative that explores the possibility for a renewed Native female heritage that stands outside of colonial and patriarchal processes.

Conclusion: Representation, resistance, and transformative female politics

We are interested in clearly stating what we see and looking for the key to the unknown in the voices and words of others. We are listening—our imaginations fully engaged—to what is said, what is not said, and what is connected to what is not said. (Maracle, 2007: 58)

Lee Maracle, of Salish and Cree ancestry and a member of the Sto:loh Nation, stands amongst several contemporary Native women writers in Canada, including Jeannette Armstrong, Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, and Eden Robinson, to name only a few, who move beyond the ethnographic approach to explore the connections between Native women, history, gendered politics, and narrative identity. In doing so, these women have helped provide a space in the Canadian literary tradition for Aboriginal women's voices. Through narrative, Maracle participates in the ongoing attempt by Native women writers in Canada to tell a story that needs to be told about multiple marginalization, but more so about transformative relationships and the reconstruction of individual and collective identity. The novel situates the female body as the symbolic site at which the psychosocial, physical, and political conflicts are played out. The inclusion by Maracle of the Native female ethnic body into the history of colonialism serves as a textual intervention against the silenced history of Native women and often overlooked Native-Canadian culture. Maracle embarks on what she calls the "journey of the story" to discover and unfold unknown voices, words, and histories, and it is only "in seeing ourselves through [her] story that we become part of that journey" (2007: 59).

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My Mother's Face

Remembering Mothers in the Holocaust Testimony of Francine Christophe and Cordelia Edvardson

When we listen for mothers' voices of the Holocaust no one answers. Mothers and young children were among the first groups sent en masse to the gas chambers: mothers because of their ability to reproduce more unwanted Jewish offspring, young children because they were thought to be too weak to do physical labor for the Reich. Thus, the testimony of the Holocaust is largely a testimony written by those who were adolescents in the camps and managed to survive. This paper aims to recover voices of lost mothers of the Holocaust through a study of the work of two daughters: Francine Christophe and Cordelia Edvardson. Bound via stories of motherhood in extremis and maternal subjectivity in its complexities and contradictions, their work dislodges idealized expectations and assumptions about motherhood. We see motherhood as a position of mutuality as mother and daughter mother each other in Christophe's account; mother as seducer and betrayer. These representations invite a reconsideration of mothering outside familiar biological, familial, and social conventions, when mothers and their children are not seen as human beings. Too, the paper considers the role of language in recreating the lost mother and in mothering the self.

My mother
she was hands, a face
They made our mothers strip in front of us

Here mothers are no longer mothers to their children.
—Charlotte Delbo (1995)

*Forced into cattle cars. Squeezed into squalid barracks.
Marched into showers raining with Zyklon B.
Thrown into mass graves.*

*Somewhere a child is crying. "Mutti!" "Maman!" "Mama!"
No one answers.*

When we listen for mothers' voices of the Holocaust, no one answers. Mothers of young children were among the first groups of people systematically sent to the gas chambers: mothers, because they were reduced again to the traditional reproductive role; children, because they were not strong enough to haul rocks, dig ditches or do other dirty work for the Reich.¹ The first-hand witnessing of the Holocaust is largely a witnessing by children who came to the camps as adolescents and survived.² Joan Ringelheim (1993), one of the first scholars to study gender and the Holocaust, has written that mothers' experiences of pregnancy, birth, and death in the camps constitute a specific legacy of suffering. She notes that sexism left women especially vulnerable to abuses of their sexuality and maternal responsibilities: to rape, murder of their children, the necessity of killing their own or other women's babies, forced abortion, and other forms of exploitation (375). In the foreword to Liana Millu's (1986) memoir, *Smoke over Birkenau*, Primo Levi noted that the presence of the smoking crematoria right in the middle of the women's camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau was an undeniable, omnipresent reminder of the death of children.

This paper aims to recover images of lost mothers of the Holocaust through a study of the work of two daughters, Francine Christophe and Cordelia Edvardson. Bound by stories of motherhood *in extremis*, maternal subjectivity in its many complexities and contradictions, and the persistent desire for the mother's face, their work dislodges idealized expectations and assumptions about motherhood. We see mother as role model and mentor in Christophe's account, juxtaposed against mother as seductress and betrayer in Edvardson's. Marcelle Christophe, Francine's mother, embodies Adrienne Rich's concept of "courageous mothering," in which the mother refuses to be a victim, establishing a strong female identity that nurtures both herself and her daughter (O'Reilly and Abbey, 2000: 9). That feminist mothering could occur in a concentration camp is astonishing. Elisabeth Langgasser, Edvardson's mother, is a paragon of narcissism, intent on saving herself, even if it means sacrificing her child. Edvardson's longing for connection with a nurturing maternal figure is embodied in the dedication of her book to her three mothers—one biological and two non-biological "othermothers."³ These two very different autobiographical accounts invite a reconsideration of mothering outside familiar biological, familial, and social conventions, in a time and place where neither mothers nor children were seen as human beings. The italicized passages in the paper inscribe my maternal identification with these texts and responses of protest and outrage. Faced with the loss or displacement of the mother, the daughter may seek to recreate herself through language. Critic Bella Brodzki (1988) constructs the mother as the origin of both language and love: "As the child's first significant Other, the mother engenders subjectivity through language; she is the primary source of speech and love" (245). Janet Burstein also affirms this

connection between language and love: “Mothers’ voices can empower daughters by showing them how to articulate themselves as subjects” (O’Reilly, 2004: 42). Such theories rupture constructions of the mother as voiceless and silent. Too, these theories explain one of the powerful motivating forces in women’s autobiographies —to simultaneously recreate the lost or absent mother and recreate the self through writing. Thus, women’s memoirs of the Holocaust serve the dual purpose of reclaiming a seriously traumatized subjectivity and giving voice to the absent mother, a thematics of reparenting.⁴

Francine Christophe’s (2000) memoir, *From a World Apart: A Little Girl in the Concentration Camps*, is a first-person narrative written in the present tense in a child’s voice. Francine Christophe is six years old in August 1939 when her story begins. The fairy tale beginning of the memoir, with its image of a happy family enjoying their holiday at the beach, is quickly shattered when Christophe’s father is called to serve in the French army. With the surrender of France to Germany, the father is taken prisoner of war. Conditions rapidly deteriorate for French Jews, who must register their identities with the local *bureau de police*. When Christophe’s mother, Marcelle, is asked why she bothers to register with such a non-Jewish sounding surname, she replies that she has always obeyed the law. Marcelle Christophe, *une bonne citoyenne* whose uncles had been decorated in the Great War, could have no way of knowing what horrors were in store for her as a consequence of her loyalty, a patriotism that was quite common among non-observant European Jews, who saw themselves as nationals first, Jews second. By the time Marcelle decides to flee the family home in Paris for the Unoccupied Zone, it is too late. She and Francine are arrested at the border, where authorities’ suspicions are aroused by their fake identity cards. Thus begin a series of arrivals and departures that take Francine and her mother first to prison and then to different camps: Pithiviers, Beaune-le-Roland, Drancy, and, eventually, the dreaded Bergen-Belsen.

Consumed by the passion to bear witness, Francine started keeping a journal of her wartime experiences at the age of twelve, in 1945. Unlike the young Anne Frank, who died of typhus at Bergen-Belsen, Francine survived to document the horror she had witnessed (Francine and her mother were prisoners at Belsen during the same period as Anne and her sister, Margot, but the two families did not meet). Christophe’s memoir, based on her post-war journal and written in 1967, was completed in a few weeks. The childlike prose and voice of the memoir are shockingly juxtaposed against descriptions that are far from innocent, including narratives of beatings, suicide, and death by starvation. Too, the use of the present tense conveys the perspective and urgency of a child more effectively than the distanced retrospective past tense.

In the beginning of the memoir Francine uses humor to underscore the feeling in Paris that this is a “*drole de guerre*,” a play on words meaning both a funny and phony war, the pun being a device of which children (and adults) are uncommonly fond. Francine narrates a joke she has overheard that captures this spirit of *drole de guerre*: “Two ladies are talking. ‘Oh! My dear, I make an

amazing chocolate cake.' 'Do give me the recipe.' 'Well, I don't use any chocolate, flour, eggs, sugar, or butter....' 'And is it good?' 'No!'" (12). Amusement rapidly gives way to terror as more and more arrests are made, property is confiscated, and Jews are forced to wear the yellow star. Posters appear in the *metro* and the streets portraying Jews with pointed chins, evil eyes, thick lips, hooked noses, clawed hands. Francine's family is not religious—they celebrate Christmas with a tree—and through these images she learns to see herself as monstrous: "I have learned that I am Jewish, that I am a monster, and that I must hide myself."

Francine's insistence that a terrible mistake has been made, that she is French, not Jewish, occurs again and again, ironically reinforced when the Jewish children from Eastern Europe whom she meets in the camps tell her she is not really Jewish because she doesn't speak Yiddish. The yellow star becomes a sign of race when other signifiers such as surname and hair color fail. At the *Gare de l'Est* on the way to Bergen-Belsen, Francine says to Marcelle, "Oh Mother! How I wish I could tear this star off. I don't want people looking at me like that anymore. Make these people go away. I am not an animal." The fragility of national identity and the arbitrariness of social constructions of race are underscored when Uncle Charles, Francine's grandmother's second husband, a Catholic who is a close friend of *Marechal* Petain, goes to visit the *Marechal* to plead for the release of Marcelle and Francine. "This is about a mother and her child," he tells the *Marechal*, invoking what he assumes will be regarded as an iconic relationship that transcends considerations of race. "Bah, Jews" (42), says the *Marechal*, and the two are not freed.

Francine is a compassionate witness who is keenly attuned to other children and their suffering. At Drancy she writes, "The herds of children filing by! Heads shaved, hollow cheeks, sometimes in rags, sometimes tied together with rope. Generally children of Central European Jews, automatically separated from their parents.... We ask them their names, their ages, and they don't reply. Beaten dogs, stunned, they have forgotten everything." This description leads Francine to reflect that animals such as the sheep and cows that wander free in the fields are treated better than these children. She identifies with these children and notices that their arms are scratched where their mothers gripped them as they were taken from them. Animal metaphors (a device also employed by Frederick Douglass [1982] in his autobiography) resonate frequently as Francine struggles to retain her humanity while she is starving: "I'm turning into an animal who thinks only of its empty stomach" (54).

The blurring of the line between childhood and adulthood in the camps is another recurrent motif because children in the camps are subjected to the same brutality as adults. Of Beaune-le Roland, Francine writes, "Since I no longer know what good times really are, I blossom, I skip ... and I take under my protection several children who have lost their parents." She says, "At Drancy I forgot my age. Very old, very young" (53). Francine's ability to nurture orphaned children enables her to emulate her mother, who is beloved

by other prisoners for the kindnesses she shows them as barracks supervisor. Some of these women send cards to Marcelle, even write her poetry: “She can empty bins and ladle soup/Impose silence when to bed we troop/Command and bring us light relief... Even make our wardens pleased/And yet remain our chief” (39). They praise Marcelle’s kindness in a letter signed by 60 women. Francine is influenced by her mother’s generosity, stamina, and resourcefulness. Marcelle’s work as a nurse and supervisor takes her away from Francine during the day, and the little girl is left to fend for herself. We hear her anguish when Francine complains that she is only ten years old and wants her mother to herself.

In May 1944 mother and daughter are deported to the infamous Bergen-Belsen, where Anne Frank and her sister Margot die of typhus during the terrible winter of 1945. Thus far, Marcelle and Francine have been shielded by the protections of the Geneva Convention because they are related to a prisoner of war. Their heads have not been shaved. They are allowed to keep their luggage and wear street clothing instead of prisoners’ uniforms. They travel to Belsen third-class rather than by cattle car. But at Belsen they lose their protected status.

Upon arrival, mother and daughter try to sustain themselves and their creativity. Madame Christophe reads a children’s book written by her husband to a group of youngsters. Francine befriends a Dutch girl in spite of the language barrier that divides them. She learns some Yiddish from an Eastern European woman. But these efforts fade in the overwhelming struggle to survive.

The stench of burning flesh. Dysentery, the draining of the bowels. Beatings. Typhus. So many lice that Francine’s head must be shaved. Freezing outside during morning roll calls. Corpses everywhere. A constant hunger, so fierce the women fight each other for bread to give to their children. Francine’s chest caves in, her bones stick out, and her stomach swells. In the barracks, a mother and daughter are being eaten alive by lice. A group of women try to rescue them, but it is too late, the mother dies. The women hear that in the men’s camp, the prisoners eat one of their dead.

For Francine, the hunger and terror is so great she becomes angry at Marcelle. She reminds her mother every day she is hungry, so that Marcelle will not forget: “Mother, do you hear?” We do not hear the mother’s voice in reply, for what is there to say? This is Bergen-Belsen: “Dead bodies lie in every corner. The crematorium chimney smokes all the time” (84). Francine imagines she will escape by climbing inside her mother’s womb, the archetypal place of safety and protection.

How to survive? Marcelle finds a yellow enamel basin that she and Francine use for washing, eating, and relieving themselves. A Dutch man sees the bowl and attacks Marcelle. His wife explains that this is their basin and they want it back. Linguistic and social class differences threaten to derail diplomacy, but then Marcelle offers the couple some sugar in exchange for the bowl, which she desperately wants because it allows her and Francine to wash and relieve themselves in a place other than the barracks corner—prisoners are not al-

lowed to leave the barracks at night to use the latrine—such being the hygiene of Bergen-Belsen. Another survival strategy: the women imagine themselves eating croissants and drinking coffee in Paris, an example of Viktor Frankl's theory that the prisoners' capacity to imagine the past or the future helped keep hope alive. A small miracle: a baby is born in the Belsen hospital and Marcelle goes to visit the mother, bringing her a special gift—bit of chocolate she has saved. Such gestures, that nurture relationships and community, prevent the women from becoming *Musulman*, the term used in the camps to describe the walking dead—those who can no longer take care of themselves—who will soon be selected for the gas chambers.⁵

With the Russians advancing, Belsen is evacuated; prisoners are either shot or loaded on trains that are on their way to being blown up by explosives. Marcelle leaves her train to gather some grasses to eat and does not have the strength to return—another prisoner drags her aboard. Francine at first does not know her mother has boarded a different car and cries out that she cannot live without her mother, a *cri de coeur* telling her personal truth. The train, liberated by the Russians before it reaches its destination, a mined bridge, is abandoned, and, although Marcelle nearly dies of typhus in a Russian hospital, mother and daughter survive.

From a World Apart explores the hell of camp life through the eyes of a child who sees everything and forgets nothing. The conventional maternal role is expanded when the daughter becomes mother to her own mother. For example, Marcelle asks Francine whether she should trade her wedding band for more food for the two of them, and Francine tells her not to, saying Marcelle must keep the ring as a reminder of her marriage, an act of empathy and altruism unusual in someone so young. Francine becomes a woman at the age of twelve, having learned the responsibilities of mothering at an age when most girls are worried about their appearance and boyfriends. Clearly, the mutuality between mother and daughter, where both nurture one another, is critical to their survival.

Cordelia Edvardson's (1997) memoir, *Burned Child Seeks the Fire*, explores complex and painful contradictions of race, family, and identity. Born in 1929 to Elisabeth Langgasser, who was the daughter of a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, Cordelia is Jewish according to the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, while her mother Elisabeth is *mischlinge*, mixed race. The Nuremberg Laws defined a Jew as someone with three Jewish grandparents, whereas someone with two Jewish grandparents was classified as *mischlinge*.⁶ Thus, according to the Nazis, mother and daughter belonged to different races at a moment when racial categorization determined whether you lived or died. Cordelia, who was born out of wedlock after Elisabeth had an affair with a married Jewish man, bears the double stigmas of illegitimacy and Jewishness, marking her as the embodiment of her mother's sexual transgression and a member of a despised race.

A sensitive child, Cordelia knows she is different from the rest of her

family. She writes, “The girl had of course always known that something was wrong with her. She wasn’t like the others. There was a mystery about her, a sinful, shameful, dark secret” (3). Her sense of alienation is evident in her use of the third person, “the girl,” to describe herself rather than the conventional first person of memoir. References to fairy tales (“Rumpelstiltskin,” “The Little Match Girl”), Greek myth (Ariadne and Persephone) and the New Testament (Christ’s suffering on the Cross) inscribe Cordelia’s attempts to make sense of her otherness. Raised as a Catholic by her grandmother, who lives with her and her mother, Cordelia speaks of her outcast status in the family by referring to Christ’s stigmata, believing she has been chosen to suffer for her family’s sins.

Sexuality and shame are conflated throughout Cordelia’s early childhood. Elisabeth is described as a seductress who alternately woos or ignores her daughter. Wishing to obliterate the family’s shameful Jewish ancestry, Elisabeth attempts to ingratiate herself with the echelons of Nazi society, taking Cordelia to a wedding where the bride’s father is a high-ranking SS officer. The elaborate wedding feast, with its fairy tale motifs celebrating courtship and marriage, is at once a scene of endangerment and enchantment so terrifying to the child Cordelia that she soils her pants. She asks herself what Elisabeth could have been thinking in taking her to such an event: “Was it the half-conscious, magical idea of protecting the daughter by leading her directly into the wolf’s den?” (32). Elisabeth also sends Cordelia to spend a summer holiday with a couple who are ardent Nazis and who call Cordelia a “filthy Jewish brat” when they discover she has been playing games of sexual exploration with one of their sons. Cordelia’s suspicions that Elisabeth lives in her own elaborate fantasy world are as close to an explanation of the mother’s disturbing behavior as we get.

Cordelia is desperate to connect to the provocative, enigmatic Elisabeth. Language becomes the vehicle through which Cordelia tries to establish this connection, signified through multiple references to fairy tales. The text opens by invoking an inverted fairy tale: “The girl knew she was the opposite of a princess; a dark, pudgy, mean, defiant little brat that didn’t live in an enchanted garden but in a dark apartment in Berlin-Siemenstadt.” Her mother is a writer and storyteller, and, for the young Cordelia, language and writing come to symbolize her desire for union with her mother: “The word became flesh in the fairy tales her mother told ... even in the chapters from her next novel the mother read to her four- to five-year-old daughter.... Later on, the girl found confirmation of this experience: that one can, literally, be nourished and sustained by the words of a poem” (8). The writing of the memoir is a maternal act that fuses memory, language, and love, evidenced in the dedication to three mothers—one biological (Elisabeth) and two “other mothers,” the women who nursed Cordelia back to life after Auschwitz.

As the noose begins to tighten for Jews in Germany, Elisabeth marries in a last-ditch attempt to legitimate herself and Cordelia. For her savior Elisabeth

chooses a man of impeccable origins, a tall, blond, blue-eyed man whose Aryan looks and impeccable bloodline will hopefully redeem the family from the taint of Jewishness. Elisabeth and her new husband enjoy painting themselves in make-up and cross-dressing in courtiers' clothing, casting Cordelia as a page in their eroticized costume dramas. But the new husband's unsullied blood cannot save Cordelia. She is made to leave secondary school because she cannot show the *Ariernachweis*, the required proof of Aryan background, and attends a segregated school for Jews. She is dismissed from the Catholic Girls' Club, of which she has been an active member. Eventually, she is forced to wear the *Judenstern*, the yellow star, and to live with strangers, apart from her family.

The desperate Elisabeth arranges for Cordelia to be adopted by a married couple from Spain who work as servants for an elderly Bavarian aristocrat. But the authorities summon mother and daughter to Gestapo headquarters, saying the adoption is illegal and also treasonous, and, if Cordelia is not deported to the camps, her mother will be prosecuted for her crimes. Cordelia looks at Elisabeth's eyes, filled with "wordless, helpless pain," and writes that she had never felt closer to her mother. She offers herself to the Gestapo, and, in doing so, saves her mother's life.

Once upon a time there was a little Jewish girl named Cordelia. Dark-haired, sad-eyed, she bore the signs of shame for all to see, much to the dismay of her mother. One day a band of wolves heard there was Jewish blood to be had nearby. They circled the family's cottage (the "squirrel nest," in the mother's words), demanding to be fed. Cordelia's mother tried to keep them at bay but ultimately allows them to kidnap her daughter, since the wolves must satisfy their quota of blood.

Cordelia is sent to Auschwitz, where she seeks maternal protection from other young women. She befriends Elsa, who wears the black triangle of "an anti-social," a non-Jew who has been arrested for a crime, in this case prostitution. Elsa's bunkmate is jealous of her attentions to Cordelia. One Sunday, the two young women join forces and encourage Cordelia to approach Maria Mandel, the camp commandant, who strolls the grounds on weekends accompanied by her German shepherds, to ask for something to eat. As soon as Cordelia nears Mandel she realizes she has been set up. But it's too late to turn back, so Cordelia tells Mandel she is hungry. Surprisingly, Mandel laughs and tells Cordelia to go to the supply room, but the terrified girl runs straight for her barracks. Later she hears that Mandel enjoys turning her dogs on stray prisoners and watching while they chase them up against the electrified fence.

Cordelia survives the terror of Auschwitz and is sent to Stockholm to recover. In Stockholm she begins to experience a lifting of the fog of Auschwitz, where "(she) moved among the gray faces of the prisoners, their gray rags, the gray water-gruel and the gray bread." Auschwitz is a nightmare in gray and black, the "mute gray silence" and the "gray fog of nothingness" juxtaposed against Mengele's "impeccable black uniform and shining black boots." Cordelia's

journey back from the dead is imagined as a rebirth, complete with “amniotic fluid [flowing] unobstructed...” (91). She is reborn amidst the shocking contrast between the world of the living—restaurants, shops, fine food—and the dead—the night and fog of Auschwitz, writing, “I am here! I, who was full of lice and scabies and gnawed on raw potato skins, I, who didn’t even have a tin bowl to eat from because someone stole it from me, I am here!” (90). But in Stockholm, Cordelia must give birth to herself, though she is not alone.

Cordelia’s recovery is assisted by another survivor, a woman from Berlin she meets in a Swedish hospital, a psychotherapist: “She was a woman who had never given birth to children but who became the mother of many to whom she had given new birth: a woman endowed with the clear-sighted strength of a Jewish mother, but un sentimental and not at all prone to foster dependence in others.” This “othermother” revises the biological maternal text, positioning motherhood as work that involves caring and empowerment. By including a dedication to her own children, Cordelia acknowledges herself as a mother. She arranges a religious conversion for her children to become Swedish Jews. She journeys to Israel as a journalist during the Yom Kippur War and sees a wounded soldier who becomes a symbol of all the lost sons of war. The narrative ends with the words, “I am!”—a reference to the name God reveals to Moses in the Book of Exodus 3:14, naming herself a biblical matriarch, one of the mothers of Israel. Cordelia’s reclamation and redefinition of the maternal—seen in her bond with othermothers, her own empowered motherhood, and her self-definition as a mother of Israel—is especially important in the face of Elisabeth’s overweening narcissism. For, unbelievably, after the war is over, Elisabeth writes to Cordelia and asks her whether she will help Elisabeth with her next novel, which is about Auschwitz, by reading what Elisabeth has written and providing feedback about its accuracy and verisimilitude.

Taken together, the testimonies of Christophe and Edvardson map new maternal texts. Their insistence on motherhood as dynamic rather than static, complex and contradictory rather than monolithic and monochromatic, active rather than passive, socially mediated rather than biologically determined, demands that we shift the figure of the mother from its altar of iconic beatitude to a place where the wishes and desires of mothers can be expressed, where their voices can be heard.

*At the gates of Auschwitz stands a little girl.
In her hand is a crumpled piece of paper, a photograph of her mother’s face.
The little girl waits. She will wait forever.*

¹Gisela Bok (1993) notes that the Nazis used women’s childbearing abilities to achieve their racist goals: “the surest method of birth control is death, and Jewish women were targeted accordingly” (162).

²Accounts vary as to how old children needed to be to be deemed strong enough for physical labor. Liana Millu (1986) tells the story of an eight-year-old boy in Auschwitz who survived the selection and was put to work. Ruth Kluger (2001) describes a selection during which she was required to give her age (12) and was selected for the gas chambers. At her mother's urging, she went through the selection line again and this time told the commandant she was 15. Thus her mother's ingenuity and resistance saved her life.

³"Othermothering" is defined as "acceptance of responsibility for a child not one's own." See O'Reilly (2004: 5).

⁴Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985) describes reparenting as an artistic collaboration between mother and daughter in which the daughter enters a more dominant art form (poem, not garden) in order to make prominent the work both have achieved (94).

⁵Myrna Goldenberg (1995) notes that often women's socialization skills in the home helped them survive: "Women and girls found that this socialization, which included sewing and food preparation, provided avenues for survival that usually was unavailable to men and boys" (95). The recreation of home and family is a recurrent theme in Liana Millu's memoir, where she describes how the women in Birkenau light candles to celebrate Hanukkah.

⁶The *mischlinge* were a problematic category for the Nazis because of their mixed race status—part Jewish, part German. They seem to have encountered varying fates, depending on the amount of anti-Semitism in their communities. For an account of a *mischlinge* child who ended up in the camps, see Ursula Pawel's (2000) memoir.

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Mother

1.

Night drags her blanket of blackness
from bedroom to couch then back

again to bed, her frail head, slightly
shaking. She will not step outdoors.

Small squares of green gingham
puddle at her feet, sketch of quilt

for my son but the sliver of needle
is hard to grip. The squares slip

through the floor and trigger
a green flood. My sister and I slosh

through the boggy basement, wring
out water from murky piles of wet

dreams. We know better than to ask
why they are heaped here. She blackens

her hair. The dark dye drains to her lips
and seeps into the lines around her mouth.

Carole Berg

“If only I could sleep,” she says
so my sister and I flatten

into a set of cotton sheets to sooth her,
tuck ourselves around her, fold her into sleep.

The mattress buckles and craters:
broken metal springs won’t spring again.

Only her bed imagines—
floating on waves of moonlit water.

2.

We are on the hint of a shoreline
an unutterable island. We are a part

of her past rippling outward
from her bedroom as a crimson

tide. Our presence is an eddy
to her: leaving, coming, leaving.

We are underwater seaweed flicking
against her skin. Our voices crash

over her, plumes of sounds.

There is no water here in her room
yet she cannot utterly surface.

She is wandering further into herself,
sinking to where her other

self propels then slows darkly,
as she slips among unseen rocks.

“A Mixture of the Madonna and a Woman of the World”

Virginia Woolf’s Assessment of the Mother

In this essay, I explore Woolf’s complex depictions of her mother in two autobiographical pieces, “Reminiscences” and “A Sketch of the Past.” In my analysis, I proceed from the premise that Julia Stephen’s death when Virginia was a child of only thirteen was the primary trauma underlying Woolf’s subsequent emotional breakdowns. I consequently read Woolf’s writings that engage maternity as scriptotherapy. Judith Herman (1997) maintains that “the ‘action of telling a story’ in the safety of a protected relationship can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of the traumatic memory. With this transformation of memory comes relief of many of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The physi-neurosis induced by terror can apparently be reversed through the use of words” (183). Telling her story to her readers, Woolf endeavored to work through her trauma. In this way, Julia Duckworth Stephen was in many senses the source of Virginia Woolf’s artistic genius.

Throughout Virginia Woolf’s writings, readers encounter a quest for the maternal, a fraught exploration of who the mother is, and who and what she should be. Because Virginia’s mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen, died unexpectedly when Virginia was only thirteen, and because her surrogate mother, her half-sister Stella, died tragically only two years later, Virginia’s psychical need to probe motherhood, and daughterhood, was especially urgent. Moreover, Stella’s death at the age of twenty-eight further cast a pall upon maternity. At the time of her death Stella had been married a short time, and she had only recently learned that she would soon become a biological mother. Given Woolf’s tremulous relationship with those who mothered her, it is understandable that a number of Virginia Woolf’s writings evidence a rather compulsive consideration of motherhood.

Woolf's conception of motherhood is by no means simple. In her autobiographical "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past" and in her fictional *To the Lighthouse*, the mother looms large, as an idealized figure, as a lack, as a troublesome presence, as both impediment to and inspiration for art. As is well-documented, Woolf's first mental breakdown occurred shortly after the death of her mother in 1895. Nancy Chodorow (1978) identifies the early adolescent years as especially problematic for girls, as "a girl must confront her entanglement in familial relationships" before she can "fully develop extrafamilial commitments." She argues that the mother's "desire both to keep daughters close and to push them into adulthood" creates an aura of ambivalence, which, "in turn creates more anxiety in their daughters and provokes attempts by these daughters to break away.... [T]his spiral, laden as it is with ambivalence, leaves mother and daughter convinced that any separation between them will bring disaster to both" (135). Perhaps this explains why losing a mother for Woolf at this age was so devastating—she was unable to engage fully in this struggle and likely confronted the death with feelings of guilt, resentment, and even (guilty) relief. Commenting on Woolf's weak sense of self-identity in "Reminiscences," LuAnne McCracken (1990) claims that "for Woolf, the task of achieving a sense of her own identity was doubly problematic: she needed to achieve separation from the identity of her mother, yet the death of her mother at the crucial beginning of Woolf's adolescence ... meant that Woolf lost the figure from which her identity derived" (66).

Suzette Henke (2007) identifies Julia Duckworth Stephen's death as the primary trauma underlying Woolf's subsequent breakdowns, and "A Sketch of the Past" supports this claim. Given this possibility, one does not err in considering Virginia Woolf's writings about mothers as scriptotherapy, as attempts to come to terms with that which was unassimilable. Judith Herman (1997) maintains that "the 'action of telling a story' in the safety of a protected relationship can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of the traumatic memory. With this transformation of memory comes relief of many of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The *physioneurosis* induced by terror can apparently be reversed through the use of words" (183). Telling her story to her readers, Woolf endeavored to work through her trauma.

In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf articulates clearly and beautifully her own conception of writing as scriptotherapy:

I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known

to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. (1985a: 72)

She avows that writing takes pain and injustice and assimilates them into a comprehensible order. But it does not stop there. Writing establishes human connection. Through telling her stories—both “literal” autobiography and “fictionalized” autobiography—Woolf realigned herself with others. Scriptotherapy enabled her to transform devastation into something salutary.

I should be clear from the outset that, while her own desires as a motherless daughter entertain the Angel in the House as appealing, Woolf does not establish the Angel in the House as the ideal. Reiterated throughout her writings is the conviction that, although the desire for the mother’s absolute devotion is strong, integrity in mothering depends upon a protected inner life. Although it is undeniably romantic, the portrait of Julia Duckworth Stephen that emerges in Woolf’s autobiographical “Reminiscences” (1985b) is nonetheless deceptively complex. Begun before the birth of her sister Vanessa’s first child, Julian, “Reminiscences” was ostensibly undertaken for the benefit of her nephew, so that he would know not only his mother, but his grandparents and the world in which Vanessa had come of age. Given the precariousness of maternity in Woolf’s own experience, it is not surprising that creating a written legacy for Vanessa’s child was a priority.

In characterizing Vanessa, Woolf emphasizes that she was maternally-inclined from her youth: “[T]he mother would ... feel tender joy within her, and some bright amusement too, for already her daughter promised to be honest and loving; already, as I have heard, she was able to care for the three little creatures who were younger than she was, teaching Thoby [Vanessa’s and Virginia’s brother] his letters, and giving up to him her bottle. I can imagine that she attached great importance to the way in which Thoby sat in his highchair, and appealed to Nurse to have him properly fastened there before he was allowed to eat his porridge. Her mother would smile silently at this” (1985b: 28). Endowing Vanessa with an innate nurturing instinct, Woolf bases her description in part upon what she imagines Julia Duckworth Stephen would have hoped for in a daughter. The use of the propositional “would” is significant in the passage, for it reveals memory as a creative enterprise and represents Woolf assessing her own identity through the eyes of her absent mother.

Because Julia's untimely death bequeathed to her daughter an incomplete memory, in remembering Virginia relies upon hearsay and the power of her own imagination. In essence, she creates a history for herself, and for her family. The above excerpt from "Reminiscences" illustrates well that Woolf is sketching a portrait not only of Vanessa, but of her mother. Indeed, much of the remainder of the piece dwells upon Julia. In that sense, "Reminiscences" attempts to capture in words what it means to mother in the Duckworth-Stephen family, and, by implication, what it means to perform the role of daughter.

The Julia of "Reminiscences" is, on a number of levels, quite a romanticized figure. Representative of a primal loss experienced at an inopportune and psychologically-detrimental time, Julia's death is the impetus for reflecting nostalgically upon a lost foundation that was mysterious and necessary, the crumbling of which threatened to destroy the household's tenuous connection to the external world. In Woolf's construction of her, Julia Duckworth was a figure of untouchable, heroic proportions:

[F]or you must conceive that she was not only the beautiful of women as her portraits will tell you, but also one of the most distinct.... She had been happy as few people are happy, for she passed like a princess in a pageant from her supremely beautiful youth to marriage and motherhood, without awakenment. If I read truly, indeed the atmosphere of her home flattered such dreams and cast over the figure of her bridegroom all the golden enchantments of Tennysonian sentiment. But it would need a clearer vision than mine to decide how far her husband, though now so obviously her inferior in all ways, was able then to satisfy noble and genuine passions in his wife. Perhaps she made satisfaction for herself, cloaking his deficiencies in her own superabundance. At any rate when he was dead she determined to consecrate those years as the golden ones; when as she phrased it perhaps, she had not known the sorrow and the crime of the world because she had lived with a man, stainless of his kind, exalted in a world of pure love and beauty. (1985b: 32)

With her repeated "perhaps," Woolf again highlights the imaginative leap she must take to write her mother's life, the inherent "gulf which lies between a middle-aged woman and her children" that was surely intensified by Julia's death but was present nonetheless during her life (1985b: 39). Casting Julia as a princess whose beauty cast a benevolent spell on husband and household, Woolf effectively establishes a lofty height from which her mother inevitably fell from bliss, with the results of that fall—the death of her beloved husband Herbert Duckworth—including Julia's subsequent marriage to Leslie Stephen and the children she bore to him. Once more, Woolf's inclination is to emphasize the separation of mother and child, in this case existing because the fruits of Julia's marriage to Leslie Stephen would inevitably be shadowed

by a more satisfying past with Herbert Duckworth that was shattered by his untimely death.

The portrait that Woolf presents of Julia Stephen differs dramatically from that of Julia Duckworth. This Julia does not exist so fully in fantasy, for "she bade herself face the truth and realize in all its aspects the fact that joy was to be endured as well as sorrow. She rose to the heights, wide-eyed and nobly free from all illusion or sentiment, her second love shining pure as starlight; the rosy mists of the first rapture dispelled forever" (1985b: 33). In this marriage, Woolf maintains, Julia became all that she was meant to be, prompt, practical, and demanding, a woman whose social activism and devotion to her husband left her little time to dally with her young ones, an idea reiterated in "A Sketch of the Past" (Woolf, 1985a). Whatever Julia's relation to her Stephen children, it is clear that Virginia did not find her as warm toward them as she was to the Duckworth children: "Four children were born to her; there were four others already, older, demanding other care; she taught us, was their companion, and soothed, cheered, inspired, nursed, deceived your grandfather; and any one coming for help found her invincibly upright in her place, with time to give, earnest consideration, and the most practical sympathy" (1985b: 34). According to Woolf, far too much of her mother's time was spent coddling Leslie Stephen and feeding his ever-fragile ego—he demanded more of her than her children did—and, when she was not doting on Leslie, she busied herself in administering to the needs of the less fortunate in the community. Hence, while the Julia Stephen we are introduced to here was philanthropic, she was neither affectionate nor especially nurturing toward the children she bore to Leslie Stephen, and Woolf was surely trying to come to terms with this.

Yet her mother continued to exist to some extent in the realm of fantasy, a presence in her absence, a desire: "The dead, so people say, are forgotten, or they should rather say, that life has for the most part little significance to any of us. But now and again on more occasions than I can number, in bed at night, or in the street, or as I come into the room, there she is; beautiful, emphatic, with her familiar phrase and her laugh; closer than any of the living are, lighting our random lives as with a burning torch, infinitely noble and delightful to her children" (40). The "Oriental period of gloom" that Julia's death brought with it put into relief the relative idyllic existence of the family when her mother was alive (40). A section of "Reminiscences" dealing with the years following Julia's death focuses largely on Stella, who fulfilled the maternal role in the Stephen household following Julia's death, and it is here that Woolf more fully reveals the potential perils of living in the shadow of Julia Duckworth Stephen through exploring the potential for maternal engulfment.

Stella Duckworth was consumed by her mother's virtues:

She exaggerated her own deficiency, and, living in close companionship with her mother, was always contrasting their differences,

and imputing to herself an inferiority which led her from the first to live in her mother's shade. Your grandmother was, I have said, ruthless in her ways, and quite indifferent, if she saw good, to any amount of personal suffering. It was characteristic of her to feel that her daughter was, as she expressed it, part of herself, and as a slower and less efficient part she did not scruple to treat her with the severity with which she would have treated her own failings, or to offer her up as freely as she would have offered herself.... As a child, then, Stella was suppressed, and learned early to look upon her mother as a person of divine power and divine intelligence.... Stella was always the divine handmaid, feeding her mother's vivid flame, rejoicing in the service, and making it the central duty of her life.... Stella and her coming out, and her success and her lovers, excited many instincts long dormant in her mother; she liked young men, she enjoyed their confidences, she was intensely amused by the play and intrigue of the thing; only, as she complained, Stella would insist upon going home, long before the night was over, for fear lest she should be tired.... [A]ll her triumphs were mere frippery on the surface of this constant preoccupation with her mother. It was beautiful, almost excessive; for it had something of the morbid nature of an affection between two people too closely allied for the proper amount of reflection to take place between them. (1985b: 41-43).

Woolf critiques Julia's style of mothering Stella as detrimental to the child's individuation. To Stella, Julia was both ruthless and unempathetic, hardly qualities one would generally wish in a mother. Woolf suggests as a potential consequence Stella's failure to separate herself from the woman who bore her; she remained in what Julia Kristeva refers to as the *chora*, the alluring symbiotic realm that threatens to devour the older child. While Woolf attributes much of the blame for this union to Stella—she supposes that her mother would have deemed it “too close to be wholesome”—her critique of the relationship implicates motherhood in a potential bind (43). Woolf appears in this essay and in others to desire the freedom and ability to “think back through our mothers,” but here doing so denies the daughter an identity of her own. She also poses the possibility of an unwholesome, incestuous economy between mother and daughter, which has both individual and social implications. “Reminiscences” exposes Julia Duckworth Stephen as a model who was impossible to emulate perfectly but who inspired in her eldest daughter a desperate and destructive desire to become the Mother.

After Julia's death, Stella transferred her selflessness to a “quite unqualified self-surrender to ... [Leslie Stephen's] needs,” again attempting to walk in her mother's footsteps (1985b: 44-45). Maintaining a Juliaesque distance, Stella administered to the needs of the traumatized, numb family that was traipsing

about in "the sultry and opaque life which as not felt, had nothing real in it, and yet swam about us, and choked us and blinded us" (45). Meanwhile, the maternal role that Stella adopted led Leslie Stephen to develop an unhealthy dependence on her, to the extent that he initially opposed her engagement to Jack Hills and later expected the couple to adhere to an over-hasty commitment they had made to continue to live at Hyde Park Gate with the family. Stella's death was yet another maternal blow suffered by the Stephen siblings that forced Virginia's elder sister Vanessa to adopt the caregiving role first performed by Julia and then by Stella.

What we have in "Reminiscences" depiction of the mother, then, is a precarious combination of romance and brute reality. Both Julia and Stella are at times painted in the most flattering of terms, but when one reads more closely, the limitations of the mother-daughter relationship are disclosed. Julia was beautiful and aloof, maintaining a distance between herself and the Stephen progeny, but she also allowed an unhealthily-close dynamic to develop between herself and Stella. One wonders if Woolf presents this accurately, or if the mythic dimension of the Duckworth years and Julia's detachment from Virginia led her to read the relationship between her half-sister and mother the way she does. Whatever the case, in this piece motherhood is a highly contentious institution, desirable and potentially nurturing, but prone to inflict scars, irreparable disappointment, and trauma.

Recorded some two decades later, the memories of Julia Stephen presented in "A Sketch of the Past" are much more sensorial than those of "Reminiscences." Woolf cites two sensory-charged memories as her first:

[My first memory] was of red and purple flowers on a black ground—my mother's dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose. Perhaps we were going to St. Ives; more probably we were coming back to London. But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we were going to St. Ives, for that will lead to my other memory, which also seems to be my first memory, and in fact it is the most important. . . . If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (1985a: 64-65)

I quote at length to capture the connection and the potency of the two recollections and to communicate the contagious ecstasy in Woolf's articulation of these exquisite memories. As in "Reminiscences," Woolf unabashedly admits that her memories are to some extent fabricated—in actuality Julia and Virginia were not likely on their way to St. Ives, but it is "convenient" to say so for the sake of making an aesthetically-pleasing transition from one incident to the next. Likewise, Woolf concedes that in the period when she heard the lapping waves her ability to perceive her world was challenged, as she had "the feeling of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow" (1985a: 65). Her artistic rendition of the memory surely heightens the experience; memory is a construct of the imagination.

In both first memories the experience of the mother is central. Unlike in "Reminiscences," where Julia's distance dominates, in this text Woolf relates being on her mother's lap, near her breasts, basking in the visual sensation that was Mother. When coupled with this depiction of young Virginia being cradled, her description of the sea is equally maternal—the waters evoke the amniotic waters of the womb and the blind's acorn recalls the maternal heartbeat. The feeling of lying in a grape and seeing things dimly likewise recalls the womb. She looks back on this period as womblike; the fantasy of symbiosis enthralls. Later she recalls an image of her mother at St. Ives on the nursery balcony in a virginal, white dressing gown, surrounded by flowers. The mother-child bond is idealized to the extent that the father is written out of existence; the mother exists solely for her children.

Thus, "A Sketch of the Past" merges the comforts of St. Ives with the security of union with the mother. Visually, it is recollected in terms that are definitively feminine: "If I were a painter I should paint these first impressions in pale yellow, silver, and green.... I should make a picture that was globular; semitransparent. I should make a picture of curved petals; of shells; of things that were semi-transparent. I should make curved shapes...." (1985a: 66). Even an incident that apparently happened years after the first two is recalled in terms of sensory experience that threatens to rupture "some membrane; not to burst it; but to hum round one such a complete rapture of pleasure that [she] stopped, smelt; looked" (66). Again, the womb figures prominently. Because these intense memories bombard her so, because they can feel "more real than the present moment," Woolf fancies that perhaps "things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence" (67). If they were, she could indeed reconnect physically with her mother, which is the urgent, foundational desire that underlies "A Sketch of the Past."

But, alas, the womb is not impenetrable; the rupture of the fragile membrane eventually proves irreparable. "A Sketch of the Past" also captures the traumas that infected Woolf's life: sexual abuse by her half-brothers George and Gerald, Julia Stephen's maternal distance and later death, the deaths of Stella and her father, and the bombings of World War II that threatened her daily existence

as she was composing this piece. Woolf describes Julia's unexpected death in terms of a lamentable loss of innocence: "How immense must be the force of life which turns a baby, who can just distinguish a blot of blue and purple on a background, into the child who thirteen years later can feel all that I felt on May 5th, 1895—now almost exactly to a day, forty-four years ago—when my mother died" (1985a: 79). The suddenness with which her mother was taken from her, and the fact that this happened as Virginia was on the cusp of puberty, renders at times impossible the task of narrativizing that which is bound in the traumatized psyche and therefore beyond words.

It is significant that Woolf identifies in "A Sketch of the Past" the process of writing *To the Lighthouse* as therapeutic:

Until I was in my forties—I could settle the date by seeing when I wrote *To the Lighthouse*, but am too casual here to bother to do it—the presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings. She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life.... It is perfectly true that she obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse* in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another. Blowing bubbles out of a pipe gives the feeling of the rapid crowd of ideas and scenes which blew out of my mind, so that my lips seemed syllabbling of their own accord as I walked. What blew the bubbles? Why then? I have no notion. But I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest. (1985a: 81)

The appeal of the mother in *To the Lighthouse* is established through the character of Mrs. Ramsay, the matriarch who orchestrates human community in a seaside town inspired by the St. Ives of Woolf's childhood. Like the ideal Victorian mother, Mrs. Ramsay is humane, taking care not to crush the dreams of her young son when his father would smite him with the dimmest of realities, recognizing within insecure and deeply flawed individuals the capacity to connect. Her meticulous care to ensure the well-being and comfort of her guests makes salient her virtues. And she befriends Lily Briscoe, the motherless painter—surely representative of both Virginia's sister Vanessa Stephen Bell who herself became a painter and of Woolf herself—who falls in love with Mrs. Ramsay and all that she represents but simultaneously finds her example demanding, oppressive, and engulfing.

Mrs. Ramsay's appeal to Lily is not coincidental. Lily adopts her as a surrogate mother of sorts because Mrs. Ramsay offers a fecund fullness that contrasts the emptiness Lily perceives in herself. Mrs. Ramsay is Woolf's reflection upon the identity of her mother, upon her beauty and her social grace, and in Lily's self-doubt we glimpse reflections of Woolf's own self-doubt when confronting the spectacle of her beautiful, fairy tale mother. Everyone is smitten by Mrs. Ramsay's beauty. Above all, however, Lily is drawn to Mrs. Ramsay because she is an artist. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily reflects on her attraction:

But what a power was in the human soul! . . . That woman sitting there writing under the rock resolved everything into simplicity; made these angers, irritations fall off like old rags; she brought together this and that and then this, and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite . . . something—this scene on the beach for example, this moment of friendship and liking—which survived, after all these years complete, so that she dipped into it to re-fashion her memory of him, and there it stayed in the mind affecting one almost like a work of art. . . . “Like a work of art,” she repeated, looking back from her canvas to the drawing-room steps and back again. (Woolf, 1981: 161)

Only Mrs. Ramsay could induce Lily to regard the misogynist Charles Tansley in affectionate terms, to recognize something of the beauty within even him. Throughout the novel Mrs. Ramsay knits, and the recurrence of knitting is a metaphor for the domestic artistry that Mrs. Ramsay transacts. She is creative, delving within those she meets to discover their strengths, recognizing their weaknesses, and sustaining them where they need sustenance. As the novel progresses, both Lily and readers recognize that it is Mrs. Ramsay's imagination and self-reflection that carry her through her days of domesticity. And it is her imagination that enables empathy and her philanthropic impulse. Here we witness Woolf attempting to understand her mother's motivations, her mother's art.

Like Woolf, Lily must combat the numbness maternal death brings with it, and this is accomplished through contemplating the maternal, through imagining herself “sitting beside Mrs. Ramsay on the beach” (1981: 171). Lily's ability to produce art demands an honest assessment of the mother's strengths and weaknesses, as Woolf managed in “Reminiscences” and “A Sketch of the Past.” Even in the process of such acknowledgment Lily is once more seized with the desire for a suicidal symbiosis. Contemplation brings pleasure and it brings pain, the coexistence of romantic images of Mrs. Ramsay “raising to her forehead a wreath of white flowers” retreating with Death to a blissful nothingness and, alternately, distress and condemnation (181). Lily embraces Mrs. Ramsay's contradictions and the contradictory impulses she inspires, and it is only then that she can complete her painting.

We cannot take Woolf's claim to have conquered her trauma through writing the novel at face value, since she revisits the same maternal territory more than ten years after writing *To the Lighthouse*. The paragraph in "A Sketch of the Past" that follows her avowal that writing *To the Lighthouse* brought resolution confirms that her mother's voice is still "faintly in [her] ears, the 'Ah—ah—ah' that is at once mother-speak and orgasm, that is the pre-language of the symbiotic" (1985a: 86). In "A Sketch of the Past" especially, Woolf appears to be utterly smitten with the maternal body, the curves, the lap, the breasts, the delicate fingers. Even the image that she associates with scriptotherapy, that of blowing bubbles from a pipe, recalls both vagina and womb, even as it invokes the phallus, which enables her to approach the freedom and fluidity that is the maternal body.

In addition to the romanticization that characterizes her fascination with the womb are self-consciously romantic visual images of her mother that are dominated by her beauty, images that she admits are likely not fully representative of life as it was when her mother was alive. Particularly notable is her description of Julia at tea with nobles and artists, dressed in a striped silk dress, holding a plate of strawberries and cream. Here, as in "Reminiscences," Julia appears as from a fairy tale, as from the Pre-Raphaelite romantic paintings for which she was a model. To summon her mother "as she really was," Woolf claims, "I dream; I make up pictures of a summer's afternoon" (1985a: 87). She fantasizes. In "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf also reiterates the vision of her mother "as happy as it is possible for a human being to be" in her marriage with Herbert Duckworth, in her life before Virginia Woolf was herself imagined or conceived.

Throughout "A Sketch of the Past," such idealization inevitably yields to the reality articulated in "Reminiscences" of Julia's aloofness. Woolf's admission that lying awake longing for her mother's presence inspired her artistic imagination is especially provocative. Her mother encouraged her to imagine substitute "lovely things," which suggests art as a way of mediating absence and loss (1985a: 82). She tells of Julia's sharpness, of the fact that she cannot recall ever being alone with her mother for an extended period. As Woolf puts it, "it was impossible for her to leave a very private and particular impression upon a child . . . She was keeping what I call in my shorthand the panoply of life—that which we all lived in common—in being. I see now that she was living on such an extended surface that she had not time, nor strength, to concentrate, except if one were ill or in some child's crisis, upon me, or upon anyone—unless it were [Virginia Woolf's youngest brother] Adrian" (1985a: 83). Again she returns to Julia Duckworth Stephen as an absent presence, and again she suggests maternal favoritism that was not directed toward her. She also insinuates that Julia "sacrifice[d]" her children to their testy father, in insisting that one child always accompany him on his walks and in molding "the legacy of his dependence, which after her death became so harsh an imposition" (1985a: 133). In Woolf's account, Julia Stephen did not lose her

identity through mothering, but Virginia the child wishes that she had.

Yet, this woman she knew on a less than personal level was the “creator of that crowded merry world which spun so gaily in the centre of ... [her] childhood,” the world that collapsed upon itself on May 5th, 1895 (1985a: 84). Here Julia is constructed as an artist who organized the intricate life of the family into a veritable dream world. Throughout, Woolf reiterates that recapturing that world is a tentative, creative endeavor, one that requires the intervention of imagination. It requires the mind of an artist, and it is significant that the mind of that artist was formed when Julia yet lived because even then young Virginia was forced to engage in a good bit of imaginative work to attempt to know her mother. Equally significant is Woolf’s claim that her mother’s death enhanced her artistic sensibility:

...[M]y mother’s death unveiled and intensified; made me suddenly develop perceptions, as if a burning glass had been laid over what was shaded and dormant. Of course this quickening was spasmodic. But it was surprising—as if something were becoming visible without any effort. To take another instance—I remember going into Kensington Gardens at the time.... I had taken *The Golden Treasury* with me. I opened it and began to read some poem. And instantly and for the first time I understood the poem.... It was as if it became altogether intelligible; I had the feeling of transparency in the words when they cease to be words and become so intensified that one seems to experience them; to foretell them as if they developed what one is already feeling. (1985a: 93)

Not only does this develop an intriguing connection between art and the mother—she was, after all, consumed with her mother in this period, with her mother’s absence—but it also suggests a relationship between trauma and art. Was it her mother’s absence that allowed her to become the sensitive artist that she was? Was it desire for the mother? Was it the trauma of her mother’s death?

“A Sketch of the Past” probes deeply Virginia Woolf’s traumas—especially the deaths of her mother and of Stella—and the desires they provoke in her. Woolf’s essay explores the traumatized memory, the post-traumatic recollections of the adult nostalgically constructing for herself what she believes was her childhood, the artist’s reflection on the sources of her artistic temperament. Here she suggests that the loss of the mother, the loss of the idyllic, symbiotic sphere, provoked in the sensitive, young woman the necessary development of imagination and a regard for depth. Beth Schwartz (1991) claims that, “in invoking maternal figures as her muses, Woolf rewrites the erotic, heterosexual plot of the poet-muse relationship.... Woolf aims to establish the mother as the repository of memory and as the source of poetic inspiration for women writers by locating her at the core of the creative impulse” (721). Julia Duck-

worth Stephen, with her foibles and virtues, as "a mixture of the Madonna and a woman of the world," inspired the art that struggles to approximate, however imperfectly, the Mother, the art that sustains and nurtures readers as they struggle to realign themselves with the lost Mother (1985a: 90).

Clearly Woolf resolved her maternal obsession in neither *To the Lighthouse* nor in her autobiographical writings. In her afterward to *Virginia Woolf and Trauma*, Suzette Henke (2007) warns against romanticizing Virginia Woolf's watery suicide, and I do not intend to do so, yet its maternal dimension is undeniable. Virginia Woolf spent her life contemplating what it meant to be a child of an absent mother. Her suicide, I believe, was a self-conscious return to the mother, but as we have seen in "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past," she was under no illusions about the struggles returning to the mother entails. While in her final days she feared she was falling into madness, I believe she recognized the tortures of the death she chose. In a time when her homeland was threatened by Adolph Hitler, when the world seemed to be dominated by evil, perhaps she finally isolated an immersion in the cloudy, suffocating amniotic waters as the only way to die meaningfully.

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The Rejected and Reclaimed Mother in Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*

Sandra Cisneros's most recent novel, Caramelo, has received little critical attention thus far, and none of which examines mother-daughter themes. By highlighting the maternal relationships in this novel, my paper will add to current mother-daughter literary criticism. In addition, very little scholarship has investigated maternal themes in Chicana literature, marking my paper as what I hope to be a valuable contribution in an under-studied field. The daughter in Cisneros's novel, Celaya Reyes, refuses to model herself after her mother, and it is only by reclaiming the mother that the daughter may gain insight into her own life. Celaya's identity is closely tied to her status as her mother's daughter, despite her oppositional stance to what her mother represents, namely tradition and a seeming complicity with sexism within the family and Mexican culture. I argue that Celaya's rejection of her mother stems from her attempt to resist patriarchal family dynamics and to a greater extent, the rampant patriarchy of the Mexican social structure; that is, she rejects aligning herself with her mother, as she believes she can become more than her mother, more than "simply" a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, roles a Mexican woman is destined to be. A part of this identity-formation involves reclaiming her paternal grandmother; Celaya's narration of her grandmother's story grants her (and subsequently, her mother) subjectivity and a valid, non-marginalized role within the family. Can telling her grandmother's story shed light on Celaya's own mother-daughter conflict and thus heal the wounds that mother and daughter inflict upon each other? Can the act of narrating a maternal story humanize and reclaim the mothers in her family and simultaneously offer an opportunity for Celaya to engage in self-formation? These are significant questions the novel posits, which I intend to discuss.

There is nothing Mexican men revere more than their mamas; they are the most devoted of sons, perhaps because their mamas are the

most devoted of mamas ... when it comes to their boys. (Cisneros, 2002: 128)

The maternal relationship discussed in this paper illustrates the ambivalent nature of the mother/daughter bond between women. On the one hand, the protagonist daughter in Sandra Cisneros's novel *Caramelo* desires a connection with her mother and wants to learn about her mother's life prior to being her mother; yet, it is while undergoing the confusing, often tormented period of adolescence and young adulthood that the daughter Celaya Reyes attempts to break free from maternal identification. Identifying with the mother, she believes, sacrifices the identity she is in the process of developing. Is it possible to unite the differing perspectives the mother and daughter hold regarding their family, their Mexican/Chicano culture, and their roles as women within the family? Although a challenging task, the text suggests that mothers and daughters can come to a compromise when both members of the dyad make efforts to unite together, rather than alienate each other from their lives. The daughter initially rejects her mother's influence over her life by trying to break free from her, yet later learns that rejecting the maternal bond is a rejection of herself, for "the importance of the relationship between mother and daughter in a woman's ... formation of her female identity" is evident throughout the novel (Eysturoy, 1996: 116).

Celaya's identity is closely tied to her status as her mother's daughter, despite her oppositional stance to what her mother represents, namely tradition and a seeming complicity with sexism within the family and Mexican culture. I argue that Celaya's rejection of her mother stems from her attempt to resist patriarchal family dynamics and to a greater extent, the rampant patriarchy of the Mexican social structure; that is, she rejects aligning herself with her mother, as she believes she can become more than her mother, more than "simply" a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, roles a Mexican woman is destined to be. Throughout the novel, we see Celaya's attempt to establish a voice and a place for herself within her Chicano family structure. A part of this identity-formation involves reclaiming her paternal grandmother, who initially appears to be a difficult-to-please, demanding woman who caters to her sons' every desire; Celaya's narration of her grandmother's story, however, serves to overturn that simplistic rendering by giving her grandmother (and subsequently, her mother) subjectivity and a valid, non-marginalized role within the family. Can telling her grandmother's story shed light on Celaya's own mother-daughter conflict and thus heal the wounds that mother and daughter inflict upon each other? Can the act of narrating a maternal story humanize and reclaim the mothers in her family and simultaneously offer an opportunity for Celaya to engage in self-formation? These are significant questions the novel posits, which I intend to discuss. To date, scholars have not investigated mother/daughter dynamics in Cisneros's novel, resulting in what I believe to be an overwhelming lack of research in this area. Scholarship on mother/daughter themes in Chicana

literature is also heavily underrepresented. My paper contributes to mother-daughter research by centralizing an under-studied novel by a Chicana writer that has much to say about the Chicano family and mother-daughter relations within this patriarchal unit.

Sandra Cisneros's most recent novel, *Caramelo*, published in 2002, is a text that portrays the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship by featuring a head-strong narrator/protagonist Celaya "Lala" Reyes, who yearns for a maternal connection while she simultaneously attempts to construct her own identity. That the novel is written from the daughter's point of view is significant: "Stories about women's quests for identity are usually written from the perspective of daughters (a perspective every woman retains, even after she has become a mother herself). The daughter wants to define either her own identity or that of the woman she has only known as "mother" (Koppelman, 1985: xix-xx). The daughter, in reclaiming the mother, is also on a quest to reclaim her female self that has been de-valued by both the dominant society and her own ethnic culture. What is significant of the daughter's search for identity is her inherent need to do this by "separating from her mother" (Koppelman, 1985: xx).

The novel is divided into three sections and takes place in Chicago, Mexico City, and San Antonio, spanning three generations of the Reyes family as narrated by Celaya, including a detailed account of her paternal grandmother's life-story. Celaya's search for her identity is challenged by the family dynamics: as the youngest child and sole daughter among six brothers, her voice is overshadowed by her male siblings. In a culture that validates patriarchy, Celaya turns to her mother in an effort to forge a female bond, yet her mother is heavily influenced by patriarchal Mexican codes of maternal behavior that reinforce the favoritism of sons, thus leading Celaya to question her role as a daughter and as a female. Because Celaya is the only daughter, it is expected that she will someday inherit her mother's role. Cisneros's novel thus "represents the new mestiza/Chicana consciousness of daughters who resist and refuse to accept the constraints against which their mothers and grandmothers have chafed and which limited their lives" (Madsen, 2000: 40). Celaya is torn between expectations by her family to be her mother's helper and her own deep-rooted desire to form an identity unlike her mother's, which as my paper demonstrates, is a major factor in Celaya's rejection of her mother.

In writing this novel, Cisneros borrowed aspects from her own life, making some parts from the text autobiographical. Cisneros's statement, "I am the only daughter in a family of six sons. *That* explains everything" (1997: 119) sums up a prominent theme found in her fiction: the marginalization of Chicanas growing up in the Mexican culture that places more value on men's accomplishments. Cisneros clarifies her role within the family by adding that she is "the only daughter in a *Mexican* family of six sons," and she believes her role as "the only daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother or ... the only daughter of a working-class family of nine ... had everything to do with who

I am today” (Cisneros, 1997: 119). As this statement makes clear, Cisneros’s working-class background, gender, and the conflicts that arise between the clash of American and Mexican cultures played crucial roles in the formation of her identity. Undoubtedly these sentiments resemble Celaya’s feelings as she grows up witnessing the privileges her brothers receive simply because they are born male. By re-using this subtext of the need for female validation in essay and finally novel form, Cisneros clearly demonstrates that prescribed gender roles must be transcended in order to liberate Chicanas.

Central to the novel is Celaya’s budding awareness of Mexican cultural influences that perpetuate her mother Zoila’s favoritism toward her sons, resulting in Celaya’s often resentful attitude toward her mother, as María Gonzales (1996b) explains: “Feminists have been arguing for years that a mother who favors her sons over her daughters destroys the self-worth of the daughters. That search for self-worth becomes a theme in much of the work by Mexican American women authors” (163). In fact, Ana Castillo’s essay, “Toward the Mother-Bond Principle” from her highly influential collection of essays *Massacre of the Dreamers* reiterates this point: “...while girls are taught that they must be givers of affection and caretaking, they are not always given the message that they are deserving of receiving nurturing” (1994: 190). Chicana playwright and essayist Cherrie Moraga (2000) echoes this sentiment, saying, “Ask, for example, any Chicana mother about her children and she is quick to tell you she loves them all the same, but she doesn’t. *The boys are different*” (93-94). As daughters form their Chicana political consciousness, they witness their mothers’ preferential treatment of sons, thereby trying to “earn” the same love and affection their brothers receive. Daughters, then, may question their worthiness in a family structure that places them second to males. A question that arises within the works of Chicana writer-daughters is whether there can ever be a mutual understanding between mothers and daughters, a common recognition between women whose lives are dictated by Mexican codes of conduct.

How can the daughters come to terms with their mothers’ apparent complicity with the oppression of women? Clearly, an issue of concern in the novel is Celaya’s feelings of doubt involving her mother’s love for her. Why cannot Zoila show affection toward her daughter? Although later as an adult Celaya comes to understand patriarchal traditions that shape Zoila’s favoritism toward her sons, she cannot comprehend this while she is growing up, leading to the resentment she harbors toward her mother. Celaya’s role as story-teller of her paternal grandmother’s life enables her to critique the culture that places more value on the mother-son relationship than that between mother and daughter. Narrating her grandmother’s story may heal Celaya’s feelings of resentment and hostility toward her mother. Moreover, Celaya’s narration of her grandmother’s story is imperative to her development as a writer, also enabling her to recognize and challenge Mexican customs that serve to dismantle the bond between Celaya and her own mother.

As a young girl, Celaya is astutely aware of her mother's confinement to Mexican decorum that outlines her responsibilities as wife and mother. Describing her mother as "washing our clothes herself" and "muttering and spitting and grunting things I can't quite hear under her breath," (Cisneros, 2002: 64) Celaya becomes an active observer of the limited roles women are expected to assume, that of wife and mother. Zoila confides in her daughter in hopes of establishing female empathy. On their daily walks every summer in Mexico City while visiting her father's mother, the "Awful Grandmother," Celaya comes to realize her mother's frustration: "Mother with those cat-eyed sunglasses, looking out at the street, out at nowhere, out at nothing at all, sighing. A long time. ... And I think to myself how beautiful my mother is, looking like a movie star right now, and not our mother who has to scrub our laundry" (65-66). Celaya distinguishes her mother from that woman who "has to" do domestic chores; to Celaya, her mother is "beautiful," revealing her ability to appreciate her mother for her aesthetic, rather than domestic value.

Although Zoila does not articulate her discontentment, Celaya voices this herself by expressing her dissatisfaction with Zoila's role as wife and mother. As the only other female in the family, Celaya empathizes with her mother, and in her critique of Zoila's role, she is also lamenting the possibility that she, too will someday inherit her mother's place as caretaker of the family. To Celaya, Zoila represents more than simply the woman who cleans after them; she represents beauty and grace, someone worthy of admiration. Indeed, even at her young age Celaya aptly discovers a contradiction inherent to the Mexican culture. Mothers are believed to be revered, yet this seeming high regard relies on the fulfillment of their "obligations" of producing children and being efficient in domestic responsibilities.

Zoila's and Celaya's daily walks serve to establish a female, maternal connection free from male interference: "And I'm so happy to have my mother all to myself buying good things to eat, and talking, just to me, without my brothers bothering us" (Cisneros, 2002: 66). In a home that is occupied predominantly by males, the outdoors become a sanctuary for maternal bonding, offering Zoila and Celaya an opportunity to establish their own feminine space; thus, the presence of male members of the family is seen as intrusion, leading Celaya to desire a connection with her mother outside the home that is occupied by the rest of the family. But patriarchy betrays that maternal bond; upon return from one of their walks, Celaya tells her family where she and her mother have been, thereby "breaking the spell": "And now why is everyone angry just because we ate in a restaurant? I don't know anything except I know this. I am the reason why Mother is screaming: -I can't stand it anymore, I'm getting the hell out of here" (66). Celaya cannot comprehend why "just" eating in a restaurant would incite anger or suspicion from the family. Interestingly, Celaya's joyous walk with her mother is described as a "spell" that Celaya breaks when she lets in on their secret. As this passage demonstrates, female connections and secrecy

are shunned and viewed as a threat to masculine order. While in Mexico, Zoila realizes that she must abide by traditions that limit a woman's mobility outside the home. As an American-born Chicana, these seemingly archaic traditions conflict with her more Americanized notions of female independence, especially given the fact that she knows this kind of behavior would have been tolerated in the States, even by her own husband. During their stay in Mexico, Zoila learns that excursions without the accompaniment of a male chaperone and male protection are culturally taboo.

Later in the trip, Zoila learns that her husband Inocencio fathered a child prior to his marriage to Zoila. Upon learning this secret from the Awful Grandmother, Zoila flees from the moving car, yet Celaya questions her mother's options: "But where can Mother go? She doesn't have any money. All she's got is her husband and kids, and now she doesn't even want us" (Cisneros, 2002: 83). Although Celaya empathizes with her mother, she feels betrayed as well, believing that Zoila no longer wants her. She thus questions if she has in some way hindered her mother's options. As a Mexican American wife and mother, Zoila is financially dependent on her husband, leaving Celaya to accurately state that her mother's options are limited. Once again, as in the previous passage, Celaya's thoughts are tinged with feelings of guilt for her mother's limited roles as dutiful wife and mother. Celaya feels guilty for being an added burden, as if her role as daughter has contributed to her mother's feelings of imprisonment. As a female, Celaya aligns herself with her mother, despite feeling betrayed and saddened that her mother "doesn't even want" her anymore. Moreover, the Awful Grandmother cannot situate herself as her daughter-in-law's ally, as she tells her son Inocencio: "*Mijo*"—the Grandmother intervenes—"Let her be. You're better off without her kind. Wives come and go, but mothers, you have only one!" (85). The Awful Grandmother is a product of patriarchy, and because of this she must defend the male, even if his actions are questionable.

Although the Grandmother is called "Awful," it is Celaya's duty as narrator and writer to shed light on how her Grandmother became this way. Celaya sees that it is her responsibility to give voice to the maligned female who cannot speak for herself. By telling her Grandmother's story of pain and suffering, Celaya comes to understand the role that Mexican patriarchy has played in forming her Grandmother's character. The Grandmother's story may also serve as a mode of connection between Celaya and her own mother. If Celaya can learn that the Awful Grandmother's character was learned, that is, shaped by the hardships and tragedies that result from being born female in a male-dominated culture, then she may come to understand why her relationship with Zoila has become conflicted.

By underscoring the significance of the mother-daughter bond, the novel also serves as a sharp criticism of the idealization of mothers by sons and the preference placed on this relationship. Yet this idealization of mother actually belies the systematic subordination of women inherent within pa-

triarchy; that is, mothers are worshipped yet held in passive roles. This critique is seen in Celaya's narration of the Awful Grandmother Soledad's story. When growing up in her future mother-in-law's home, Soledad observes her husband-to-be's absolute devotion to his mother and vice versa: "It's amazing how blind Mexican sons are to their mothers' shortcomings. A meddling, quarrelsome, difficult, possessive mother is seen only as a mother who loves her child too much, instead of the things she is—an unhappy, lonely person" (Cisneros, 2002: 165). Mexican sons, according to Celaya, fail to admit their mothers' faults because they often idealize them as sacred figures rather than as flesh-and-blood beings. As women possessing limited power and autonomy, motherhood becomes their sole source of identity and happiness. The novel demonstrates that a woman's role in the Mexican culture is limited to that of daughter, wife, and mother; women's influence is chiefly visible through motherhood. Celaya attacks her culture's strict value-placing on the relationship between mother and son and challenges the sons' idealization of mothers. In this glorified role, mothers are essentially stripped of any semblance of humanity. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a Chicana writer such as Cisneros would intentionally create realistic mothers with imperfections and flaws.

As Celaya grows into a teenager, she becomes a sharp critic of patriarchy that distorts the maternal relationship and leads to her alienation from her mother. While the young Celaya admired her mother's beauty, the teenaged version scoffs at being compared to her: "Father adds, *Ay, que Lalita*. You're just like your mother. I'm nothing at all like Mother!" (Cisneros, 2002: 238). Celaya desires an identity that is independent of her mother; moreover, the disconnection that arises between mother and daughter stems from Celaya's determination to create a life unlike her mother's. She does not want to be "just like" her mother, for this means she will inherit her mother's role in the home: "In a patriarchal context, . . . the relationship between mother and daughter is charged with ambiguities, because accepting the mother as a role model may signify accepting oppressive, socially prescribed norms of womanhood" (Eys-turoy, 1996: 116-117). As a Chicana, Celaya desires more than what her mother represents, leading her to believe that any identification with the mother means she will have to sacrifice an integral part of her self. Celaya's role as a daughter raised by Mexican and Chicano cultural standards is at odds with her desire for independence and freedom, values preached by America. Celaya does not easily identify with the American society, but she is nonetheless influenced by these "American" values.

This cultural tension is at the root of the mother-daughter relationship, as María Gonzales (1996b) argues: "Contemporary Mexican American women prose writers depict in their texts female characters preoccupied with the conflicts inherent in the relationship between mothers and daughters who are members of a community that receives its cultural values from two worlds often in conflict, U.S. mainstream culture and Mexican culture" (153). Celaya feels

insulted by the comparison to her mother, given that she interprets it as an undermining of her need to assert her own identity and voice. Celaya's desire to construct her own voice may be read as distinctly American; however, she is astute enough to realize that her ethnicity has relegated her to a marginalized, invisible figure in American society. Celaya's refusal to be silenced goes against decorum deemed appropriate for Mexican women, leaving her caught between two value systems. How can she give herself a voice while remaining true to her Mexican heritage? This struggle is undoubtedly inherent to the Chicana experience.

As the only daughter and youngest child, Celaya detests the Mexican culture's limited value placed on daughters: "There is no commandment that says honor thy daughter" (243). She questions the notion of honoring the mother when she as a daughter is relegated to a lower status than her older brothers. A connection with her mother amidst the Mexican culture's inherent male superiority is unfathomable to Celaya: "How could Father say I'm like her! Even she admits I take after him. Says even as a baby I was *una chillona*. How she had to wear me on her hip like a gun, and even then I wouldn't stop crying. I drove her crazy. Now she drives me crazy" (242). Celaya's resentment toward her mother sharply contrasts her infancy, when she was literally attached to her mother's hip.

Why would she compare herself to a violent weapon? Celaya's attachment to her mother's hip here is not interpreted as a form of safety or security, but rather, an added burden or weight she must carry. Earlier, I discussed Celaya's guilt for burdening her mother, but the roles have been reversed. Zoila now unwittingly drives Celaya crazy. Ironically, mother and daughter are similar in their ability to incite *locura* in each other. But it is because of this intimacy they share as mother and daughter that they know exactly how to inflict pain on each other and hence, drive each other crazy. This commonality drives them further apart from each other, and what once was a relationship marked by close attachment is now one replaced by disconnection and hurt.

The bond that Celaya desires with her mother is integral to her development as a self-defined woman. Celaya looks to her mother as a potential ally and confidante, yet as a mother of six sons and one daughter, Zoila prioritizes her bond with her boys: "Mother's never been on my side about anything.... Father would like to think me and Mother are friends, but what kind of friend can't hear you when you're talking to her?" (Cisneros, 2002: 362). Celaya is saddened and angered by what appears to be her mother's indifference toward her. According to Celaya, Zoila fails to hear her when she's talking, illustrating her desire to be heard by her mother, someone she believes would "be on her side" due to their shared gender. Celaya is upset at being compared to her mother, yet it is somewhat ironic that she would nevertheless desire maternal recognition. She may not want to be like her mother, but she wants to be seen by her. Because of her detachment from her mother, Celaya struggles to find her place in the world.

Given that Celaya feels devalued by her mother and culture, she attempts to distance herself from Zoila, yet she is cognizant of how a daughter is “supposed” to feel about her mother:

You're supposed to think good thoughts, hold holy her memory, call out to her when you're in danger, bid her come bless you. But I never think of Mother without dodging to get out of her way, the whoosh of her hand quicker than the enemy's machete, the pinch of her thumb and index finger meaner than a carnival *guacamaya*. (Cisneros, 2002: 361)

Although Celaya witnesses the idealization of mothers very much present in the Mexican culture, she refuses to sanctify her mother. Mothers are “supposed” to be revered and respected by their daughters. However, Zoila is seen as more of an enemy and an arch rival rather than a deified, sacred figure. Interestingly, we once again see images of weapons associated with the maternal figure; in a previous passage, Celaya is “like a gun” on her mother’s hip, and here Zoila’s hand is described as “quicker than the enemy’s machete.”

It is significant that both Celaya and Zoila are compared to weapons, suggesting that the two women are symbolically killing each other slowly through words and actions. The gun and machete situate the two women as enemies, each woman waiting for the other to pull the trigger, permanently alienating one from another. She wonders how she can possibly honor her mother when her mother does not honor her; she is at odds with the culturally-ascribed mandate to “hold holy” her mother. Further, Celaya is wise enough to understand that this mandate to honor and revere the mother is a tool used by patriarchy to keep women “in their place.” The reverence held for mothers contrasts with the actual treatment of women within the family. Celaya’s knowledge that a good daughter is “supposed” to love her mother may be read as an admission of guilt and even sadness that their relationship is flawed. Significantly, Celaya does not necessarily blame her mother or herself for their strained relationship. More than anything, Celaya tries to come to some explanation for their distance from each other.

This tug-of-war of between Celaya’s search for identity and what she perceives as her mother’s antagonism and lack of compassion is at the root of the miscommunication and misunderstanding between mother and daughter:

“What’s wrong with you?” Mother asks.

“Since when do you care?” I say to mother. “All you ever worry about is your boys.” You spoiled brat, selfish, smart-mouthy, smart-alecky, smart-ass, I’ll teach you. There are tears in her eyes that she won’t let out of her eyes. She can’t. She doesn’t know how to cry....

“Come back here, crybaby,” Mother shouts good and loud. “Where you going? I said come back here, *huerca*. I’m talking to you! When I

catch you I'm going to give you two good conks on your head with my *chancla*. You hear me! Do you hear! Then you'll know what depressed means." (Cisneros, 2002: 364)

Within this family setting, mothers like Zoila "function at times to stifle growth and development; they serve as symbols of repression, of a tradition that stifles" (Rebolledo, 1987: 150). Celaya is thus not only fighting her mother, but attempting to fend off a culturally-prescribed role as "dutiful daughter" that she feels is oppressive. Both Celaya and Zoila hurl accusations at each other, unable to hear each other over the noise they create. Zoila is shocked by Celaya's accusation, yet she is unable to express this grief because "she doesn't know how to cry," suggesting that Zoila guards herself against this type of emotion. Celaya's accusation visibly pains Zoila, but rather than cry, Zoila threatens violence. Why does Cisneros make several connections between violence and maternity? For one thing, Zoila's threats to "conk" her daughter on the head and the "pinch of her thumb," etc., contrast the image of helpless, suffering, victimized mother deified by Mexican sons. But as the novel makes clear, the seemingly harmless, gentle mother does, in fact, hold the capacity to inflict violence upon other women. It is the daughters who must succumb to the violence from their mothers, although, realistically speaking, both mothers and daughters are equally threatened by the possibility of male violence.

The inability to cry functions as yet another deterrent to a maternal connection. Crying requires vulnerability, yet both mother and daughter are on guard with each other, restraining emotions aside from anger. Central to this passage is what Celaya interprets as Zoila's inability to empathize with her. Zoila should not be easily dismissed as a deliberately cruel woman who intentionally hurts her daughter, yet why can she not show empathy toward her? Celaya believes it is because Zoila prefers her sons, but I would argue that although Zoila's behavior would appear to affirm this, the rationale extends beyond this perceived favoritism. Because Zoila's role as mother has been shaped by Mexican patriarchy, she is expected to overly-protect and coddle her male children, often at the expense of the daughter. Without a doubt Zoila loves her daughter, but prescribing to Mexican patriarchal motherhood dictates that she indulge her sons and socialize her daughter to follow these rules.

In an effort to escape her confinement within the home, Celaya runs away with her boyfriend, Ernie Calderón. Although by this time her grandmother is dead, Celaya is haunted by her grandmother's presence. As a writer and more importantly as a daughter and granddaughter living within a male-dominated culture, Celaya has the capacity to comprehend the significance of her grandmother's story and its need to be told:

Oh, it's terrible being a woman. The world doesn't pay attention to you until you grow tetas, and then once they dry up, you turn invisible again....

You'll tell my story, won't you, Celaya? So that I'll be understood?
So that I'll be forgiven? (Cisneros, 2002: 408)

What Soledad truthfully conveys to Celaya is the inherent sexism within the Mexican culture. Women are valued for their physical attributes, reproductive abilities, and little else. In this light, women are worthy for what they produce for patriarchy, namely children. By witnessing the privileging of males by her mother and grandmother, Celaya determines to challenge this by learning to value the feminine. Soledad urges the telling of her story so that she may be "forgiven," suggesting to Celaya (and readers) that perhaps learning about her life will humanize this "Awful Grandmother." It is Celaya who is in danger of succumbing to rigid rules and expectations imposed on her by family and culture, making her the ideal person to narrate Soledad's life. Celaya has the most to learn from Soledad's life, enabling her to not only portray the Awful Grandmother more empathetically, but also granting Celaya the opportunity to reclaim the mothers in her family.

It is much later, while celebrating her parents' thirty-year wedding anniversary that Celaya comes to voice her awareness of her close family ties. In recognizing this, she reclaims the mother:

And I realize with all the noise called "talking" in my house, that talking is nothing but talking, that is so much a part of my house and my past and myself you can't hear it as several occasions, but as one roar like the roar inside a shell, I realize then that this is my life, with its dragon arabesques of voices and lives intertwined, rushing like a Ganges, irrevocable and wild, carrying away everything in reach, whole villages, pigs, shoes, coffeepots, and that little basket inside the coffeepot that Mother always loses each morning and has to turn the kitchen upside down looking for until someone thinks to look in the garbage. (Cisneros, 2002: 424)

Celaya gives voice to these "dragon arabesques of voices"; significantly, she gives voice to her grandmother who by strict gender assignments is silenced. Although Celaya at first wants to break away from familial bonds, she later learns that this rejection of family and the mother reinforces her unhappiness. Moreover, Celaya's admission that she has "turned into" the Awful Grandmother (Cisneros, 2002: 424) solidifies her recognition of the valuable roles her grandmother and mother have played in shaping her life. She discovers that she is not so unlike her Awful Grandmother or her mother, for that matter. In affirming her grandmother's role in shaping her life, Celaya attests to the importance of acknowledging the bond between women. Initially, she does everything in her power to reject both mother and grandmother, but instead chooses to give them voice and in the end, she discovers her writer's voice as well.

Cisneros's novel sends a common message about the role the mother-daughter relationship plays in the development of female identity. Conflicts may arise between the relationship and the formation of an identity, yet the daughter/protagonist must come to terms with the knowledge that a rejection of the mother is a rejection of herself. By reclaiming the mother as a significant force in her life, Celaya may better endure stumbling blocks and other hardships that may hinder her path to self-development. As the text demonstrates, it is the responsibility of the writer/daughter to conceive of the possibility of the union between mother and daughter without sacrificing the unique self. Daughters who yearn to create an identity separate from the mother must learn to acknowledge that their mothers are daughters as well, and perhaps their mothers were once in the same position in which these daughters now find themselves.

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Maggie Kirkman and Gayle Letherby

Some “Grimm” Reflections on Mothers and Daughters

A Fairy Tale for Our Times

In this paper we utilize both the fairy tale genre and sociological auto/biography. Drawing on our own experiences and those of participants from our research we argue that traditional definitions of what makes a “real” and a “good” mother and a “real” and a “good” daughter persist beyond the fairytales of our childhood, despite (and sometimes because of) the challenging discourse of feminism. We suggest that increasingly diverse maternal and reproductive experiences of mothers and their daughters today subvert both traditional and contemporary representations and prescriptions of mothers and daughters.

For Dorothy and Alice

In this article we draw on traditional and challenging discourses and reflect on some maternal and reproductive identities and experiences of mothers and daughters. According to Michel Foucault (1980, 1984), discourses are historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth; through discourses we are encouraged to see what is and what is not “the truth.” As such, discourses “are not merely linguistic phenomena, but are always shot through with power and are institutionalized as practices” (Ransom, 1993: 134). Powerful medical, political, academic, and lay discourses surround motherhood and, by implication, the reproductive responsibilities of daughters; they specify the relation between women and mothering, sanction who should and should not mother, and inform us of when, how, and why we should mother. A significant vehicle for the distribution of discourses, including the social norms and values of motherhood and daughterhood, is the literary genre of the fairy tale:

Almost all critics who have studied the emergence of the literary fairy

tale in Europe agree that educated writers purposely appropriated the oral folk tale and converted it into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children would become civilized according to the social code of that time. The writers of fairy tales for children *acted* ideologically by presenting their notions regarding social conditions and conflicts, and they *interacted* with each other and with past writers and storytellers of folklore in a public sphere. (Zipes, 1983: 3)

We are not the first to challenge the normative script for women within fairy tales. Take, for example, these extracts from *Rapunzel's Revenge: Fairytales for Feminists*:

"Have you noticed," said the Sleeping Beauty suddenly, "that in many of our stories, our enemies are other women?"

"That's because men wrote the stories," said Cinderella. "It makes them feel good to have women fighting among themselves for male attention."

"Well then," said the Sleeping Beauty, "we'll just have to re-write the stories ourselves. I'd just love to rescue some good-looking fellow who's been imprisoned in a castle or tower by a wicked uncle or step-father."

"That's a ridiculous plot," said Goldilocks contemptuously.

"I know," said the Sleeping Beauty, "but it's actually the plot of our stories in reverse." (Kavannah, 1985: 7-8)

The prince kept the glass slipper in his briefcase along with his vodka and white lemonade. Occasionally he would take it out and stroke the glass and wish he was the kind of man Cinderella would marry.

He was sitting playing with the shoe one day when Cinderella came in.

"I really think you should see someone about this foot fetish you have," she said kindly. "I'm sure it's something they could cure...." Cinderella gently took the shoe away from the prince, she held it up to the light.

"Listen here, Prince, why don't you help us, the group that are trying to get shoes like this banned, crippling young girls' feet, and lethal too." (Binchy, 1985: 64)

See also the cartoon by Jacky Fleming on the opposite page.

Other feminist academics, too, have used this approach. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (2000), in a critical discussion of the relationship between and among feminist theory, social theory and feminism, compare the relationships within the academic feminist community to those of the participants in "The

Emperor's New Clothes." (See also Marchbank and Letherby, 2000, for a different reading of the tale.)

As suggested in the examples above, in traditional fairy tales heroines are always stereotypically beautiful and always fulfil their expected feminine script by being dutiful daughters. Although their tales usually end before marriage and parenthood begins, we are left in no doubt that they become good mothers. The villains of the piece are often women, too: bad women in every way, with their "otherness" frequently compounded by the unnaturalness of their relationship to our heroines, such as a step-parenting relationship. The beginning of "Cinderella" highlights some of the ways in which women are defined as "good" or "bad" within the fairy tale:

The wife of a rich man fell sick, and as she felt that her end was drawing near, she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, "Dear child, be good and pious, and then the good God will always protect thee, and I will look down on thee from heaven and be near thee." Thereupon she closed her eyes and departed. Every day the maiden went out to her mother's grave, and wept, and she remained pious and good. When winter came the snow spread a white sheet over the grave, and when the spring sun had drawn it off again, the man had taken another wife.

The woman had brought two daughters into the house with her, who were beautiful and fair of face, but vile and black of heart. Now began a bad time for the poor step-child.... There she had to do hard work from morning till night, get up before daybreak, carry water, light fires, cook and wash. Besides this, the sisters did her every imaginable injury—they mocked her and emptied her peas and lentils into the ashes, so that she was forced to sit and pick them out again. In the evening when she had worked till she was weary she had no bed to go to, but had to sleep by the fireside in the ashes. And as on that account she always looked dusty and dirty, they called her Cinderella.... (The Brothers Grimm, 1884, np.)

In challenging the traditional and (some) contemporary expectations of women in relation to mother and daughter identities, we utilize and subvert the traditional fairy tale which explains the use of "Grimm" in our title. It is not only Grimms' tales and style that we draw on, but "Some Perrault/Anderson/Grimm' Reflections on Mothers and Daughters" does not have quite the same ring to it, or even make sense. Charles Perrault, writing and publishing in the 1600s wrote, amongst other tales, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Mother Goose* and an early version of *Cinderella*. Both the Grimm brothers (who in the 1800s published hundreds of stories based on tales that they said had been handed down for generations) and Hans Christian Anderson (who likewise published numerous stories in the nineteenth cen-



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ture) removed the sexual references from the original stories and introduced moral warnings in order to make them "suitable" for children. The Grimms' stories include *Rapunzel*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella* and *Little Snow White*. Anderson's include *The Emperor's New Clothes*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Snow Queen*, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Ugly Duckling* and *The Red Shoes*. Since their publication these stories have been translated around the world, read to countless generations of children and, more recently, made and re-made into films (there has, however, also been some subversion here: see the *Shrek* trilogy for an example).

Thus, in our challenge to the normative reproductive script for mothers and daughters, we use a fairy tale approach to highlight even further how traditional expectations persist and are supported within the societies in which we live, although we could, of course, just as easily have draw on other cultural and media formats. In addition, our story draws on our own autobiographies as well as the biographies of our research respondents, demonstrating how, like all researchers, our lives have influenced our research and our research has influenced our lives (see Kirkman, 1999a, 2001b; Letherby, 2003). The "neutral" scholar is a fiction (Charmaz and Mitchell, 1997; Bauman, 2000), a cunning plot device to shore up academic authority. None of us is outside society; we are all part of it (e.g. Mills, 1959; Ribbens, 1993).

Thus, our fairy tale reveals that traditional definitions of what makes a "real" and a "good" mother and a "real" and a "good" daughter persist beyond the fairy tales of our childhood, despite (and sometimes because of) the challenging discourses of feminism. The personal is, indeed, political; it is also

theoretical: one person's experience can help us to understand the experience of others (Letherby, 2003).

We now begin our tale, Dear Reader, with confidence that you will recognise the irony in the telling.

Are you sitting comfortably?

[Why are you sitting comfortably? Should you really be reading a story at this time of day?

Never mind; we'll begin anyway.]

Once upon a time, not so long ago, there lived two women on opposite sides of the world. They were both wicked. Neither was a mother although both had hoped to be so.

One of the women in our story, Gayle, trained as a nursery nurse, at least partly in preparation for the care of all the children she intended to have. But she found it very difficult to become pregnant when she and her husband felt that the time was right. Of course, if her mother-in-law had had her way, Gayle and her husband would have thrown away the evil contraceptive pills on the day on which they were wed. They might as well have been poisoned apples. When she finally did become pregnant, there was great rejoicing by her family and friends. The joy was followed by great sorrow when Gayle lost their baby at 16 weeks gestation. Lots of people tried to comfort her with platitudes such as, "Never mind; it will all be better next time" and "Of course it was all for the best," but the next time never came and benefits were hard to identify.

A period of loss and distress followed, and it was Gayle's mother, Dorothy, who helped Gayle through the darkness. Dorothy was in all ways Gayle's Fairy Godmother as well as her biological mother. It was more important to Dorothy that Gayle was happy rather than that her daughter made her a grandmother. The doctor, though, was not so kind. He told Gayle and her husband that they could consider *in vitro* fertilisation "if all else failed," but recommended that they not go "that far," letting "Nature take its course."

When, after many, many months, Gayle emerged from the dark tunnel of distress, she had decided not to pursue further medical investigations. Some people would not accept this as a decision reached by Gayle for self-preservation and told her that, if she would not attempt everything she was offered as the heroine in the fairy tale would, then it was her own fault she was not a mother.

The other anti-heroine of our tale is Maggie, who trained as a kindergarten teacher, working with children just as Gayle had done. Maggie, too, was unable to become pregnant. When she thought she had succeeded at 25, she and her husband were very proud, but it lasted only through one missed period. She tried pills and potions to stimulate her ovaries to produce more eggs; she attempted to bewitch her husband to make love to her more often when she was fertile; but there was no magic transformation. Her eggs were, it seemed, irreparably cracked.

Maggie continued teaching for a few years, coming to specialise in hearing-impaired and intellectually disabled children. But it was too hard working with other people's children when she had none of her own. She went to university to retrain as a psychologist. Maggie was lucky that she made this decision in the few years of free university education in Australia. Her Fairy Godmother was Gough Whitlam, the prime minister who brought about a brief period of radical reform.

At 30, when she had begun her second year of study, Maggie's problems were solved by a hysterectomy, the result of many enormous fibroid tumours. After the operation, an excited junior doctor told her that one was the size of an orange, another as big as the base of her water jug. He almost did a little dance when he said, "That was really pathological!" Maggie's mother-in-law said that she knew how Maggie felt because she had "just had the dogs done." A hospital social worker confidently told Maggie that she was "mourning her uterus" and did not listen when Maggie tried to say that, on the contrary, she was mourning all her lost children.

Once she came out of hospital, Maggie's friends—all of whom seemed to be prodigiously fecund—were convinced that she wanted to spend lots of time holding their babies. When, through sheer effort of will, Maggie became a non-mother rather than an infertile woman, she was avoided by her friends with little children. Even her loving younger sister, Cynthia, whose three sons Maggie treasured, laughingly told her that she used Maggie's new persona and tidy house to threaten the children: "If you don't do as you're told I'll send you to live with Maggie!" She had become the wicked, selfish, Childless Woman.

The ways in which some people defined Maggie and Gayle—and the ways in which they thought about themselves—were, of course, affected by dominant discourses of womanhood, motherhood, (reproductive) daughterhood, and childlessness (Foucault, 1980, 1984; Letherby, 2003). Power is constituted in discourses and it is in discourses that power lies. As Gayle has since argued:

In Western Society, all women live their lives against a background of personal and cultural assumptions that all women are or want to be mothers and that for women motherhood is proof of adulthood and a natural consequence of marriage or a permanent relationship with a man. (Letherby, 1994: 525)

Infertility discourses, therefore, stress that women who are unable to have babies are indeed bewitched—desperate victims, full of anguish and suffering (Franklin, 1990: 200)—their reproductive capacities broken and cracked, their lives and psyches under the same evil spell.

Maggie's way of fighting this spell was to immerse herself in her studies. Even though she had missed almost a full semester, she completed the year top of her class. Her lecturers asked her if she was possessed. Maggie's husband

was ambivalent about her academic success and said that standards must have dropped since his day. By the time she graduated, their marriage was over. She began a part-time Ph.D., looking at families of disabled children, while lecturing at her old teachers' college and tutoring in the Psychology Department of her university.

Meanwhile, Gayle decided that it was difficult for her to work with children, at least for a time. This was probably for the best, because everyone “knows” that women who do not have children know nothing at all about them or how to care for them. But Gayle was perplexed about what to do, now that she was unable to prove herself as a woman. Eventually she went to night classes to perfect the typing skills she had developed in school, consciously or unconsciously (perhaps as a result of a Wise Man's curse) pursuing another stereotypical female occupation. At the same time, Gayle decided to study something else of interest, and enrolled in A-level Sociology, which she loved and which led, a few years later, to what some would perceive as her ultimate downfall.

After a couple of years Gayle began an undergraduate degree in Sociology and, although her studies had helped her to understand and to challenge the traditional narratives of womanhood, she still hoped that one day she would become a mother. No baby came, but Gayle enjoyed her undergraduate studies so much that she decided to keep studying. Luckily she won a scholarship and was able to undertake a Ph.D. focusing on the experience of infertility and involuntary childlessness, which her own autobiography had shown her was misunderstood.

Ancient tales augured the dangers courted by Gayle and Maggie in returning to study. As many men have argued—from the beginning of time until relatively recently, in scholarly journals as well as down the pub—too much learning is bad for women and their reproductive capabilities (e.g. Ford et al., 1953; Spencer, 1893; Sturgis, 1957). It will wither their ovaries and dry up their milk. It can also wreck their marriages, as Gayle, like Maggie, soon discovered. Her husband, although initially supportive, became unhappy about Gayle's return to learning and four months before her finals Gayle moved out of the marital home and went to stay with her mother. For six months Gayle and Dorothy slept in a single bed. Gayle has since found out that her mother (who, you remember, is also her Fairy Godmother) slept for all of that time with one foot on the floor.

When researching for her Ph.D., Gayle met the Other Man: a father who lived with and cared for his two teenage boys. So, when Gayle and John decided to live together, Gayle began an intimate relationship with John's children. She mothered them but was not their mother. Just like Cinderella and Snow White, Gayle washed and cooked for the men in her life, although she was very, very lucky because her new partner did all the ironing “for her.”

Unlike Cinderella and Snow White, however, Gayle is not the heroine in her story because she is that frustrated, ugly, cruel, and wicked person, the

Step-Mother: the giver of the cold, cold kiss and the person you must never, ever take an apple from.

It is hard to imagine, but in fairy tale land Maggie is possibly even more wicked. She, too, moved out of her marital home (which happened to be a vicarage) and it did not go down too well with the parish that she left the vicar on Christmas Eve. Maggie found a Handsome Prince five years after her marriage ended and was thrilled to discover that he was sterile, so there was no danger of her barrenness blighting his life. However, she soon learnt that the Handsome Prince had a lively imagination and had dreamed up a story about how a woman with no uterus and a man with no sperm could have a baby, using Maggie's eggs, donor sperm, and another woman's uterus.

At first this tale was a nightmare and Maggie feared that she would lose the security of her childfree non-motherhood. Eventually, she mentioned the Prince's dream to her youngest sister, Linda, a mother of two children, who said she would love to have a baby for her, although not with her own eggs. Cynthia offered eggs if she needed them, but could not gestate and relinquish a baby. As it happened, Linda conceived at the first attempt, using Maggie's egg. Linda and Maggie thought they were being strong, feminist women in overcoming the limitations of nature and were proud of their achievement (see Kirkman and Kirkman, 1988, 2001; Kirkman and Kirkman 2002). When their story became known, they were astonished to discover that they were anathema not only to the Church but to other women, who said that Maggie was cruel to her sister and treated her baby as a commodity (Attwood, 1988; Dixon, 1988; West, 1988). Maggie threatened the future of her sister, the sisterhood, motherhood, and her daughter Alice. She was a Wicked Woman. Nevertheless, the sisters lived happily ever after, despite being cast in a story of gloom and despair. Alice is now 20 and has survived the maternal cruelty, burdened only by the intrinsic inadequacies of parents.

Maggie's first Ph.D. was derailed by her complicated path to motherhood, but she began another when her daughter started school. Maggie, like Gayle, had learnt how different her experience of infertility was from accounts offered in her undergraduate studies, and also researched women's experiences of infertility for her Ph.D. in psychology (e.g. Kirkman, 1999b, 2001a, 2002, 2003b).

Maggie does not regret the way her life has unfolded. Without these (at times painful) vicissitudes she would not be the person she is and would certainly not be mother to the daughter she has. But she is aware that, in a public version of her story, she remains the Ugly Sister who took Cinderella's baby. Maggie is comfortable researching infertility because it is many years since she has been an infertile woman. She researches donor-assisted conception without feeling any personal ramifications, even though her husband needed to use a sperm donor. These plots are part of *Once Upon a Time*, in which "insider" knowledge has attained the perspective of "outsider" reflection (see Woollett, 1996). Maggie does not, however, research surrogate motherhood.

This feels too much like the story she is still living. (There is a precedent for seeing surrogate motherhood as a nasty fairy tale: Annas, 1988.)

Gayle, too, feels blessed that she has been able to devote such a lot of time and attention to an issue that is so important to her life. But it has not always been easy. Respondents in her doctoral study were often really interested in Gayle's story, one of the consequences of undertaking research as an "insider." All in all, Gayle undertook 99 interviews and received 100-plus letters during her research. Two-thirds in to the 18-month data-collection period, Gayle began to wonder if she was bewitched, for when asked about her feelings and views she could no longer distinguish her own experience from those of the women and men in her study. Gayle became even more anxious and confused when the people she was speaking and writing to assumed that she would always make the same decisions as they had and hold the same opinions that they did. For example, although she believes that it is "a woman's right to choose," some of Gayle's respondents had been led by their experiences to deny abortion as an appropriate choice for women. Maintaining her own values whilst not upsetting the women who were so freely telling their own stories to Gayle made her feel more wicked than ever.

So, Gentle Reader, both Gayle and Maggie were able to indulge themselves within the "ivory towers" of academe rather than live, as most people do, in the "real world," and this helped them to cope with their stigma. They did become mothers of a sort, but did not fulfil their role as reproductive daughters in the traditional way, in the way of good women in fairy tales. Many people—some close to them, others they hardly knew—challenged their choices and told different stories about their experiences. Many did not cast them as mothers at all: not real ones.

Some women in Gayle's research also became social mothers as stepparents, foster mothers, or adoptive mothers. Many of them talked about not being full members of the "motherhood club": unable to tell the tales of labour, and found wanting when judged against "real" mothers. They felt excluded and ignored. After all, as improper women, it was not worth asking their opinion. And if these women did find other things to enrich their lives and begin to feel positive about their childlessness, they risked being thought unnatural for giving up the quest to fulfil themselves as all women are expected to do (for example, Letherby, 1999, 2002, 2003).

Similarly, Maggie discovered in her research that some women who had become mothers using eggs donated by other women thought of themselves as not "real" mothers, but just playing a part not rightly theirs (Kirkman, 2008), which is not surprising given that we are told tales from infancy in which the only real (and for "real" read "good") mother is the mother with a biological connection to her child. These women found it hard to suppress entirely their sense of masquerade, even though donors of eggs and embryos stressed that it was the nurturing—the "mothering"—that made a mother, not the genetic connection to a child (Kirkman, 2003a). But then, donors

are themselves accused of being unnatural mothers for giving away their genetic material (Vautier, 2005), so what would they know? And women who become mothers when their female partners have babies have a very hard time persuading others that they are any kind of a mother (Kirkman, 2004; see Donovan, 2000).

The involuntarily childless women in Maggie's Ph.D. research, like those in Gayle's research, were buffeted by the discourse that women inevitably become mothers; by the objections of some feminists to assisted reproductive technology; by the assumptions of many people that, if they were not pursuing every chemical and surgical intervention available, they did not really want to be a mother; and by expectation that they should "get over it" in the time-frame of other people's attention span. All this took place alongside the constant, perverse demand that they justify their desire to be mothers (Kirkman, 2001a, 2001b). Women whose lives fail to conform to the canonical narrative of motherhood are difficult to accommodate as benign characters in our stories.

Of course, many biological mothers are "damned" too. Motherhood is something that all women are expected to do, but only in the "right" social, economic and sexual circumstances. The collection edited by Helena Ragoné and France Winddance Twine (2000) demonstrates the many ways in which women can be marginalised as deficient or improper mothers by virtue (for example) of their race, class, fertility, or sexuality, through "the policing of normative womanhood" (Rapp, 2000: xvi). As Elaine DiLapi (1989) argues, there is a hierarchy of motherhood in which many mothers, such as teenagers, lesbians, older women, and disabled women, are defined as "inappropriate," just like mothers who did not give birth to their children or who are not genetically related to them. We, of course, have been placed by others low down on the hierarchy of motherhood. But we are defiant, and define ourselves and each other as real in all ways: women with attitude, definitely Snow Queens, not Snow Whites.

Some of the women in Gayle's study who became biological mothers—with or without medical assistance—also spoke about not being "good enough" women or "good enough" mothers. They felt under great pressure to be perfect—always available, always attentive—and, at the same time, not to be *too* attentive nor *too* possessive. After all, aren't such desperate women likely to be a terrible burden on their children, always demanding perfection? Claims to this effect have been made by some feminists (for example, Rowland, 1987) as well as religious conservatives (Fisher, 1989: 75). In addition, those who got pregnant with medical assistance were sometimes accused of disturbing Mother Nature and putting a price on a "God-given" gift. Such biological mothers are like those dolls with two heads and no legs: turn them up one way, and you have the Fairy Queen; flip them over, and there is the Wicked Witch (see Letherby 1999, 2002, 2003). So it is not enough to be a biological mother; motherhood must be achieved through socially-sanctioned plot developments with no deviation from the story.

And, because women are constructed as intrinsically selfless, even childless women are perversely positioned as bad mothers because of their failure to sacrifice themselves to children (Tyler May, 1998). There are many ways for women to be Villains.

As Gayle and Maggie came to understand the canonical narrative of womanhood and the hierarchy of motherhood, they placed their own stories in the discursive milieu. Their reflections had led them to see that the woman who fitted that canonical narrative was a rarity. The vicissitudes of contemporary life ensure that few women marry young, stay married to the same man with whom (unaided by medical science) they have the requisite number of children, whom they raise in a stable home. Perhaps it is this very threat to the discursive ideal that nurtures the perception of women who do not fulfil it as wicked or at least inadequate.

The warnings and morals implicit in fairy tales suggest that women must conform to the requirements of womanhood. But maybe Prince Charming cannot impregnate Cinderella. Perhaps Sleeping Beauty is infertile. And what if the Babe in the Woods herself becomes a stepmother?

Gentle Reader, our story has reached the end of the beginning. It has a long way to go to Happy Ever After. But, to keep you company on the journey, we want to add a Moral of our own:

It is to the benefit of all women that we accept the many ways of being a daughter, including nonmotherhood, and that we support women in their diverse experiences of mothering.

Engaging in research on topics related to our experience has led each of us to reflect on our own choices, opportunities, and barriers. It is a rare luxury to have time to evaluate and draw on significant life events, let alone to be paid and praised for doing so. Most people, including our respondents, are unlikely to be in this position. We are grateful for our academic indulgences and, indeed, for our relationship which has facilitated further solo and shared reflection, not least through the writing of this piece. Nevertheless, we remain frustrated that the roles of Mother and (reproductive) Daughter are caught in a narrative time-warp, despite the opportunities for repositioning motherhood that are presented by reproductive developments and changes to the structure of the family. Political and social discourses throughout the Western world maintain a traditional view of women and motherhood (Sha and Kirkman, under review), supported by some contemporary academic discourses. We present our Grimm fairy tale as part of the resistance to this gendered fundamentalism.

Our tale echoes others who have drawn on the genre as a means of challenging the discourses communicated by canonical narratives. According to Christina Bacchilega (1997: 50), re-reading and rewriting traditional fairy tales serve:

to expose, make visible, the fairy tale's complicity with "exhausted" narrative and gender ideologies, and, by working from the fairy tale's multiple versions, . . . to expose, bring out, what the institutionalization of such tales for children has forgotten or left unexploited.

Of course, as Ussher (1997: 12) notes:

Fairy tales are just the beginning; the message of what it is to be "woman" is constantly conveyed to women through the mass media. Girls' comics, women's magazines, romantic fiction, advertising, as well as films and television aimed at female audiences, may appear to have moved beyond the narrow romantic script of fairy tales, providing a more sophisticated or complex view of what it is to be "woman."

But they have not done so. The pressure of reproductive responsibility can be transmitted not only culturally but from mother to daughter; each generation imposes expectations on the next. We must keep telling new, liberating stories. Let us continue to challenge our enchantment: our capture in the High Tower of limited ways of being a woman.

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“Ginealogy”

Towards the Revival of Feminine Genealogies in the Works of Contemporary Polish Artists¹

Luce Irigaray argues, that in order to re-evaluate and revive the feminine in culture we need to turn our attention to relations between women, especially mothers and daughters, and revive “feminine genealogies from oblivion” (1995:13). In the present text, I scrutinize the works of contemporary Polish artists: Monika Zielińska/Mamzeta and Katarzyna Górny demonstrating strategies they employ to retrace the voices of women and to re-interpret the figures of the mother and daughter. Their art can be viewed as an attempt to transgress the established gender order in a very Irigarayan sense: by bringing up the maternal, and by regaining female genealogies, or even creating “ginealogies” instead—the term referring to the work “Genealogy/ginealogy: The Scar After the Mother” by Monika Zielińska, who replaced the supposedly neutral prefix “gyne” with feminine “gine.” Through the representations of the maternal body: sensual and desiring, but also aging, sick, disabled or dying, entirely new understanding of female subjectivity can be acquired. Female corporeality, also the non-normative that typically exists on the margins of the patriarchal culture is finally placed in the centre. Artists, whose works I discuss struggle to find visual language(s) that would enable the expression of women’s experiences, in line with Irigaray’s idea of reviving women’s language(s) and representations along with enlivening their-story, making an important contribution to the attempts at recovering the female voice, which is still undervalued and forgotten in our culture(s).

Suzanna Danuta Walters (1992), an American researcher and theorist, claims that the relationship between a mother and daughter is “located in culture in the most fundamental sense, where issues of gender, genre, and generation intersect and interact” (4). During the last few decades, the mother-daughter relationship has received increasing attention, both on the conceptual level and in empirical research. In most cases, the point of departure for theorists

and researchers has been mothers' dominant role in the process of daughters' female-identity construction. Thus, researchers usually focus on explaining why women mother and how mothers' choices and attitudes affect daughters' lives. According to Carol J. Boyd (1989), there are two dominant theories that attempt to explain why daughters tend to become like their mothers. The first is based on a psychoanalytical approach (e.g. Nancy Chodorow's idea of identification as the basis for "the reproduction of mothering"), while the second refers to social learning theory (e.g. Weitzman's claim that the relation in question is shaped by the principles of modeling). However, theories or empirical research projects that combine the examination of public discourses and visual representations with the analysis of individual experiences within a particular historical and cultural context, are rare.

I believe that besides scrutinizing individual mother-daughter relationships by the means of qualitative or quantitative research, such an analysis requires critical examination of cultural representations, which function within particular cultural contexts, as they not only embody, but also reinforce social scripts for society's members, and thus play a crucial role in the process of constructing one's identity. On the one hand, gender representations help give meaning to the lived experiences of particular women; on the other hand, mothers and daughters are also active agents in the course of saturating social reality with meaning, and:

come to understand their relationship not only through the exigencies of family life, economic survival, and social policies, but through the systems of representation and cultural production that help give shape and meaning to that relationship. (Walters 1992: 4)

In this paper, I focus on the analysis of gender representations in contemporary Polish works of art presenting the figure of the mother, as well as mothers and daughters. The writings of Luce Irigaray (1980, 1981, 1985, 2000) create an interesting and enlightening framework that sheds light on the meanings these representations convey.

First, we need to recognize that, as numerous studies show, the separation of "woman" and "mother" constitutes an important aspect of the social construction of femininity within our² cultural context. "Woman" is defined first and foremost through her body: its attractiveness and sexual appeal, while "mother" is asexual, her role being to give birth and take care of children in a selfless manner, which is supposedly "natural" and easy for every female. Thus, mother is more a symbol than a living person, which makes it even easier to impose the maternal ideal on all women. This separation reflects the way female identity is constructed in general: as something that is embedded in physiology, thus driven by instincts and impulses of the body, but at the same time "veiled," not fully accessible, belonging to the realm of the unknown and undecipherable. Such construction of femininity has very clear social and

political consequences. Ellen Feder and Emily Zakin (1997) conclude that "discourse(s) utilize Woman most effectively when (they) make her magically disappear from consideration" (46). As a result we deal with images, metaphors and mythologies, not complicated and multidimensional human beings.

Critical re-vision of the institution of motherhood for years now has been an important goal of feminist thinkers, scholars, artists, and philosophers; though the strategies they employ and the points of departure they choose differ significantly. It is impossible to discuss or even list all these strategies in the current paper, so I will focus on one recurring motif, which is the search for female genealogy, "her-story" as it is often called. Irigaray (1995), who calls for retrieving "feminine genealogies from oblivion" (13), argues that western culture, which excludes women, associating them with nature and unthinking matter, is founded upon the sacrifice of mothers, and women in general, since they are all associated first and foremost with their maternal role, and as a result devalued and repressed. As Elissa Gelfand (2005) puts it: "the prohibition of maternal desire brought with it the repression of maternal voice. For that reason . . . it is essential that women express their desire, thereby liberating this repressed voice." Thus, in order to re-evaluate and revive the feminine we need to turn our attention to relationships between women, especially mothers and daughters.

Irigaray (1995), who believes that men and women are fundamentally different, holds the view that women can alter cultural norms and re-establish women's position in society by developing mother-daughter relationships, and strengthening their subjectivity, rather than trying to become "like men," because: "life's unfolding is different for woman than it is for man, since it consists for women of much more pronounced physical stages (puberty, loss of virginity, maternity, menopause) and requires a subjective becoming which is far more complex than man's" (1995: 13). An important element of this project is to recognize life-affirming maternal power, which is repressed in our culture, and removed from our intellectual, religious, and artistic heritage.

In the following section of my paper, I scrutinize the strategies used to retrace the voices of women and to re-interpret the figure of the mother, as well as mother-daughter relationships, in the works of two contemporary Polish artists³: Katarzyna Górna and Monika Zielińska/Mamzeta.⁴ Clearly, they are not the only Polish artists who touch upon the issue of female identity construction, or who try to decipher and interpret dominant gender representations by the means of critical analysis of maternal figure.⁵ Their works can be viewed as part of more pronounced trend in contemporary Polish art, aimed at altering the established order in very Irigarayan sense, by focusing on the maternal, liberating both mothers' and daughters' voices and regaining female genealogies.

A macro-photograph titled *Genealogy/ginealogy: The Scar After the Mother* (1999-2001) by Monika Zielińska/Mamzeta gained significant media attention. The photo [Fig. 1] portrays a navel belonging to a person whose gender

is not clearly defined, with an inscription around it that says: “the scar after the mother.” It was exhibited on billboards in several Polish cities as a part of larger project called Outdoor Gallery AMS in which posters created by young artists were displayed on the streets instead of exhibiting them inside professional galleries. The only condition for this project was that the artwork or posters refer to important social issues and concerns. As a result, these works of art were placed in a new context, becoming accessible to the general public, and often provoking controversies and heated discussions. Surprisingly, also to the artist who considered this particular work “polite” and innocent (Zielińska, 2002: 100-101), *Genealogy/ginealogy* ... turned out to be contentious, though contrary to the work by Katarzyna Kozyra *Więzy krwi / Bonds of Blood*, (1995) it was not censored (Toniak, 2002).

Zielińska’s work provoked heated debate in the Polish media, concerning not only this particular photograph, but also the role of artists and contemporary art in the public discourse. It is worth tracing the origins of the controversy. First, Zielińska places the human body in the public sphere, but in a different context than it is usually seen. In contemporary visual culture, bodies, especially women’s bodies, exist in isolated fragments: faces, legs, or breasts; it is seldom that we see the body not fragmented. These body fragments are intended to attract the viewer’s interest or to point the viewer’s attention to the fact that their own bodies are far from what is considered the cultural ideal. The ultimate goal of displaying woman’s body in the public is to persuade the viewers to buy certain goods, or to discipline themselves (Zielińska, 2002: 103). Moreover, as John Berger points out in his classic book *Ways of Seeing*, within the European visual tradition “men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.... Thus a woman turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: sight” (1972: 47). Clearly, Zielińska’s photo escapes this familiar framework—the abdomen on the poster does not belong to any of the above-mentioned contexts. The photograph is de-sexualized; it is devoid of the frame of reference as to the question: who the spectator is. The abdomen is not even clearly gendered, although most commentators are of the opinion that it belongs to a woman. It does not sell anything, nor does it not want anybody to become younger, more beautiful, or thinner.

According to Agata Jakubowska “it is a fragment of the body ... which is self-referential” (2001), therefore, Zielińska’s project might be understood as an attempt to discover “the female signifier.” Jakubowska also suggests that the navel, which connects us to the mother, takes the place of the symbolic phallus, the Freudian father-son relationship thus being replaced by the continuum of mother and daughter. Obviously, even if not fully recognized by viewers and critics, such reversal is dangerous to the established visual imagery based on a clearly defined gender order.

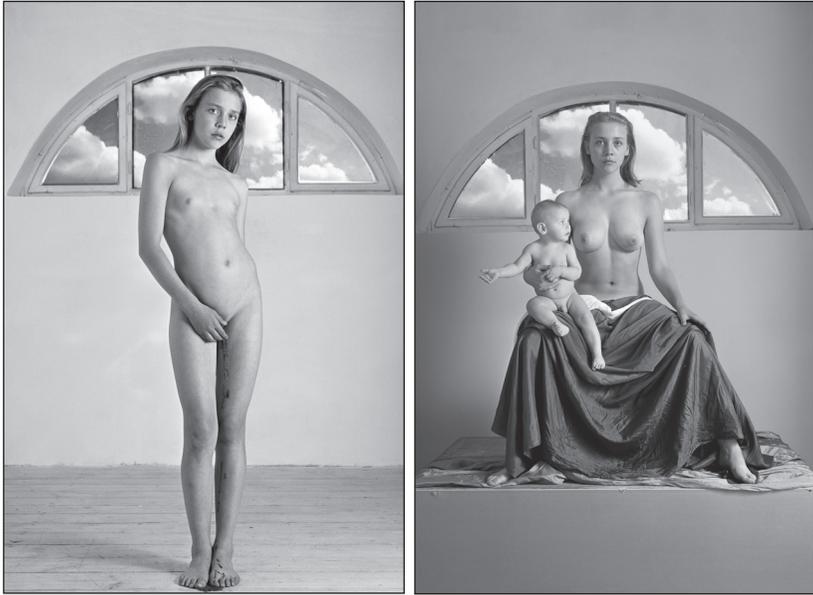
According to the Polish philosopher, Jolanta Brach-Czaina (2005) “if culture is hostile and unfriendly towards women, the only solution is to



Fig. 1: Monika Zielińska, "Genealogy / Ginealogy: The Scar After the Mother."

explore the sphere of signs, which remain neutral. We shall undertake the effort to interpret them, hoping that they do not have contents that would be discriminating and tendentious." Zielińska artwork refers to the navel, which can be considered a "neutral" sign, but clearly, given the context in which it is placed, the part of the body described in the dictionary as "a depression in the middle of the abdomen that marks the point of the former attachment of the umbilical cord,"⁶ turns out to signify so much more. By emphasizing "the point of former attachment," the artist draws our attention to the connection between the body of the mother and the body of the child, erased by patriarchal rule. In one of the texts concerning this work, Zielińska (2002) refers directly to Irigaray's claim that the phallogocentric culture "murdered" the maternal. The artist says: "Scar after the mother is the only natural scar on our body, the one which we have from the very beginning of our life. The scar ... as a word, reminds us of a murder that was committed in our culture, the murder of mother.... The fact that this expression brings bad connotations to critics, in my opinion means that the remembrance of this murder still exists in our memory" (103).

But the navel in Zielińska's work also symbolizes the replacement of the history, or even genealogy by—specifically female—"ginealogy." The transformation of language being an important element of some of her artwork, the artist coined the term: "*ginealogy*" replacing the supposedly neutral prefix "*gynē*" with the feminine "*gine*." As Irigaray (2000) puts it, the names we are given after birth replace the navel/the omphalos, but "the family name, and even the first or given name, always stand at one remove from that most elemental identity tag: the scar where the umbilical cord was cut. The family name, and even the first name, slip over the body like clothes, like identity tags—outside the body" (245). Zielińska explores this path, the one, which exists before and beyond words. In this respect, we can consider "*Genealogy/ginealogy*..." an attempt to shed layers of the patriarchal repression in order to reclaim the maternal in a gesture similar to Irigaray's efforts "to peel the dead skins off



Figures 2 and 3: Katarzyna Gorna, "Madonnas."

words and to use them as consciously chosen analogies for female experience" (Burke, 1980: 66).

The responses to Zielińska's work point to patterns embedded in patriarchal culture. While some critics paternalize the artist, claiming that a photograph of a navel can hardly be considered a work of art, others express their disgust and extreme dislike towards the photograph and the artist alike. Some conservative Catholic journalists consider this work not only controversial, but also seditious (Zielińska, 2002: 100-104). Journalists criticized the use of the word "scar," which seems "inappropriate" and "insulting" in the context of the word "mother." Further, reference to the concept of motherhood outside of the dominant discourses, where the mother appears only in her role as the one who reproduces the nation and sacrifices herself for the well-being of others, is offensive. An excerpt from *Nasz Dziennik*, a newspaper representing extremely conservative, orthodox Catholic views, quoted in Zielińska's text, summarizes much of what is relevant here. In the December 28th, 2000, issue of this paper, journalist Stanisław Krajewski wrote: "For me it is Satanism. It is not only an outrage against morals and religious beliefs, against Holy Mother and Her Son. Also, it hurts my most human and deep personal feelings; it offends me and my own Mother" (cited in Zielińska, 2002: 104).

Arguably, *Genealogy/ginealogy* undermines "morals and religious beliefs" by boldly referring to the woman's role not only as a giver of life, but also as giver of meaning. This work may provoke outrage and anger through establishing a continuum of blood and flesh, instead of the continuum of Word and transcendental Order. Interestingly, when criticizing the work, Krajewski



Figure 4: Katarzyna Górna, "Madonnas."

God, traditionally depicted kneeling before her Son, and often presented as a role-model of the humble and submissive female ideal, the figure of Holy Mary inscribed in Christian iconography is a patriarchal construct used to discipline "rebellious" women (Budrowska 2000). Krajewski leans on this tradition with his reference to Holy Mary as a witness of his outrage and also as a supporter of the feminine ideal.

It is significant that works of contemporary Polish women artists often refer to the figure of Holy Mary. Though they offer different re-interpretations of this figure, most relate to her as a source of power and agency. This is in line with some western theorists who have established new feminist paradigms of the Mother of God; for example, Mary Daly, who points out that by being a virgin, Mary transgresses the patriarchal norm according to which women are subjugated to men, whether fathers or husbands (1985). Clearly, Katarzyna Górna and her *Madonnas* (1996–2001) series are much closer to Daly's notions, than traditional perceptions of Holy Mary as submissive and powerless.

Górna's series consists of three large-scale photographs. The artist does not represent mothers and daughters together, but chooses instead to focus on different stages of women's lives, when identification with the role of either mother or daughter defines their social functioning. The first photo [Fig. 2] shows an adolescent girl, naked, with a stream of blood on her thigh. She covers the pubic area with one hand, but looks straight at the viewer, which suggests self-confidence rather than timidity. In the second picture [Fig. 3], we see a beautiful young woman (mother) sitting with a small boy on her lap, and in the last photo [Fig. 4], an ironic re-working of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, an

makes the mother and son couple, the central element of traditional Christian iconography, the ultimate point of reference. He relates himself and his mother to Holy Mary and Her Son, as if trying to reestablish the stability of the order threatened by the artist. In opposition to this supposedly blasphemous depiction highlighting mother's agency as symbolized by the markings that every human-being bears on her/his body, Krajewski makes reference to Holy Mary, symbolic woman subjugated to the law of the Father. Especially in the Polish context, sacrifice and docility of God's Mother (not agency and independence) inform cultural scripts of mothering and womanhood. Impregnated by the "Word" of

adult man clings to the body of his mother (?), an older lover (?), like a child, desperately seeking attention.

When one looks at the women, especially the young mother with a boy [Fig. 3], what is striking is the air of tranquility and nobility that emanate from each of these figures. They look straight forward, neither withdrawing their look, nor gazing with adoration at the child/man, as is usually the case in classic Christian depictions. Their gestures, body language, and facial expressions signify tranquility and pride rather than shyness or anxiety. Obviously, these are women who fully accept their bodies—they are not ashamed, and clearly do not feel intimidated by being half-naked. At the same time their bodies, placed within a religious framework, avoid the sexualization that usually characterize representations of femininity in popular culture and art. The artist stresses feminine agency and power, transgressing passive ideal inscribed in the western tradition. Brach-Czaina (2005) claims that Górna's *Madonna* with child, "...is probably the only depiction of Holy Mary that logically combines the dogmatic understanding of virginity with motherhood." Holy Mary being supposedly free from the original sin should not be ashamed of her body. Also, she can be proud of who she is, because she gave birth to God—the ultimate proof that the female body is not only an extension of God's perfection but possibly the source of it.

This project uncovers discourses structuring images of femininity within the sphere of visual imagery in Poland. Górna establishes a relationship with these discourses, at the same time "seeking from inside to disrupt and move them, creating new meanings and developed representations" (Robinson, 2003: 126). According to Hilary Robinson, Irish scholar and art historian, an analogous strategy was adopted by some Irish artists, such as Louise Walsh and Frances Hegarty, at the beginning of the 1990s. Robinson points out to the fact that model of femininity inscribed in Irish myths, political, and religious discourses "produce the function of representation, 'woman', as being the cypher of nation, while reducing actual women, politically, and empirically, to mothers" (2003: 113). Thus, the works of art disrupting the dominant gender imagery, have both aesthetic and political function. The artists not only re-formulate images of femininity, but also engage in the discussion on the workings of power inscribed in the process of constructing gender roles and ideals. Similarly to Walsh and Hegarty, Górna deploys the motif of mother-daughter relationships to formulate a productive critique of representations of women within religious contexts, in line with Irigaray's invitation to re-think the mother/daughter, daughter/mother relationship and change it, also through the means of visual representation.

Zielińska employs a strategy analogous to Górna, attempting the deconstruction of Christian iconography in a project entitled *When I Grow Up I Will be a Virgin* (2003). The artist re-interprets the figures of Holy Mary, Jesus Christ, and God the Father as if trying to regain the potential of transgression inscribed within them. She takes photographs of mothers and daughters using



Figure 5: Monika Zielińska / *Mamzeta*,
"When I Grow Up I Will be a Virgin."



Figure 6: Monika Zielińska / *Mamzeta*,
"When I Grow Up I Will be a Virgin."

settings and scenarios that constitute Christian cultural imagery: Madonna with Child, the Holy Mary in a Pieta-like setting, or the Father and Son couple replaced by two women sitting next to each other. The artist plays with the question of what will happen to the symbolic images if we distort the gender order. Nevertheless, the most interesting element of Zielińska's series is not the simple exchange of positions that results in placing the Other in the position of the One. I argue that by transgressing the images which belong to the dominant culture, the artist explores new dimensions of the female subjectivity.

Significantly, important elements of the project *When I Grow Up...* exist on the margins of what we are used to paying attention to as viewers consuming works of art through the patriarchal lenses of education, knowledge of art history, and cultural production. In this case, the question of who the models are in the photos is very important. Only if we look for information released at the opening of the exhibition, can we discover that Zielińska photographed herself with her daughter, as well as her own mother and grandmother. Thus, the work of art is given a new dimension.⁷ The artist not only puts herself symbolically in the position of the Mother of God, but also re-interprets themes from Christian iconographical tradition replacing the well-known masculine narrative with her-story. On the one hand, this gesture may



Figure 7: *Monika Zielińska / Mamzeta, "When I Grow Up I Will be a Virgin."*

be considered a very personal statement, given that some of the photos, such as the picture of her mother holding her sick grandmother in her arms [Fig. 5], belong to the intimate sphere, which is usually closed to outsiders. On the other hand, Zielińska seems to de-naturalize the very ways of seeing, by focusing on the figures that were typically placed in the background, if visible at all, namely bodies that are neither sexually attractive, nor in line with the aesthetic ideal.

One can read this work as critical reconsideration of women's experiences—experiences that typically filtered through patriarchal culture. Seen from this particular perspective, the photos reveal an extra-ordinarily rich vision of the relations between women, especially between mothers and daughters. In the first image [Fig. 5], we see mother holding the girl-child close to her naked body, licking her hand, as if expressing desire to eat or swallow daughter, to have her inside her own body again. One can trace the expression on the woman's face: the unity of two figures, the skin-to-skin contact, the body-to-body closeness apparently give her a sense of pleasure. Clearly, Zielińska refers to those maternal experiences which are still a taboo, such as the sensual pleasures of mothering, the excitement connected with breast-feeding, the joy

that comes with holding child's body and feeling its corporeality. The child's sex is hardly visible; only from other photos included in the series the spectator knows that it is a girl hidden within her mother's arms. Daughter and mother give the impression of being one, united but the girl does not seem to be overpowered. The artist visualizes the *juissance* Irigaray refers to when she writes: "I look at you, you look at me. I look at myself in you, you look at yourself in me.... You/I exchanging selves endlessly and each staying herself. Living mirrors" (1981: 61).

In the project *When I Grow Up...* Zielińska shows diverse phases of every woman's life cycle, highlighting different types of attachments with other women within the family, which dominate during each phase. One of the photographs [Fig. 5] shows a woman with a child; then there is a woman with an adolescent girl, possibly with Down Syndrome [Fig. 6]; and finally a daughter who holds her aging, maybe even dying mother in arms, repeating the gesture of the Holy Mother in the Pieta-like setting [Fig. 7]. It can be argued that the circular nature of their lives connects them to each other, but also to mothers and daughters in different places and times. By repeating this movement they inscribe themselves in the endless continuum of women, not by sacrificing their subjectivity, but by participation.

Despite the numerous similarities, there is an important difference between Zielińska's and Górna's vision, and the one offered by Irigaray. In the French philosopher's view, a mother's personhood seems to dissolve once her daughter abandons her, which is a consequence of women being trapped in the maternal role prescribed by culture and society. According to Helene Vivienne Wenzel, Irigaray "despairs over the nullity of her mother's personhood (as well as her own, by extension), sandwiched as it is between the roles of mother's daughter and daughter's mother—a personhood destined to become nil when her daughter leaves her" (1981: 58). This loads the mother-daughter relationship with guilt, making the daughter partly responsible for killing off the maternal. One may argue that in the concluding paragraph of the text "And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other," Irigaray formulates not only expectations towards her mother, but also expresses fear of causing her death. She writes: "what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive" (1981: 58). That very fear may be considered a source of anger and sorrow that sometimes fuel mother-daughter relations. This sense of anger and sorrow are absent from Górna's and Zielińska's works.

Despite the fact that Irigaray stresses the importance of developing relationships between women, broken and torn apart by patriarchal authority, in her own writings she seems to take in consideration not woman's continuum really, but rather mother-daughter pairs. The complex choreographies of the generations of women related with each other in multifaceted ways are reduced to the vision where only separate dyads of mothers and daughters seem to exist. In fact, if we embrace the notion of a circular movement, which is to govern women's lives, we may arrive at a conclusion that a mother abandoned

by her daughter, still functions in daughterly position/role by relating to her own mother. Also, a daughter often relates not only to her mother, but also to her grandmother and other emotionally significant women within the family. Arguably, only through the recognition of the shifts between the role of mother and the role of daughter that *constantly* take place within a woman's life, can we escape the vision of "mothers, daughters, all women ... swallowed in the sole function of 'maternage,' mothering." (Wenzel, 1981: 58). Only by placing each and every woman within the context of her relationships towards the continuum of women she is part of, can we truly give voice to long-silenced mothers and daughters.

Nevertheless, there is also another very significant link between Irigaray's project and the works of Zielińska and Górna. They all emphasize the female body, the maternal body as the source of ultimate power that needs to be "subjectified." Through the representations of the body offered by the female artists—a body that is sensual and desiring, but also aging, sick, disabled, or dying—an entirely new understanding of the female subjectivity can be acquired. Female corporeality, also the non-normative one, which typically exists on the margins of the patriarchal culture is finally placed in the centre. And we can imagine the artists saying: we will not give up this place easily. Irigaray writes:

Aside from the return to and reconciliation with genealogy, with feminine genealogies—which are still a long way off—woman, women, needed a language, images, and representations which suited them—on cultural level, even on a religious level.... (1995: 13)

Clearly, Monika Zielińska, Katarzyna Górna, and other contemporary Polish female artists struggle to find visual languages that enable the expression of women's experiences, which are significantly different from that of the men's. I believe that they make an important contribution to the attempts at recovering the female voice, which remains undervalued and forgotten in our culture(s).

¹The first draft of the present text was written at Södertörns Högskola where I worked under the program Marie Curie Fellowship for Early Stage Research Training, the European Doctorate in the *Social History of Europe and the Mediterranean*. I would like to thank especially my supervisors Elisabeth Elgan and Teresa Kulawik for support, insightful comments and useful suggestions.

²By "our," or western cultural context I mean European and American (U.S.), and it includes also the Polish context. This rather simplistic differentiation excludes most African or Asian cultures, where the figure of the mother and the model of mother-daughter relations respectively, are constructed quite differently. It does not mean that there are no differences between, lets say,

the view on motherhood within the French cultural context and the Polish one, but the length of the present paper does not allow to scrutinize this issue in details. For more on the issue of cultural differences see, for e.g., Mudita Rastogi and Karen S. Wampler, "Adult Daughters' Perception of the Mother-Daughter Relationship: A Cross-Cultural Comparison," *Family Relations* 48 (3) (1999).

³I would like to thank Katarzyna Górna and Monika Zielińska / Mamzeta for permission to reproduce their works in the present book. For those who wish to know more about the artists the following sites can be recommended:

Katarzyna Górna:

<<http://www.artprogram.art.pl/ARTISTS/GORNA/0prezentacja'pl.htm>>

<<http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/artistInfo/artist/36996>>

<http://www.culture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/os_gorna_katarzyna>(in Polish)

Monika Zielińska / Mamzeta:

<<http://www.waa.art.pl/mamzeta/frame.htm>>

<<http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/artistInfo/artist/48276/lang/1>>

<http://www.culture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/os_zielinska_monika> (in Polish)

⁴Monika Zielińska presents her works under the name Mamzeta now, but since the article I quote was written under the name Zielińska, in the present text I decided to refer to her as Zielińska or Zielińska / Mamzeta in order to avoid confusion.

⁵Among Polish artists who work with the mother figure and mother-daughter relations are: Anna Baumgart, Zorka Project, Zuzanna Janin, and Agata Groszek.

⁶According to <www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/naivel>.

⁷Interestingly, Katarzyna Górny's employs the same artistic strategy in the series "Fuck you, fuck me, peace" (2000), where she photographed herself, her sister and mother (<http://www.artprogram.art.pl/ARTISTS/GORNA/0prezentacja'pl.htm>). This project can be interpreted as a provoking and uncompromising statement on women's sexuality, and analogously to Zielińska's work it comments upon the experiences captured in different moments of women's life cycle.

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Folio



"Mom Getting Some Sun." Photo: Rita Hermann.

Editor's Notes

...When Rita turned sixteen,
our mother set fire to her sheets
as Rita slept in bed. Through the flames,

she sang to her, Happy Birthday
to you, Happy Birthday to you.

—James Cihlar, “House Beautiful”

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the poems of James Cihlar in this issue of *Folio*. This selection of poems about Cihlar’s mother is set in the landscapes and cityscapes of Midwest America. We encounter the narrator and his mother through poems and striking family photographs by Rita Herman, Cihlar’s sister. The images and poems range from depictions of the young woman before marriage, the mother during the narrator’s childhood and adolescence, to the narrator’s estrangement from the mother seen from the lens his identity as a middle-aged gay man. Throughout the collection, the narrator’s voice is accompanied by the stream of daughters, sisters, sister-in-laws, and friends who carry the reader through encounters which culminate with the mother’s aging, the ravages of illness, and death by cancer.

In a series of poems that begins with “What My Mother Used” the poet uses an economy of language in couplets that strike us with blunt force. For example, the title is followed by: “Miss Clairol/Custody,” then later in the poem, another couplet: “Seagram’s/Rage.” The dark humor of the titles that follow: “What My Stepmother Used;” “What My Sisters Used;” “What My Older Sister Used;” “What My Mother Used Later;” are undercut by painful memories.

Throughout these poems, the sense of the narrator’s city is a constant, haunting character. The City Beautiful appears in the poem “House Beautiful,” and Cihlar skillfully plays with notions of aesthetics of home, domestic spaces, while using plain statement to reveal the shocking incident of the mother setting the daughter’s bed on fire. In the last stanza of the final poem “Resolution,” the narrator’s tormented relationship with the mother is the

tension of living, a return to childhood, mother-love tinged with fear:

And I'm middle-aged and fearful,
Holding my knees to my chin
On my old bunk bed,
Waiting for her to crash
Through the door.

At once powerful and knife sharp, Cihlar's work is also poignant, deeply affecting, and human. Readers can look forward to reading more of Cihlar's poetry in his new book length collection *Undoing*, published by Little Pear Press of Seekonk, MA, edited by Martha Manno.

—Rishma Dunlop



"We Would Wear the Highest Heels." Photo: Rita Hermann.

My Mother's Gifts

I.

What she gave me.
Howard Johnson's hot chocolate.
Ironstone cups and saucers.

The Center Shopping Mall.
Table heaped with Christmas decorations
Outside Younkers Department Store.
Glitter, wax, holly, Santa.

A & W Drive In.
Tray perched on driver's window.
Red and white checked wax paper.
Red plastic open weave basket.
Salt and potatoes.

Strand Theatre.
Jerry Lewis matinee.
The Big Mouth.

II.

What she had.
An explorer's curiosity.
Love of neighborhoods

But not of neighbors.
Weakness for strays.
Cats, dogs, children,
Sisters, mothers, men.

Regular observance of holidays.
Poinsettia, lily, fireworks, cake.

Reputation as a clotheshorse.
An urban sense of humor.
Nothing expected in a Midwesterner.
Dismissal of convention.

The ability to draw.
Attention to details.
Love of dime stores
And secondhand shops.
Endurance. Fascination.

III.

What I didn't know she had.
Letter from her best friend in high school.
If only her mother hadn't remarried and moved her to a small town.
We dreamt about changing the world.
We dreamt about wearing the highest heels.

Photos of her before marriage.
Dark circle skirt and light beret.
Shoulder-length blonde hair.

IV.

What she bequeathed me.
Being my own parent.
Surviving my mistakes.

V.

What I brought home after visiting her in hospice.
Indigo blue Murano bracelet.
Fifties aqua Brush McCoy Gladiola vase.

Glimpse of her face waking up from medication
Reading the room around her.
IV drip, heart monitor, call button, estranged son,

Middle-aged, gay.
Stream of daughters, sisters, in-laws.

Long-lost aunts and uncles.
Hostesses at restaurants. European travelers.
Condo dwellers.

VI.
What I use every day.
Victorian sheet music stand.
African woven basket.
Coir rug in front of the sink.
Clouds in pale blue border.
Inset rectangle of periwinkle sky.
Rainbow fan of kites flying away.



"Kathleen and Dylan and Luna." Photo: Rita Hermann.

James Cihlar

Bergen Mercy

Claiming a city. Collecting signs.
I am back to say goodbye.
Tidyland
Laundromat.
Associated Thrift:
Yesterday's Best.
"Jan"-tiques. Owner Jan Gardner.
A trip to the past with a touch of class.
Blood pressure 126 over 90.
72nd and Dodge. Heritage Village.
New Lady Fitness. Suburban Bridals.
From Here to Maternity.
NW Radial Hwy in Benson.
Omaha Lace Laundry. A fashion cleaner.
Musette Bar. Grampy's Odds & Ends.
All proceeds go to Uta Hallee Home for Girls.
Tip Top Thrift Shop.
Jim's Seek & Save.
Enter Through Alley. Buy an antique
that evokes a favorite memory
of a special person in your life
or a happy occasion from your childhood.
My mother sat on the gossip bench
talking to Aunt Honey on the rotary dial.
Animal Ark Shelter.
Return to Willoughby.
Please come browse,
I know you will find
that perfect memory
to take home.



"Kathleen in West Omaha." Photo: Rita Hermann

What My Mother Used

Miss Clairol
Custody

Rog & Scotty's
Supervalu

Toni home perm
The Pill

"Please Release Me"
Pall Malls

The county lines
My father crossed

Jesus, Mary,
And Joseph

Hot water bottle
Irreconcilable differences

Seagram's 7
Rage

James Cihlar

What My Stepmother Used

The color pink
Rotted bananas

Black Galaxy
With fins

Josef's Originals
Lefton wall pocket

Pearl Drops Toothpaste
Herman Miller sunburst

Fridge, oleo
Her son

Paper dress
Trailer in her driveway

My mother's cut glass
And linens

Pot of chili she flung on the wall
Of my mother's apartment

What My Sisters Used

Poster of Snoopy
Feelin' Groovy

Midriff tops
Let It Be

Linda Ladd
Wild best friend

Who later died alone
In a motel

Bing
Toy chimpanzee

Pieced cloth body
Molded plastic face

Banana permanently
In hand

Perfectly fit
Open space of mouth

James Cihlar

What My Oldest Sister and Her Best Friend Used

Turd
In snowball

Lobbed
At Danny Ladd

Enema bag
Belted

Around
Fur coat

In dress up
Punctured

Charlie
Brown

Lawn chair
Through

The picture
Window

What My Mother Used Later

The Rendezvous
Bar

The three B's
Buds

Butts
Booze

Apartment
On Farnum

Long
Distance

Tirades
Medication

Lump
Pressing into esophagus

Hooded sweatshirt
I sent her



"Kathleen at Vickie's House, Easter." Photo: Rita Hermann.

My Mother Believed in Christmas

If my mother did not believe in the food pyramid,
orthodontia, and sobriety, she believed in Christmas.
If my father mailed me a check, my mother
read the Sunday supplement from Holiday,
the gas station on 13th where I would later buy
my first album, Creedence Clearwater Revival,
and choose a present from the wall of shelves
stocked with Fisher Price imitations
of the accoutrement of maturity. Faux radio,
sham television, and phony telephone
whose jangly ring disappointed with a null receiver.
Were they homage or mockery of adulthood,
the narrowing in of perception,
items limited only to their intentions,
when what I loved were the clash of colors—
powder blue handle against snow-cone
white body, sunburst yellow speaker—
the hollowness and stiffness of inflated plastic,
and the slight hint of formaldehyde?

My mother believed in Christmas presents
just as she believed in staying home sick,
eating what you want, and watching television.
If my father believed in Chevrolets,
she believed in Fords.
If he believed in Nixon,
she believed in McGovern.

They both believed in
stationary disease—
their definition
of couch potato syndrome—
and cigarette smoke
as a cure
for
ear
ache.

More of What My Mother Used Later

Go to Hell
The verge

Of a nervous
Breakdown

Aquanet
Her palm

On my sister's backside
Next time

It'll be
Bare-assed

Derf
Fred spelled backward

Fold out
Sofa bed

Dickie Doo
Casio's on 10th



"Mom's Hands." Photo: Rita Hermann.

James Cihlar

House Beautiful

The lady across the hall
smoked, and her cigarettes trailed
through the plumbing into my apartment.
As Bill and my sister and brother-in-law

moved my stuff out of the Soviet-bloc-
style apartments in Columbia Heights, Minnesota,
she opened the door
and yelled drunken gibberish at my sister.

Rita lived in a Wisconsin cabin outside the cities
for three seasons of the year, with Binks,
a pet turtle, and Chippie, an uninvited
chipmunk. The sign outside Richmond reads,

The City Beautiful. Neither of these places
was home. When Rita turned sixteen,
our mother set fire to her sheets
as Rita slept in bed. Through the flames,

she sang to her, Happy Birthday
to you, Happy Birthday to you.
Six blocks down from the Capitol
in Nebraska, I once soaked in the tub

with my headphones on, Paul
in bed, the phallic deco building
glowing in the flood lights
as cars circled its base,

men cruising
in what was known as the fruit loop.
That was my apartment. Long story short:

I later moved in with him, then I moved out.

Okay, back up: I came home from the party
just noticing the rips in my shirt from the fight,
and he had pushed the furniture in front of the doors
so I couldn't get in.

Later, by myself in my own apartment
on thirteenth and "B" Street,
I sat in front of the speckled mirror tiles,
free Gevalia coffee-maker brewing its first pot of coffee,

watching myself eat a delivered pizza,
with *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* playing
on a UHF channel. Believe it or not,
that was the closest to home I'd gotten by then.

(Originally published in *Prairie Schooner*)



"Playing Tea Party with Dylan." Photo: Rita Hermann.

Resolution

In the first dream
my guidance counselor
makes a clerical error
and I do not have enough credits.
So in middle life
I go back to high school.
But I forget to show up for class,
and I don't know how to study any more,
so I never graduate.
This dream repeats.

When I was a kid I was mad
my mother treated me like an adult,
blaming me for her lost chances.
But now I'm mad
that as a kid
I did not act like an adult
and take the wheel
or just speak up.

When I was in college and my mother called, drunk again,
stereo throbbing behind her,
Jimmy Jay?
The most I did then was say,
Listen, old lady, if you don't knock this off,
we will lock you up. Hear me?
Lock you up.
For years
she stopped calling
but kept on drinking.
What if I had honked the horn,
pulled the car over,
told her to stop

what really needed stopping?

She is gone now,
I even threw away her thank you note,
her gratitude for my older sister's attention,
Vickie and her girls
have been wonderful.
What comes after?
I'll always be circling back.

In the other dream
I am still living at home
with all my sisters and brother,
under her roof. Once I get a job,
or once I save money,
or once I make a decision,
I can move out.
But that will never happen.
And I'm middle-aged and fearful,
holding my knees to my chin
on my old bunk bed,
waiting for her to crash
through the door.



Photo: William Reichard

James Cihlar's book of poems, *Undoing*, is available from Little Pear Press. His poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Bloom*, *Minnesota Monthly*, *Northeast*, *The James White Review*, *Wisconsin River Valley Journal*, *Water~Stone Review*, *Mankato Poetry Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Plain Songs*, and in the anthologies *Aunties* (Ballantine 2004), edited by Ingrid Sturgis, and *Regrets Only* (Little Pear Press), edited by Martha Manno. The recipient of a Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowship for Poetry, a Glenna Luschei Award from *Prairie Schooner*, and a collegiate award from the Academy of American Poets, Cihlar lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his partner.

2008 Literary Contest

The Association of Research on Mothering is pleased to announce the results of the 2008 literary contest on the theme of Mothers and Daughters. All judging was blind; identification of authors was not disclosed to judges:

Creative Non-Fiction

Judge: Rachel Rose

1st Prize – “Knee Deep in the Mother of God,” by Rebecca Goodrich

2nd Prize – “Stories in the Wind,” by Beverley Brenna

3rd Prize – “A Letter to My Daughter (To Be Sent in the Future),”
by Yelizaveta P. Renfro

Poetry

Judges: Fiona Tinwei-Lam and Rishma Dunlop

1st Prize – “Piannismo,” by K.V Skene

2nd Prize – “Blade,” by Leslie Vryenhoek

3rd Prize – “Just Beyond Call if You Need Me,” by Leslie Vryenhoek

Honorable Mentions

“First Birds,” by Laurie Kruk

“Learning the Words,” by Lorri Neilsen Glenn

“Sangan River Meditations,” by Susan Musgrave

Congratulations to all contest winners and honourable mentions.

Thank you to all who participated in the contest.

Andrea O'Reilly, Founder/Director – Association for Research on
Mothering (ARM); Editor-in-Chef/Publisher – Demeter Press;
Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering for Research on Mothering

Knee Deep in the Mother of God

My daughter, Kiya, and I pull off the narrow mountain highway and park on a cracked asphalt strip. Below us a ribbon of green water emerges from the dry brush, then curves out of sight, exactly where the guidebook said it would be. The author assures us it is stocked with rainbow trout we can keep and endangered native cutthroat trout which must be released. I especially like the name, the St. Mary's. My hope is that the day will be a respite for both of us, an island of amity in a sea of recrimination. Standing side by side in a river named for a mother feels just right, and I sense we've come to this place for forgiveness as much as for fishing.

Although it's been a year, I must still occasionally remind myself that we're in North Idaho now. Before this we lived for sixteen years on an island in Southeast Alaska with one town and seventeen miles of road. Now we've moved to a place with no tides and little rain, where water is confined between the rims of riverbanks, lakes, and man-made ponds. My decision to move from Alaska was abrupt. My marriage had dissolved; my second-grade teaching job had become a suffocating ordeal. Kiya had just finished eleventh grade with friends she had known since kindergarten. I took her away at the end of June, just when the weather was warm enough for all-night beach bonfires and skiff excursions to far islands. Friends called long distance for the rest of the summer describing the adventures they were having without her. Small-town kids do not easily accept a new 12th grader, and her senior year is a painful ordeal. In Idaho she has no tight group of friends, no history, no identity. She is a fish out of water in a wheat-growing place. She blames me for her misery.

This may be the last time the two of us fish together. In a week we'll pack her small, red truck with everything a teenager needs to make it in the world: stacks of CDs, shoes, jeans, a tie-dyed beanbag chair. She's not headed for college; her future is more uncertain. A job of any kind, an apartment of her own. I've tried to persuade her to stay in the area, give the local university a try. *You could live in a dorm, find friends who are more like you, be on the snowboard team.* Her answer is emphatic—*no*.

Perhaps because her day of departure is drawing near, she has agreed to fish with me. We stand together in the chilly current, casting small copper

lures towing treble hooks with the barbs crimped down to make the releasing easier. Within minutes my line telegraphs the bite I've been waiting for. A mottled olive back breaks the surface, and I tow it within reach. The colors on its side are like a mountain dawn, the crimson slashes on its throat the color of fresh blood. This is a cutthroat trout and must be put back. I hold it gently in the flow so that I can extricate the hook without tearing its jaw. In spite of my care and good intentions the fish darts away with a ragged lip, weakened by the struggle.

Here willows and alder grow close to the river. Song-sparrows warble from the underbrush; a red-tailed hawk rides high overhead. Our senses are at odds: sizzling from the neck up in mid-afternoon heat, numb and senseless from the knees down. The more chilled we become, the more often we lose our footing on the slick, river-pounded cobbles. We stagger and slip, we laugh, gripping each other like pedestrians on an icy street. That algae underfoot, I want to explain, is just one filament in a complex web of interactions and processes. Green cells bask in sunlight, sipping a broth of minerals and salts, working alchemical magic by converting light to sugars and starch. Beneath our feet delicate mayfly larvae, snails, and copper-colored water pennies graze on subriverine pastures. Caddisflies spin lacy nets and set them perpendicular to the current. On a flat rock Kiya finds a dozen dry husks with legs and tails, stonefly skins unzipped and shed when the time arrived to leave the water and take to the air. I'm hoping we'll catch a rainbow trout, a fish we can take home and eat. Each bite of pale flesh will contain a bit of sunshine, a bit of algae, a bit of the river's spirit. *When you leave home, I want to tell her, the St. Mary's will flow in your blood, her riverbed will lodge in your bones.*

By day's end we've hooked three cutthroats. We released each one and watched it dart away, a spark in the amber-green current. We braided flat river grass and made circlets for our hair. We sat on flat stones, ate sandwiches, and tossed the crumbs into the river to atone for the crushed and dying invertebrates we left in our wake. We spoke without words about childhood and how it vanished like smoke.

Twilight has arrived, and the river is a rippling band of lead. Mayflies dip and rise. With only moments to live the adult females have no need to hunt, to eat. Their bodies have become hollow caverns whose single purpose is to hold, then deposit their eggs. I watch them skim close to the river's surface and imagine thousands of microscopic spheres falling into the current. In response, trout rise to feed. Mayfly and trout meet at the wavering border of air and water, to predate, to procreate. Concentric circles mark the moment of each encounter, widen, then drift downstream. Kiya and I could fish now, but choose to watch instead. We sit together in the dusk listening to the murmur of the river, a whisper from the St. Mary's that we recognize and accept, a time to catch, a time to release.

Stories in the Wind

Standing knee deep in prairie sedges, hearing the first meadowlark of the year, my mother and I feel the wind tug against our skin, a dry, constant presence that scrapes its throat against bare branches and leans across the land, bearing witness to all that sky illuminates. Today the wind is heavy with memories, pulling from 1916, the year my mother was born, to the present, and I listen as my mother's stories fall into the arms of the waiting evening.

It's 1921, and she, not yet school-age, is playing on tin-can stilts in the yard, when Old Jones, a deaf-mute, strides up the road, dust on his clothes and on the hands he uses to gesture greetings and dispense dark chocolate. He'll stay a week, and maybe two, helping Grandad with the chores, until the wind pushes at his back and the next farm beckons.

It's 1924 and my mother is attending Squirrel Hills' school. Seven-year-old Johnny and his immigrant parents had just moved into the district, and the students were not being very receptive to him. On this particular day in September, a season when cases of peaches, pears, and plums were brought home from town to be preserved in glass jars for winter use, the girls are sitting under the shade of a caragana hedge, eating noon lunch. Mary opens her pail and gives a squeal of disappointment. On top of her sandwiches there is a piece of tissue paper, but the pear her mother had promised is missing. Immediately the students think of Johnny. They promise that if he owns up, they'll let him go. Dutifully, he confesses. Someone runs and tells the teacher. Johnny receives the strap. That afternoon the room is unusually quiet, except for Johnny's sobs. The next morning, Mary confides that her mother had found the pear, forgotten on the shelf at home.

My mother attends Normal School in Regina, the hundred dollar fee an obstacle until her grandmother sends a cheque. Without money for paints, she sits, embarrassed, in art class, until the instructor roughly arranges a loan. At age nineteen, she graduates, and, in January, heads to her first school. The train passes brittle fields, gaunt livestock standing hunch-shouldered against the wind. As the train slows around a bend, she catches sight of a group of hollow-eyed horses pawing the ground for what could only be the most meagre sustenance. But when the train whistles, the animals—transformed—lift their heads and run, manes and tails flowing, sun gleaming on their shin-

ing sides. This image becomes the inspiration for my mother's poem "Wild Horses," widely published in Copp-Clark's Grade VI Reader, *All Sails Set*.

It's 1936, and my mother is teaching in Outram, a hamlet near Estevan, Saskatchewan. The wind is parched, its voice lost in the roar of the Great Depression. My mother's salary, three-hundred-dollars a year, inspires alarm in the Ontario teaching community. The Ontario Teachers' Federation collects donations, and sends their Saskatchewan counterparts an extra bonus, based on current wages. My mother receives ten-dollars. The end of that year, wooden barrels arrive from Ontario farmers: relief apples, sent to skinny children grateful for the sweet, tart fruit.

It's 1942. My mother is spending summer vacation on the farm near Indian Head. She is digging potatoes with her father when the station agent arrives with the news. Her brother is missing overseas. In a daze, she goes into the house to find her mother, sewing at the treadle machine. "I know he's dead, dear," Grandma says in a small, tight voice. "I had a dream the other night." Then comes a letter, announcing Ken is a prisoner-of-war. Three years spent in the POW camp, and then, at war's end, he and his English bride return to Saskatchewan. The Americans had found him on the Death March south, after the Russian army invaded Germany. Fellow soldiers had resorted to eating shoe leather, falling in their tracks.

My parents, who met at Normal School, reconnect at University. My mother admires the tall, intellectual man who waits for her outside class. "Why didn't you ask me out years ago?" she asks. "I didn't have the money to entertain a girl," my father says. Her farming background parallel to his, my mother understands.

At our feet are crocuses, furry sepals drawing in the sun's faint warmth. My mother reaches down and plucks a hoary stem, touching velvet purple to her cheek. Kittens in the loft, potatoes in the cellar, Grandma's saskatoons preserved in tall glass jars: in some ways, farm kids had it easy. "I never saw her sitting down," she says about her mother, remembering the slender frame, the ragged hands. "She worked from dawn to dusk."

A bird darts from a fence post: flash of blue, then gone. Snow geese circle, bright wings trimming air, then wheel against the slough. Frog song; insect hum. My mother's words settle in this prairie world: Old Jones; Relief Apples; Johnny and the Pear. Like Coleridge's ancient mariner, my mother illuminates the past, makes and remakes the present. I'm grateful that the wind will bring these stories back to me, from time's dim glass, so that for golden moments it is me with berry pails, and stolen fruit, a brother lost—then found. Biting into wizened apples, it's me who tastes their tang. I marvel at my inheritance.

Against our cheeks the wind is whisper thin. A few bats hail through darkening sky, mosquitoes stitch against my sleeve. We turn towards the house, the porch light offering a yellow, faltering path. On Monday, entering my classroom, I hear the tapping of her shoes on wooden floors; at the chalk-

Beverley Brenna

board, she is neatly printing the day's lessons for eight grades. I see a Johnny in the warm eyes of every child I teach and, together, my mother and I resolve a different ending to his story.

Yelizaveta P. Renfro

A Letter to My Daughter (To Be Sent in the Future)

When your angry plum of a face flashed up at me for the first time, cracked open in a howl of rage, incensed at the sudden loss of home, your blue-black eyes glinting from narrow splits of skin, I felt I'd known you all along. Yet you were a stranger to me, your jittery newborn heft unfamiliar in my clumsy hands. I hardly knew you at all—we were acquainted mere minutes—when I put you to my breast. As you scuttled along my skin with your greedy pucker-mouth, this first encounter felt so old and new, like a reunion.

When you were nine days old, you were a squalling madness, struggling in your first grunting, screeching, spastic living. On the inside, I thrashed and screamed too, resisting my enslavement to you. Holding you, I watched your father cut a wild, overgrown yew down to the ground. Our two lives were like battling, tormented, hopelessly intertwined roots. And I despaired of ever pruning you from me. There was no end in sight.

I waited for the time when I could count your life in weeks, even months. Motherhood was round-the-clock trauma. The feedings and diapers were endless. You cried. No one slept. I cried. I had many questions. How did the human race endure? How did people have more than one child? How did they survive the first one? When would I go back to being *me*? You cried and cried; there was no end in sight.

You began life in a tight fetal curl, the petals of your consciousness shut to the world. I watched you open like flower, unfolding out of me and unfurling into the world, your eyes squinting open to let in light, the pink clenched-blossoms of your fists relaxing. Your bruise-colored eyes bloomed a wide sky blue. And you watched me.

That first Mother's Day, I dressed you in blue, and people thought you were a boy. I said to you: "I will *always* dress you in blue to spite the world." And in response, you gave me my gift: your very first laugh, a deep, mischievous burble. This was my reward for two months of mothering you. It was enough.

I read baby books so that I would be an expert on you. I learned many things. For example: at birth a baby girl has within her ovaries all the ova she will ever have. Like a matryoshka—a Russian nesting doll—I carried within me not only you but also (within you) the promise of my grandchildren, just

as a part of me was carried deeply burrowed in the womb of my grandmother within the womb of my infant mother. This was one of the miracles in the wreckage of those first months. This—and the feel of your fist cradled within mine, like a ball in a socket, a joint, a perfect fit. This—and so much more.

You are three years old. We count your life in years. You ask, “When you were *your* mommy’s baby, where was *I*?” I don’t know how to tell you. You didn’t exist, and yet I think you were always in me, in fact and in spirit. For don’t little girls carry within them not just the promise of genetic material but also their own nascent motherhood, learned from being daughter to a mother?

“Are you happy or sad that I’m not a baby anymore?” you ask. “Happy and sad,” I reply. Childhood is a series of superimpositions; you supersede yourself, day after day. I miss the other you’s, but I don’t want them back. When you are eight and fourteen and twenty, I will miss you of now. I am writing to all of you—every person you will be. I am writing to you across time, my adult daughter, my stranger, my friend.

You are the eldest child of a mother who was an eldest child of a mother who was an eldest child of a mother who was an eldest child. Perhaps the line stretches even further back. We are the first, we are girls, and we are big sisters. Because you are bossy and precocious, because you resemble me, because I imagine being a girl again through you, probably I invest too much in you. Your brother, second born, a boy, doesn’t look like me; his not-ME-ness was apparent from the beginning. But I see you in my image, or I see myself in yours. No doubt this will cause us trouble down the road, as it does so many mothers and daughters.

You ask, “Before you were a mommy, who were you?”

“I was just myself.”

“But what did you do before you had me?”

“I don’t know.”

You say, “I think you were lonely.”

And I think you are right. Back then, I would not have said that I was lonely. But now, imagining a life entirely without you—in which I never had a daughter—I feel chilled with the depth of my loneliness.

It is Mother’s Day again, my fourth as a mother. Your father has taken you and your brother to a nursery to give me time to write. This is his gift to me. Upon returning, you run in with my gift: a pot containing three flowers that you selected and planted yourself and a card on which you have scribbled a picture. I ask you what you have drawn, and you reply: “I haven’t decided yet.” Bless you for leaving the options open, for not forming premature judgments. There are many things that aren’t decided. I am changed by you forever; I continue to change. You have made me a mother forever. There is no end in sight. I cannot express the vastness of my love for you. It overpowers me. There is no end in sight. I have come far. I have so far to go. There is no end in sight.

K.V Skene

Pianissimo

In the small hours
when no one else is listening

you feel the shape of your hands
as your fingers open

empty as the house
when your mother is not home

 is nowhere
she can be touched or spoken to

and you in your second-best dress
cherry-red sandals

alone at the Bechstein
flames playing over your hands

even as you hold note on note
her song

dying. It is beautiful
and so are you

with your pupils wide open as mirrors
the music inside beckoning.

Blade

Colder tonight, the moon
just a bent
gold blade caught
in a tangle of branches

and sinking.

Help her — a silent petition to hang
on that scimitar's slash, a mother's
frayed wish for a fevered
girl. More than a week before
that moon will turn its blind eye
this way.

Just Beyond Call If You Need Me

Ignace is a coffee shop squat by the side
of the Trans Canada, a bank
of payphones inside the door on the left.
Dim light, only one phone
working, no answer.

Ignace is seven hours
east of goodbye; is still raining slick
with the memory of wet blotches
carelessly left on the shoulder
of your khaki T-shirt; is a hole

in the pit of my gut, the faded postcard
that looks like it's been here since last time,
twenty years ago, when I insisted on driving
your dad all this way just to hold
on to the hours.

Ignace was where the railroad
took him to work, leaving me
nine months pregnant and scared
senseless — was a dank motel room, a last
kiss, a stupid idea that turned out okay only
because I could follow a semi back west
through the snow, faint twin lights enough
to keep up with the highway's unexpected
twists and

you hiccupping softly
in the dark of me.

Ignace is another tank of gas; is checking the chains
on the U-Haul I'm pulling away
from the life you will have; is the vacancy
you will never
stop being.

Laurie Kruk

First Birds

for Elena, 8 months

There are birds, flying
out of your throat
birr birr, birrr birr

folding diapers, I glance
at empty window
where moments before
wings whirred, beaks dipped
in seed reservoir, tapping glass, then
flashed
back, into absence

leaving only your words
newly-winged--

You stick tiny, tenacious hands
right into the heart of things,
like my opening lips, too close
for a kiss,
touching tongue, teeth and mouth
as if to unlock

—birr, birr birr!—

the swallow-starling fountain
of talk. Of feathers that fall
carelessly all day
from our lips, swept up now into
nests of naming:
daughter. My daughter.

Laurie Kruk

Of meanings
that float, from my mouth
to yours *Mother,*
your mother

and write
the air.

Lorri Neilsen Glenn

Learning the Words

1. Blood

Something happens late July when the cool wind
gushes through the screen, reminds you the season
has peaked, dandelion and thistle have scattered
their future in white puffs, and the sun has dragged you
along the days until evening---earlier now, simmered
and drawn, sweet butter. Reminds with each berry
and grasshopper what happens to love and regret, and what
grace can grow in the blue plum of summers that reappear
each year. Deeper, and you didn't have to ask. Each
cell inside a cell inside--as your mother's hand,
reaching from your body to cradle tomatoes
is inside your grandmother's, searching in the clover
in Selkirk for a four-leaf, and her mother's,
gathering saskatoons near Norway House, touches
a berry as though it were desire, drawing blood
from the soil, drawing still.

2. You write about your mother

because she tells you the Chautauqua came to Shoal Lake the year
she was nine, and brown-haired Lillian and white-blond Grace sat overlooking
the stage in the meeting house built by Carson, her grandfather,
and the organizers of the program plucked the two from the oak balcony

to model clothes-- imagine! the Thirties, and the abundance, the burst of the moment when the stylish woman from the city turned to her:

“Dear,” she said, “you need to wear rose and blue.”

And because the year following, after her father died and Grace was sent to the McDonald’s

while her mother went to the city to train to be a nurse, Aunt Bell found curtains, old clothing sent from Boston, anything to fashion

something rose, something blue for the white-blond girl from an oak bluff on the Western plains.

3. Separation by Degrees

What? You got boulders in these? No, just books *come in* your father says *this calls for a scotch the first one in the family* and your mother scowls *you’re so thin, I’ll put on the potatoes.* You wait, poised on the edge of a worn brown plaid chair, looking into the cold ripples of the familiar. *So, he says, piled higher and deeper, right?* and places a cork coaster with an Irish castle under the wet circle of glass that draws your eyes inward and you open your mouth to ask about your little brother the dry spring the heat the tomatoes the dog the latest on the long reach of the neighbour’s tree over the backyard fence how the old Chrysler is hanging on but you hear a sharp exhale and a snort look up over the ice cubes to see the one who bore you leaning heavily on the door frame wiping her hands slowly on a tea towel. Chin pointed: *well, missy, I suppose this means we can’t talk to you now?*

4. St. Boniface

Walked out, the four of you, coats unbuttoned at thirty-five below, stepped around smokers who stood outside the atrium by the revolving doors – shots of warmth along with their nicotine—past holiday trees triumphantly lit on the boulevard, past taxis,

emergency vehicles, a native couple shielding a child and clutching a suitcase, everyone with a hundred yard stare, and with your shoes scuffing over ice and salt, you crossed over near the park to search for the car you brought –was it

only that morning? Somewhere around here. Snow had blown across the diagonal path so you made your own, heads down,

tracking each other's feet ahead. Nothing now but that
small focus. Behind you, the cross on the hospital roof

was a beacon—against cold, despair; or just for salvation perhaps—
and it cast light on your backs as you each, unaware, fell into step in birth
order across the field. One held a bag with a nightdress. You walked
slowly in the dark, like shepherds in drifts, away from miracles.

5. Hemlock Ravine: Spring

Walk the path where old
trees slapped down by high winds

are now lying in grey huddles
praying with their brittle hands,

broken arms. Inert, their memories
of earth cracked apart in the fall,

their reaches, once psalms against
rain, are sawn in angles, left

to dry. Climb over a trunk to pursue
something green, your legs like a spider's

crawl slowly, spiny-limber with
life. Oh, it was
so sudden. You had much more

to say to one another; you were
just learning the words.

Susan Musgrave

Sangan River Meditations

(i)

Sun falling on yellow cedar
and my daughter in broken sandals
climbing the steps to her father's house,
hurt foot first, then the other.

(ii)

The moon-coloured stones
she piled high above the tide line -
in the morning they are still there!
Even the river stealing past
in the darkest night becomes another way
for grace to slip through.

(iii)

My daughter calls for me
to climb with her, the last leaves
yellow in the skeletal tree.
She'll find a way, she knows,
to make those golden apples rain.

(iv)

Snowflakes melt on her face,
a lifetime passes away.
The deep muttering of rocks

in the black river. Why am I
ill at ease?

(v)

From the bridge I watch
the pure moving of the bird
over the bank where my daughter
stoops to pick the blue lupins
that have now grown wild. I see
the raptor swoop, then change
his mind and disappear, think
how boundless is the pure
wind circling our lives.

My Mother Wears Combat Boots: A Parenting Guide for the Rest of Us

Jessica Mills.
Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Jessica Smartt Gullion

Punk mama Jessica Mills was tired of stereotypical pregnancy and parenting books, so, in true do-it-yourself fashion, she wrote her own guidebook. The result, *My Mother Wears Combat Boots: A Parenting Guide for the Rest of Us*, offers an alternative to mainstream parenting guides. Through personal narrative, accompanied by sidebars of helpful tips and information, Mills offers a different approach for advice-seeking parents.

While the technical information she provides is adequate, Mills's strength lies in the personal accounts of her own parenting experiences. Her writing is raw and honest, a refreshing change from the current proliferation of ironic "bad mommy" memoirs.

Mills covers a range of topics, from the nuts and bolts of pregnancy, birth, and early childhood, to the more difficult topics of finding a community of like-minded parents, resisting gender-coding, and unschooling. Individual ideals are reflected in a personal approach to childrearing, and the best part of Mills's narrative is her discussion of how she incorporates anarchist ideals in raising her daughter.

Subculture parents may find themselves alone when the majority of their peers are not having children. Mills shares her experience of forming a supportive community of like-minded parents. With a group of subculture parents, Mills organized a cooperative childcare centre that reflected their personal philosophies. She includes a do-it-yourself guide to forming such a cooperative centre and shares some of the materials used in her school. She also provides interviews with other punk mamas who incorporate punk sensibilities in their childrearing.

Mills advocates involving children in our own political activism and using our ideals to create a better world for our children. She writes, "Parenting is

living a life of daily revolution.” The revolutionary ideas supported by anarchists can be reflected in how we choose to parent our children. As anarchists, we can follow the dominant childrearing practices, or we can choose to maintain our passion for social change and work to create the kind of world we want for our children.

Parenting a Defiant Child: A Sanity Saving Guide to Finally Stopping the Bad Behavior

Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall.
New York: American Management Association, 2007.

Reviewed by Tatjana Takševa Chorney

This guidebook offers step-by-step techniques and skills that will enable parents to transform their confrontational relationship with a defiant child. Written in jargon-free prose, the book includes key statements and concepts in highlighted boxes, which makes it a particularly accessible work. It aims to distinguish itself from other parenting books by favouring a preventative over a punitive approach to non-compliant behaviour. I support the premise that prevention works better than punitive measures, which focus on consequences rather than causes.

The book is divided into three sections: Prevention, Managing Non-compliance and Defiance, and Planning for Success in the Community. Each section emphasizes practical concerns, and the end of each chapter includes a section entitled Applications. The three sections are organized in a linear and sequential way, and provide parents with exercises, examples, and activities that will help them implement the ideas and proposals presented in the preceding chapter. As authors Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall rightly point out, “there is no one big thing”(x) that a parent can do to solve the problem of defiance in children. Solutions come from consistently following a series of small steps and actions that will eventually modify undesirable behaviour.

The authors define defiant behaviour in descriptive rather than summative terms. They pose five questions for parents to answer: “Does my child frequently provoke other people? Does my child intentionally defy me? Does my child maliciously antagonize and fight with his or her sibling? Does my child throw a temper tantrum when he doesn’t get his way? Do I let my child get away with things so that I can have some peace and quiet?” (ix). If parents answer “yes” to two or more of these questions, and the defiant child is older than three years of age, then it is time for action. The authors do not say, however, that a child’s defiance is often a justifiable reaction to a set of circumstances that may have been exacerbated by parents’ momentary or ongoing lack of insight, patience, or energy.

In section one, the authors gesture toward a more nuanced understanding of defiance by suggesting that “many children who display excessive noncompliance, defiance and aggression have what mental health professionals call Oppositional Defiant Disorder,” but not all children who are noncompliant, defiant, and aggressive have this disorder (8). They also argue that a professional should carefully diagnose a child with serious behaviour problems. This section underscores the importance of routine, good communication, strategies that strengthen the parent child-relationship, and creating an environment where the desired behavioural response is the easiest and most natural one for the child.

In section two, the authors acknowledge that prevention measures and new routines do not mean that the defiant behaviour will cease, and strategies are provided to help parents guide their child through relapses. Here parents learn how to teach children to gain self-control by recognizing so-called “antecedents” or “triggers” of emotional meltdowns through role-playing and self-charting; that routine removes the necessity for parent-child power struggles; and that removing privileges is often the most effective way to encourage the child to display the desired behaviour. Here, the authors make the important statement that parenting is about teaching children the skills they need in many areas, including behaviour (144).

Section three moves outside the home, and provides advice and strategies for parents when it comes to dealing with schools, daycares, and other places in the community, including car trips, playing with friends, and shopping for groceries. In general, the suggested approach is proactive. For example, with regard to school, parents are advised to take the initiative to meet with the school principal, to be candid about their child’s behaviour, and to work on building a respectful relationship with teachers based on ongoing communication. The authors also draw attention to special services available within the education system, and provide practical suggestions on how to access these services. The book concludes with a chapter entitled Parting Advice, which incorporates a blank nine-month calendar to help parents manage the systematic implementation of the suggested activities at the end of each chapter, taking one chapter per month. Application activities can be fitted onto the calendar with one assignment or goal per week.

The authors aim to help parents persevere in their efforts to eliminate a child’s problematic behaviour. The book avoids laying blame on parents or examining to what extent parents’ own behaviour may have contributed to or may be solely responsible for a child’s defiant behaviour. The obvious and perhaps justified merit of this approach is that no parent will feel alienated by this book. Nonetheless, the authors claim that modifying defiant behaviour in children often must start with modifying problematic aspects of the behaviour of parents. Finally, I endorse the author’s decision to leave their readers with a Chinese proverb: “The longest journey begins with a single step.”

More Than a Mom: Living a Full and Balanced Life When Your Child Has Special Needs

Amy Baskin and Heather Fawcett.
Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House, 2006.

Reviewed by Theresa Nowlan Suart

Mothers of children with special needs are often overwhelmed by the day-to-day essential tasks (both large and small) of managing their child's condition, to the point of neglecting themselves, their partners, and their typically-developing children. As authors Amy Baskin and Heather Fawcett point out, "extraordinary parenting responsibilities can create extraordinary pressures" (4).

More than a Mom offers practical information and support in down-to-earth, conversational prose. Advice, conveyed in a friendly style, gives mothers permission to have a life separate from their role as "mom with a child with special needs" and guides them toward independence.

The authors state at the outset, their book "isn't just about 'coping with' or 'adapting to' the heavier parenting demands" of mothering a child with special needs. Instead, the work is "about helping you thrive, be happy, and carve out a fulfilling life for yourself" (5). This fulfilling life could include finding time to get together with friends, pursue a hobby, and achieve work-life balance—things mothers of typically-developing children also struggle to achieve, without the added responsibility of caring for a child with special needs.

The authors—one has a child with autism, the other a child with Asperger's syndrome—augment their personal experiences with information from over five hundred mothers from Canada and the United States and with current research from multiple sources. They cast their special needs net wide: rather than focusing on a single special needs population, the authors include first-hand experiences from mothers whose children have a wide variety of disorders and conditions including Angelman syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, muscular dystrophy, vision and hearing problems, learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, developmental delays, and medically fragile conditions. While both authors are Canadian and reside in Ontario—Baskin lives in Guelph and Fawcett in Ottawa—they cite American terminology and focus on American programs, with parenthetical Canadian references.

Thirty chapters are divided into seven parts: Welcome to Our World; Taking Care of Yourself; Daily Life Reality Check; Family Ties; Overcoming Barriers to Quality Care; Career and Home; and Redefining your Work Life. Part eight features five appendices and is followed by a resource list, related readings, research references, and a comprehensive index. While there is little new here in terms of mother-self-care advice, the book's focus on women whose

children have special needs makes it a useful resource.

In fact, this book includes too much information. At nearly five hundred pages, it may be daunting for a woman with little spare time. Each chapter, however, is brief and can be read quickly—ideal for the mother of a special needs child who is practiced in the “grazing” style of reading. A future edition could benefit from an improved layout that would lend itself more readily to scanning.

More Than a Mom is a well-researched, in-depth handbook for any mother facing the particular challenges and demands of raising a child with special needs.

Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief

Evelyn Burns Robinson.

Christies Beach, South Australia: Clova Publications, 2000.

Reviewed by Ruth Nemzoff

The first part of *Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief* reads like a novel and should be required reading for anyone thinking of relinquishing a child through adoption, adoptive parents, and legislators. Robinson’s account of her impregnation by what is now known as date rape, her subsequent pregnancy, relinquishment of her child, and lifelong agony should convince readers that adoption is always a profoundly difficult and life-altering decision.

The author’s experience is typical of so many young women who were told they “would never think about ... [the] baby again.” Robinson did not have any warm feelings for the man who impregnated her, she did not want to have a child, and yet she suffered enormously from the trauma of birthing and giving up her child. Her story firmly rebuts the argument that the birth mother will forget her baby.

The second part of the book I find troubling. Robinson argues convincingly that both the adopted child and birth mother have a right to know of each other’s identity. I agree that it is a travesty of justice and human rights to obliterate birth certificates and pretend that birth parents never existed. Every child deserves the right to know his or her origins. However, Robinson mitigates the validity and power of her arguments by suggesting her own experience is characteristic of most adoptive situations. For example, she states that “some adopters allow themselves to think that the children they were adopting were unloved and unwanted and that they were doing not only the children but also society a favour by providing them with a home and a family . . . in most cases, we know from biological mothers, and to some extent fathers, that the

children were adopted because they were very much loved” (186). While this may be true in many cases, it is not true in all cases.

Robinson claims “adopted people cannot grow and develop to their full potential without a connection with their history and heritage.” In fact, many children do grow up not knowing their histories. And, while they may long to know of their pasts, they are able to succeed in the world.

Robinson continues to simplify the complexity of adoption: “while birth is traditionally considered an occasion to celebrate, adoption is *never* a reason for celebration. Every adoption is a tragedy because it means that there has been a family breakdown” (214). Clearly, adoption is much more complicated than Robinson implies. A tragedy for the birth mother can mean great joy for the adoptive parents, and a chance for adequate food, education, and socialization for the child. Adoption triangles are intricate and to describe adoption as tragic is only to describe one part of the experience.

Robinson argues that “adoption is ethically and morally indefensible”; she envisages a society that is supportive of single mothers, and supportive enough of troubled families so they can nurture and educate their children—a society in which adoption is unnecessary. Her argument is based on the false assumption that only biological mothers can adequately mother their children. In fact, her assumption that biological mothers are always preferable to non-biological mothers is not supported by current statistics.

Despite these criticisms, *Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief* makes a compelling case for open and honest adoption and the need to change the laws and social customs governing adoption. Robinson may tell but one side of the adoption story, but it is an important story nonetheless.

Adoption and Recovery: Solving the Mystery of Reunion

Evelyn Burns Robinson.

Christies Beach, South Australia: Clova Publications, 2006.

Reviewed by Sarah J. Duncan

Adoption and Recovery: Solving the Mystery of Reunion is a companion volume to Evelyn Burns Robinson’s first book, *Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief*. The author, trained as a social worker, combines her clinical expertise in grief counseling with her personal story as a mother who gave up her child for adoption more than twenty years ago.

The book is divided into three sections: Personal Recovery, Interpersonal Recovery, and Questions. Robinson conceptually connects the established theory and literature of grief and loss to the feelings experienced at the time of adop-

tion and, later, at reunion. While she acknowledges that reunion is perceived (or rather assumed) to be a joyful event, she rightly pinpoints it as a moment of reckoning for many people and an experience that is bound to elicit strong emotions in both parties, regardless of who initiates the reconnection.

Robinson organizes her work logically. In the first section, she examines the grief and loss of the mother (identified as perhaps the most affected of the parents), from the shame and silence of “illegitimate” pregnancy, through the decision process, and finally the act of adoption. The birth mother or father is consistently referred to as “someone who has lost a child to adoption,” an awkward but politically correct term that may imply blame. The traditional term “gave up” is almost never used; Robinson believes the decision to relinquish a child through adoption is often taken out of the hands of the pregnant mother. She also investigates the personal grief journey of the child who is adopted, giving simple but helpful suggestions for perspective shifting and personal healing. Even for someone not affected by adoption, the information and suggestions seem familiar and potentially useful.

The second section examines the potential for grief, loss, sadness, and conflict in the process of reunion. Here is the key to the subtitle; Robinson queries why such a seemingly happy experience often results in negative reactions. How can a reunion with a birth mother or father, and/or a biological, extended family result in hostility, anger, bitterness, and confusion? Robinson’s answer is grief. In fact, the adoption experience often proves emotionally overwhelming and a myriad of feelings may surface at the time of reunion. Robinson identifies these feelings as steps in the grief journey, from initially recognizing the loss and separation through to acceptance and reconnection. Her hypothesis is convincing, bolstered by references to the established work in grief therapy.

The final section includes three chapters of questions and answers organized by category: birth parents, adopted adults, and others (including questions from adoptive parents). In her conclusion, Robinson addresses three broad issues, also presented in the form of questions and answers: government assistance, community assistance, and individual self-help. Again, her answers focus first on personal recovery and then interpersonal recovery. In fact, the ideas raised here deserve full development in the body of the book.

Evidently, Robinson wrote *Adoption and Recovery* as a form of therapy for herself and her son (Steven, who has a forward of his own in this volume). Unfortunately, her audience is ill defined and her perspective is unfocused. As a result, the reader is left confused and the value of the information she provides—important as it is—is diminished.

Birth as We Know It

Elena Tonetti-Vladimirova.

The Sentient Circle. Educational DVDs. 24 mins.; 40 mins.

Reviewed by Dominique Russell

These are the educational versions, twenty-four and forty minutes respectively, of *Birth as We Know It*, Elena Tonetti-Vladimirova's fascinating documentary on "conscious birth." Tonetti-Vladimirova was a co-founder of this groundbreaking movement in Russia in the eighties, organizing workshops and births in the shallow waters of the Black sea, an idyllic setting where dolphins play. Conscious birth involves a process of coming to terms with one's own birth trauma, and of creating a "birthing field" of love rather than fear. In the interviews and Tonetti-Vladimirova's narration, what is emphasized is maternal responsibility and power. An expectant mother needs to be supported, but she herself must tap into her "innate intelligence and body wisdom." According to Tonetti-Vladimirova, whose spirituality seems to be pantheistic, the most important thing a woman needs to learn is the spiral, present in dancing, seashells, galaxies, and our DNA strands, because "conscious surrender to th[is] vortex of energy brings profound grace." Birth is considered a sacred, transforming moment for all involved in the process. Says Tonetti-Vladimirova, "within the sacredness of birth lies the pathway to the pure potentiality of life."

The film depicts not birth as we know it, but birth precisely as we do not know it in our culture: an ecstatic, erotic, and spiritual experience in which children come into the world, eyes wide awake and peaceful, under water. The birth segments are beautifully filmed, focusing on the moment of arrival after a glimpse of labour. Many of the women give birth in clear birthing tubs, giving the camera unencumbered access. They spiral and squat, often held by partners or friends, through contractions and, what for me was the most excruciating moment of labour, crowning—slowed down by mother's or midwives' hands to avoid tearing. The newborns stay underwater for a few moments before coming up onto their mother's belly, seeking the breast. Most do not cry. The most extraordinary sequence is a midwife who gives birth alone, smiling at her other young children as she guides her newborn's head and body through her. The soundtrack includes moaning, sounding, and shouts, but these are tempered by peaceful electronic music (available at www.birthasweknowit.com/soundtrack.html); indeed the DVD offers an "instrumental version" for those who prefer to dispense with sounds and narration entirely. Skyler Sabine's work, as cinematographer, designer, editor, and audio engineer deserves mention. She no doubt had a guiding hand in the visual beauty of the works, and her editing is crisp and rhythmically in tune with the narration (which she co-supervised).

As I viewed the forty-minute version with my husband, four months along into a “high risk” twin pregnancy, I grew doubtful of its usefulness as an educational tool since it preaches to the converted. I identify with the natural birth movement, but found myself put off somewhat by the strong statement that opens the film: “The quality of this [new] life will be defined by the quality of birth.” It comes immediately after a disclaimer that tries to temper the radicalism, reassuring us “failures,” I felt, that the effects of less than conscious birth can be healed. As a reviewer on Amazon.com notes, the film can inspire guilt in the mother “who fails to achieve nirvana while giving birth.” My husband was swept up by the film for nearly half an hour, and disconnected only after a drawn-out sequence where one of the American labouring mothers describes “a sweet, squishy kiss” from her partner that sent her into waves of ecstasy. The films are singly focused on heterosexual unions and, like the births themselves, these are idealized.

Despite these caveats, I found myself replaying the images of the calm water births over and over in my head, and ferreted out a supplier of birthing tubs, though it is highly unlikely I will choose to use them to deliver my twins. I showed the sequences to friends and will show it to my daughter, closer to my due date. My husband’s resolve to find a way for our babies to enter the world without medical interference has strengthened. Despite our resistance to some of the “New Age” speak, the film has radicalized us.

The twenty-four-minute version is, I think, more effective for education. Dispensing with the contrast with hospital births and circumcision, it focuses on the positive effects of conscious birth and, with a shortened narration and image track, it distills its principles to the essentials: that “women have access to the power of creation,” but that labour “free of drama” is part of a challenging process of self-examination and spiritual, emotion, and physical practice to overcome fear.

The real strength of the films is the indelible images of fearless, confident women giving birth autonomously. Since we are bombarded with media representations of birth as frightening and painful, the power of these profoundly different documentary images might have an effect on even the resolute adherent to the technocratic model of birthing. For women—and especially younger women—vacillating between faith in technology and the wisdom of their own bodies, the film should transform the idea of what constitutes “normal” birth. I am, in the end, grateful to have seen the forty-minute version.

Laike and Nahum: A Poem in Two Voices

Ruth Panofsky.

Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2007.

Reviewed by M. Louise Ripley

Laike and Nahum: A Poem in Two Voices is a beautiful volume of poetry inspired by the lives of the author's maternal grandparents. Fictionalized voices portray motherhood as a sustaining thread through a story that follows the lives of the title characters who flee Russia in the early 1900s and settle in Montreal where they marry and raise a family.

Although she is scornful, Laike's mother makes room in her flat for her daughter and the cousin she must marry due to an unexpected pregnancy. Later, when Laike gives birth to a son in the cold of her own rented rooms, her sense of loneliness resonates with every mother: "The euphoria / of privacy / passes / long hours / alone / with the baby" (38).

Bearing another five children during the Depression, Laike voices a mother's deepest fears: "[p]alate dulled / plate bare / I struggle to keep / children healthy / and sated" (41). With money scarce, Laike takes in boarders. When her husband turns down a promotion because his Socialist pride will not allow him to assume the "burden of responsibility / for another's wife and children" (41), Laike asks, as the mother of his hungry children, "what pride have I, Nahum?" (42).

The spare, narrative poem follows the couple through years of unrelenting poverty and the agony of a tiny son plunging to his death from their tenement balcony, witnessed by five-year-old Hannah, Laike's only daughter, who afterwards turns from her mother, cold and distant. In this deeply personal story told in two alternating voices, only two brief poetic interludes refer to cataclysmic events taking place outside the life of the couple—"Synagogue whispermings / of crematoria" (64) and "Acrid fumes / from Hitler's ovens / drift overseas" (65)—but the book does not suffer for this; it is indeed its greatest strength.

We see some lifting of the burden of poverty as Nahum finds work "at union wages" (63) and when the children are grown, Hannah working, still at home. She "indulges / a longing / for cashmere" but Laike admits, "without her / wages / we could not manage" (70). Hannah marries, but her husband beats her children. Laike is distraught – "Hannah's sobbing / sears my heart" (72)—but after years of being shunned, she is unable to tell her daughter what she longs to say, "*come home*" (73), a reflection of the archetypal stubbornness of mothers and daughters. When Nahum finally urges, "*you must yield / to your daughter*" (98), Laike writes, "*my dear Hannah / can you ever / forgive my silence*" (84), and mother and daughter are reunited.

The last line of the poem encapsulates the power of motherhood. As Nahum describes his daughter seated at the kitchen table having tea with her mother, Laike reads her tea leaves and sees a happy future; Hannah turns to her father and announces: “*you see, Pa / I told you / if Ma says, / it’s true*” (101).

Laike and Nahum is a gentle and moving book that tells a story of motherhood, love, and survival.

We, The Women

Merle Nudelman.

Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2006.

Reviewed by Rosie Rosenzweig

Merle Nudelman’s first volume of poetry, *Borrowed Light*, probed her personal history. Now, in *We, The Women*, the poet examines specifically female subjects, including pregnancy and childbirth (even losing weight after delivery), children, mothering, dinner with mothers-in-law, and the inevitable memories of her own mother. She also limns the tender vulnerability of a young molested girl, as well as the mature career women molested under the corporate guise of billable hours.

The poignancy of “Variations of the Last Time” that she saw her mother, and “Mama Loshen,” about the native language of her mother, both rekindled memories of my own immigrant mother in Windsor, Ontario. Nudelman evokes her mother’s mother tongue of Yiddish:

I fit our words like puzzle pieces
into the sounds I knew,
stored these clues of meaning
inside my own secret cache.
I clicked them on to light your stories –
My lanterns into your Slavic wilderness.

Nudelman ranges widely across poetic form. Her repertoire includes lyrics, sestinas, pantoums, concrete poems, some modified sonnet forms, even a ghazal. Her adroit use of repetition showcases her natural cadence and rhythm.

The title poem, “We, the Women,” describes women as

tender repository of people-eggs,
tucked within like so many snug peas.
Calm spheres, each waiting her turn

[stanza break]

To burst the pod...

Moon-women, ...

We sprinkle that knowing-dust
Into our daughter's eyes.

And men? They are "that thrashing," a mere staccato lunge into fecundity and then no longer central to the heritage of women.

Lying to Our Mothers

Katherine Lawrence.

Regina: Coteau Books, 2006.

Reviewed by Nancy Gerber

Katherine Lawrence's collection of poetry, *Lying to Our Mothers*, is the poetic equivalent of a bildungsroman, the novel that explores personal growth. Memorable and moving, these poems map the speaker's journey from girlhood to womanhood. With its emphasis on images and memory rather than plot and sequential time, poetry is a genre especially suited to representing the complexities and contradictions of maternal subjectivity, allowing readers to witness the speaker's transformation from daughter to mother and from being her mother's daughter to becoming her daughter's mother.

The poems are divided into four sections. The first, "You Knew – Didn't You?", explores the emotional geography of female coming-of-age in the 1960s: the desire for freedom and adventure, the value and vicissitudes of girls' friendships, the pain of mother-daughter conflict. In "Mud Wars," the tension between a strong-willed mother and an equally strong-willed daughter is announced: "Our first house / a battlefield / because the address told us so: 61 Battlefield Drive, / the ravine across the road / site of all our wars: mother versus a small muddy daughter" (3). The speaker brings her feminist perspective to bear in acknowledging her mother's domestic entrapment: "How could we stop ourselves? / You tied at the waist / to stove and sink. Me, fixed on spring's wild / riot beyond the door" (3).

The second section, "The Soft Give of Flesh," includes an eponymous poem where a mother meditates on the impossibility of protecting a teenage daughter from violence: "She is immunized against pertussis / tuberculosis,

chicken pox / not rape” (33). The speaker describes the dark moment that connects the two women: “Bedsheets soaked in cold sweat / girl screaming help with no voice ... eyes black / pool of crimson blood / between my legs, her legs” (34). Later the speaker recalls her own experience of violation: “I was cornered in a parking lot / his thick hands, my back pushed against brick” (39).

The third section, “Letters Home,” is an alphabet acrostic (sometimes called an abcdarium) in which each letter of the alphabet begins a new stanza of the poem. The letters mirror the daughter’s journey: they take flight as the daughter leaves, carrying the mother’s hopes, wishes, and fears for the daughter’s well-being into the world and back home. The mother mourns her daughter’s departure even as she understands its purpose and necessity in establishing female autonomy: “Once upon a time / you would have liked me, / a time before I was your mother / a time when I was a girl / who wanted to leave home” (59).

The fourth and final section, “Slipping the Blindfold,” examines a grown woman’s life, with poems on marriage, illness, friendships, sexual desire, and domestic arrangements: “Sharon’s lost interest in cooking and sex / so you’d think Jim would lose interest in Sharon / but turns out she married a resourceful man / who now goes to market on Saturdays” (71). The first poem in this section, “Fabric,” describes the generational continuity that binds mothers and daughters even as daughters ceaselessly create new patterns: “We are the daughters of thread-and-needle mothers / women who stitched their lives from a pattern ... cut” (67).

Lawrence, a development officer for the Royal University Hospital Foundation, is the author of a previous collection of poetry, *Ring Finger, Left Hand*, which won the First Book Award at the Saskatchewan Book Awards. Her new book is a valuable addition to the literature on mother-daughter relationships, women’s friendships, and complex relationships that resonate in women’s lives.

Embracing Brings You Back

Pat Clifford.

Regina: Coteau Books, 2006.

Reviewed by Dorsía Smith Silva

Embracing Brings You Back is a collection of poetry that describes the journey of ovarian cancer survivor Pat Clifford. The poems could easily have become maudlin and sentimental, but Clifford’s work resonates with powerful images and poignant lines. Here, the poet braves the possibility of her death and laments the loss of women who succumb to ovarian cancer.

The five-section, thirty-six poem collection describes a range of experiences as Clifford endures the various stages of ovarian cancer. The first section recollects Clifford's initial diagnosis and her numerous treatments. She undergoes rounds of testing and learns the complex medical terms for body parts in "Bilingual:" "I have become / third person to myself, unrecognizable / in surgical syllables, a language life" and "Only a sick woman / knows her tender organs / are held by an apron of fatty tissue tied / in the quaint excess of old world / vowels: oementum." Clifford receives her test results in "March 2002" and learns that she has advanced ovarian cancer.

In the second part of the collection, Clifford blends humour and sadness to reflect upon her physical and emotional transformation from chemotherapy. "The Mind of Death" renders Clifford's great strain to complete everyday tasks, like putting on pajamas: "The too-small opening / flattens my ears forward, stings, pulls / on my hair, and I struggle / to get one arm, then another into the right." Although this section includes many poems that mourn the passing of cancer patients—such as "On Liz, Dying" and "Butterfly Effect"—Clifford concludes with the witty "False Face: Rise" which critiques a call for submission of "inspirational" poetry from cancer survivors. Clifford posits the irony of survivors writing "upbeat, inspirational pieces."

The third section is more deeply concerned with death. "Sitting With Catherine" ends with the stark reminder that everyone dies: "the teaching / You can't stay long." In "False Face: Clinic" a cancer patient dies, even though she has a positive attitude, eats healthily, and uses home remedies: "Two years later, I see her name in a death notice." Yet, cancer survivors fight against death in "Against Time." Clifford also recounts therapeutic moments of spending time with friends and going shopping, since "Life is too damned short / for ugly clothes."

The last two sections return to Clifford's physical changes as she battles cancer. In "Bald," Clifford engages with other women who endure the cycles of hair loss and growth. She also shares her physical and emotional wounds in "Ragged purple scar," "Look Good, Feel Better," and "Venous Refusals." The humorous tone returns when Clifford honours her friend Catherine, a cancer patient, who names her wig Alice in "Sometimes you miss people for the damndest reasons:" "We teased Alice, swore at / our own itchy inability to keep the damned / things on our heads for more / than twenty minutes at a shot." She also honours her cancer survivor friend Kathy who fearlessly flaunts her bald head to a police officer in "Kathy, barrel-assing down a back road:" "If you got it, girl, you flaunt it."

Embracing Brings You Back is an engrossing collection of poems that celebrates the triumph of human will.

Super America: Stories

Anne Panning.

Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Soliday

In *Super America*, an award-winning collection of ten short stories and one novella, Anne Panning takes us inside the lives of everyday people across the continental and pacific United States. In her stories, we meet characters struggling to cope with unexpected events, some of which readers might see as touching or poignant, others we might judge dramatic and painful. Through her ability to build tension quickly, write clear and believable dialogue, and create evocative moods that linger in the reader's imagination, Panning unveils the hidden meaning of events, both ordinary and extraordinary.

In "Five reasons I miss the laundromat," the narrator folds her family's clothing in the spacious laundry room of her home; as she recalls her younger self, the reader can almost inhale the warmth of the fresh laundry she remembers removing from a coin-operated dryer. In "Tidal Wave Wedding," we join a newlywed couple on a Hawaiian beach as they search for a lost wedding ring. While we feel the poignancy of their desperate and fruitless search, we also sense the couple's awe in the face of unstoppable tsunami waves, which they view from atop a mountain.

Panning builds dramatic tension quickly and believably. In a few pages, she introduces provocative, realistic conflicts. In "Super America" and "Hillbilies," her characters struggle with the unavoidable, unsolvable consequences of seeking and/or achieving higher social status; in "Cravings," forbidden love takes a contemporary form; the struggles in "What happened" and "Freeze" are overtly dramatic and intense, involving death and disability. Of her characters' trials, both big and small, one narrator concedes, "Life more often than not throws you where it wants to" (85).

At times, I found myself hoping for tidier endings, for Panning to conclude each story like a cut of meat wrapped neatly in butcher paper and tied with string. Though she eschews closure, her clever conclusions provide unique pleasures. And if we take this assertion to heart, "For you, this is where the story ends.... You can go back to your own lives—read and dream, eat and sleep" (94), Panning means to show us that even if we were to presume a story *could* end, its essence will linger somewhere outside ourselves.

You Can Get There From Here: 25 Years of Bridging Courses for Women at York University

Ruby Newman and Andrea O'Reilly, eds.
Toronto: School of Women's Studies, York University, 2006.

Reviewed by Rita Bode

You Can Get There From Here is a volume of voices, rather than a collection of essays, whose range and power attest to the success of what the book records: the history of York's Bridging Program for Women, and the experiences of the women who have been involved with it. Now part of the School of Women's Studies, the Bridging Program aims to enable women, over the age of twenty-one and out of school for at least two years, to acquire the critical thinking and writing skills required for university-level study. A grade of B in the Bridging course qualifies students for admission to undergraduate studies at York.

The voices number forty-seven in all and include the program founders and supporters, instructors, and students. The editors, both of whom are involved in the program, divide the book into three sections that correspond to these groups: History, Pedagogy, and Student Voices. The pieces across the sections reflect, in addition to such practical benefits as job advancement, a vision of higher education as a life-enhancing experience offering intellectual as well as emotional and psychological fulfillment. While not all the Bridging students continue their studies, they are given an excellent chance to do so, and the program's thoughtful curriculum of texts that speak to a range of female experiences encourages the intellectual self-confidence of all participants.

The contributions commonly express such values as determination, commitment, and the importance of mutual respect in human interactions. This pattern of similarity enhances rather than negates the individuality of the volume's multi-voices, for the contributors speak these values from personal, unique perspectives that reflect a broad diversity in racial and socio-economic backgrounds. This commonality, moreover, suggests a truth about higher education that is too often overlooked by educational institutions, especially for mature female students: getting "there from here" requires a communal understanding and practice in which administrators, instructors, and students work together to create the opportunity for individual achievement.

You Can Get There From Here articulates its own "idea of a university" on several fronts. Its "feminist pedagogy," valuing the students' thinking and experiences, offers, for all classrooms and both sexes, the worthy practice of student validation. This validation, moreover, as both instructor and student contributors make clear, comes not at the expense of academic standards. The bridging program is as committed to intellectual rigour as it is to warm support

and encouragement and affirms that one need not exclude the other.

The program's aim of facilitating the process of university study for women involves a re-configuring of the traditional places of higher learning. Through the Bridging classes, the ivory tower becomes accessible in the community spaces of suburban malls, public libraries, company offices where what counts is the gathering of eager minds to read, think, discuss, and communicate ideas.

Since together the individual contributions affirm the importance of shared activity in helping to realize educational goals and dreams, it would somehow be against the spirit of this volume to single out any one individual contribution for specific comment. A thoughtful addition to this collection is that each contribution is accompanied by the author's photograph. In this celebratory record of the bridging program's twenty-fifth anniversary, as in the program itself, no one remains faceless.

Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe

Patrizia Albanese.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Reviewed by Layne Parish Craig

In *Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe*, sociologist Patrizia Albanese provides an empirical study of the relationship between states' adoption of nationalist ideals and women's roles in such nations. As she writes in her introduction, "This book ... tests whether nationalism intends to modernize or archaize gender and family relations." Albanese's "test" is as rigorous and well-defined as such a project can be, and its potential contribution to work on the material relationship between "the personal and the political" is provocative.

Albanese's project examines the real-life effects of policies regulating women and families in nationalist and non-nationalist states at two points in history: between World War I and World War II and Post-1989. For each time period, she examines two nationalist states (Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy for the Interwar period and Post-Soviet Russia and Independent Croatia for Post-1989) and two non-nationalist states (Revolutionary Russia and Yugoslavia for the Interwar period and Post-reunification Germany and Contemporary Italy for Post-1989). Each of the text's chapters focuses on one of these governmental bodies, outlining its history, demography, and policies pertaining to women and families, then offering statistical information about women's

actual experiences. Albanese's articulation of her hypothesis and method can appear specious, as when she poses the question, "Did inclusion, equality, and political autonomy characterize [women's] place in the nationalist agenda?" Early in the text, most readers might anticipate a negative response to such a question. However, Albanese's careful definition of terms and defense of her methodology lend credence to her project, despite her seemingly foregone conclusions.

The most interesting and convincing parts of *Mothers of the Nation* are Albanese's detailed descriptions of nationalist policies promoting nuclear families and population growth. Hers is a comprehensive perspective that analyzes examples from Nazi Germany's "marriage loans," which were forgiven when a couple had four children, to Croatia's removal of abortion from state health insurance plans. She then reviews "Nationalist 'Successes' and Failures," using demographic information to determine the effects these measures had on such figures as birth rates, divorce rates, and numbers of abortions. Albanese's meticulous descriptions elucidate the chilling implications of common trends in nationalist rhetoric and policy, such as advocacy against women's public roles and the ideological and sometimes monetary value placed on the reproduction of "ethnically clean" citizens.

Non-nationalist states are included in the study to demonstrate that nationalist governments were not simply following broader historical trends. However, Albanese's descriptions of women's ongoing struggles in these non-nationalist states sometimes make their inclusion distracting. In her chapter on Yugoslavia she explains, "while under Italy's and Germany's nationalist regimes women were a central focus of the nation-state, in multinational Yugoslavia women were virtually ignored by the state." Such explicit comparisons between nationalist and non-nationalist examples would be helpful throughout the book.

Albanese diagnoses nationalist regimes as inherently opposed to the modernization of women's political and social lives. She emphasizes her finding that the ethnic and political "brotherhoods" extolled by nationalists have been extended to women only in narrowly defined ways, even if women had previously held prominent roles in a nation's public life. She ends by calling on Canadian readers to be watchful of the rise of nationalist discourse surrounding the issue of Quebec sovereignty. Such concrete applications of this empirical study exemplify the contribution of *Mothers of the Nation* to the fields of political theory and women's studies.

Contributor Notes

Carol Berg has poems forthcoming or in *The Hiss Quarterly*, *Rhino*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Tattoo Highway* and elsewhere. Currently she is an MFA student at Stonecoast (University of Southern Maine) and has an MA in English Literature. Carol also works part-time as a Writing Tutor at Pine Manor College.

Mary Kay Blakely joined the Journalism School faculty in September, 1997, and teaches Advanced Writing in the magazine sequence. A contributing editor to *Ms. Magazine* since 1981 and former “Hers” columnist for *The New York Times*, she is the author of the critically acclaimed *Wake Me When It’s Over* and *American Mom*. Her essays on social and political issues have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Mother Jones*, *LIFE*, *Vogue*, *Family Circle*, *Self*, *Parents*, *Newsday*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *Lear’s*, *Glamour*, *Working Woman* as well as other national publications. Her television appearances include news commentaries on the *Today Show*, *Oprah*, *Larry King Live*, *CBS This Morning*, *Charlie Rose*, *C-SPAN*, *Good Morning America*, and *CNN*.

Rita Bode is Associate Professor of English Literature at Trent University where she teaches a wide variety of courses from early modern to contemporary. Through Trent’s Julian Blackburn College in Oshawa, she has taught many mature students (the majority of them women), and highly values their contributions to academic studies.

Saskatchewan author **Beverley Brenna** (www.beverleybrenna.com) is currently working on doctoral studies at the University of Alberta. Her books include *Wild Orchid* (Red Deer, 2005) and a new collection of short stories: *Something to Hang On To* (Thistledown, pending, 2009). More about her mom’s writing can be found on www.lulu.com (search “Myra Stilborn”).

Judith Belle Brown is a Full Professor and teaches in the Masters of Clinical Science Program of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Western Ontario. She is a family practice researcher with the Thames Valley Family Practice Research Unit and the Centre for Studies in Family Medicine. She is also cross-appointed to King’s University College’s School of Social Work.

Tatjana Takševa Chorney is Assistant Professor at Saint Mary's University; she is a member of the English Department, and affiliated with the Women's Studies Program. She has published essays on Renaissance literature, hypertext, reading, teaching and learning, and is currently working on a book on John Donne and Renaissance genres.

James Cihlar's book of poems, *Undoing*, is available from Little Pear Press. His poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Bloom*, *Minnesota Monthly*, *Northeast*, *The James White Review*, *Wisconsin River Valley Journal*, *Water~Stone Review*, *Mankato Poetry Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Plain Songs*, and in the anthologies *Aunties* (Ballantine 2004), edited by Ingrid Sturgis, and *Regrets Only* (Little Pear Press), edited by Martha Manno. The recipient of a Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowship for Poetry, a Glenna Luschei Award from *Prairie Schooner*, and a collegiate award from the Academy of American Poets, Cihlar lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his partner.

Layne Parish Craig is a Ph.D. candidate in English Literature at the University of Texas at Austin with research interests in interwar literature, women's social movements, and feminist theory. Her current project explores the influence of the transatlantic birth control movement on women writers in Ireland, England, and the United States.

Patrice DiQuinzio is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Women's Studies at Muhlenberg College. She has published a number of articles on feminism and political philosophy and has edited two collections of work on women, ethics, social theory, and public policy. Patrice has also published a book on the difficulties that feminist thinkers have encountered in their attempts to develop theories of femininity, women's oppression, and women's liberation that adequately address the topic of motherhood. Her books include: *Women and Children First: Feminism, Rhetoric, and Public Policy*; *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering*; and *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy*.

Sonia Donnellan recently completed a Ph.D. by Major Studio Practice in the School of Art, University of South Australia. Sonia's doctoral study creatively explored complex and contradictory emotional and psychological states that arise as an aspect of contemporary mothering of adolescent daughters. Sonia's practice includes teaching and creative writing.

Sarah J. Duncan possesses a Master of Education degree in Teaching and Learning, with special experience in planning learning programs. She's most recently taught at Sir Sandford Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario where she lives with her two sons. In addition, Sarah is an educational researcher with her own business *Four Square Coaching and Research* (www.4-square.ca).

Rishma Dunlop is an award winning Canadian poet, playwright, essayist, and fiction writer. She is the author of three acclaimed books of poetry, *Metropolis*, *Reading Like a Girl*, and *The Body of My Garden*. A new book of poems, *White Album*, will be published in 2008 by Inanna Publications. Books as editor include: *White Ink: Poems on Mothers and Motherhood* and *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets*. She received the Emily Dickinson Prize for Poetry in 2003 and has been a finalist for the CBC Literary Prize in Poetry. She is a professor in the Department of English at York University, Toronto, where she is Coordinator of the Creative Writing Program in English. Dunlop is editor of the international poetry journal *Studio*.

Miriam Edelson is a social activist, mother and writer living in Toronto. *Battle Cries: Justice For Kids with Special Needs* was published in 2005. *My Journey With Jake: A Memoir of Parenting and Disability* appeared in 2000. Her creative non-fiction and commentaries have appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, CBC Radio, *This Magazine* as well as other periodicals. Born in New York, Edelson spent her teens in Toronto and completed her undergraduate studies at McMaster and Laval Universities. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies in sociology and bioethics part-time at the University of Toronto. Edelson lives in Toronto with her partner Andy King and her daughter Emma.

Regina Edmonds is a clinical psychologist and an Associate Professor of Psychology at Assumption College, Worcester, MA. Currently, she also coordinates Assumption's Women's Studies Program. Regina's research focuses on discovering the qualities that characterize successful mother-daughter relationships. Other specialties include the treatment of eating difficulties, self-esteem concerns and trauma based disorders. She is also working on an anthology focused on the challenges facing women globally.

Susan C. Ford holds an undergraduate degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (Social and Occupational Rights of Women) and a Master's Degree in Social Work, both from Carleton University. As a psychotherapist in private practice, Counselling for Change, she helps clients work through the past so that they can live fully in the present, with an increased ability to create a positive future.

Cayo Gamber is an Assistant Professor of Writing at the George Washington University. She currently teaches a writing course that is focused on researching primary documents related to the Holocaust (such as oral histories of survivors and archival photographs); Introduction to Women's Studies; and From Barbie Dolls to Guerilla Girls: A Study of Women in/and Media. Her research interests include analyzing the memorialization of warfare, legacies of the Holocaust, and the role of popular culture (e.g., advertising menstrual supplies) in creating western notions of girlhood and womanhood. The three pieces published here are part of a larger manuscript she has been developing.

Nancy Gerber holds a doctorate in Literatures in English from Rutgers University. She is the author of two books, *Portrait of the Mother-Artist: Class and Creativity in Contemporary American Fiction* (Lexington, 2003) and *Losing a Life: A Daughter's Memoir of Caregiving* (Hamilton, 2005). Her poems have appeared in *The Mom Egg* and *Hip Mama*. A revised version of the essay in this issue will appear in *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art*, an anthology edited by Jennie Klein and Myrel Chernick.

Lorri Neilsen Glenn is the author and editor of six scholarly books and three collections of poetry. The Poet Laureate of Halifax for 2005–2009, Lorri teaches at Mount Saint Vincent University. The poems here are from *Lost Gospels*, forthcoming from Brick Books in 2010.

Jennifer Goldberg is a Ph.D. candidate in Humanities at the University of Louisville, where she teaches courses in world literature and American culture. Her primary research interest is the representation of maternity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and visual art. She is the mother of two sons, Caleb (8) and Ethan (6).

Rebecca Goodrich moved from Alaska to Idaho in 2000 to attend the University of Idaho where she received her MFA in Creative Writing. She now teaches writing at Washington State University. Her daughter Kiya wandered the world, then found her way home and will graduate from UI in December with a degree in Sports.

Fiona Joy Green, Ph.D. is a feminist mother, and Chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Her research on mothering has been published in *Storytelling: A Critical Journal of Popular Narrative*, *Socialist Studies*, and *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, as well as in *Mother Outlaws* (Women's Press) and *Motherhood to Mothering* (SUNY Press).

Jessica Smartt Gullion has a Ph.D. in sociology and currently works as an epidemiologist. She is also an adjunct professor at Texas Woman's University. Her writings on motherhood have appeared in *Literary Mama* and the *Mother's Movement Online*, and she has an essay in the anthology *Mama, Ph.D.*

Janelle Hardy: I have deep gratitude for my photographic subject and daughter Ellazora for her joy and sensuous zest for life. Gratitude also to my whole family, and especially my father Todd Hardy, whose near-death experience and recovery from leukemia catalyzed in me the knowledge that a life in art is a life lived most fully. I am also grateful to my estranged husband Yassin Alward, without whose support and subsequent relationship challenges I would not know myself. For any inquiries, e-mail janelly@alumni.yorku.ca

Cristina Herrera received her Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate University in January 2008. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Chicano and Latin American Studies at California State University, Fresno. She is currently working on a manuscript on mothers and daughters in Chicana literature, in addition to other separate research articles on Chicana writers.

Amber Kinser is editor of *Mothering in the Third Wave*, published by Demeter Press (2008) and author of the upcoming book, *Motherhood and Feminism* (Seal Press). She also writes about family interaction and second/third wave feminist dialogues. Kinser is Associate Professor of Communication and Director of Women's Studies at East Tennessee State University. She is mother to a daughter and a son.

Maggie Kirkman is a lecturer and researcher at the Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, Melbourne School of Population Health, The University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include psychosocial aspects of infertility, involuntary childlessness, assisted reproduction and donor-assisted conception, and women's reproductive lives including abortion.

Elzbieta Korolczuk is a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate School for Social Research, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, working on the thesis: "Negotiating Mother-Daughter Relations in Contemporary Poland: Cultural Representations and Everyday Experiences." She studied at the Institute of Psychology, Warsaw University and at the American Studies Center. She has been awarded the Marie Curie Fellowship for Early Stage Researchers.

Kandee Kosior is a feminist human rights activist who has both a personal and an academic interest in Mothering and Human Rights. Kandee is a longstanding member of ARM and its spin-off activist group Mother Outlaws. She recently enjoyed participating in the 2007 Women's Human Rights Institute at the Centre for Women's Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. She lives in California, with her husband and three children.

Laurie Kruk is Associate Professor, English Studies, at Nipissing University, and the mother of two, step-mother of one. She has published *The Voice is the Story: Conversations with Canadian Writers of Short Fiction* (Mosaic Press, 2003) and two collections of poetry: *Theories of the World* (Netherlandic Press, 1992); *Loving the Alien* (Your Scrivener Press, 2006). She was also a contributor to *White Ink* (Demeter Press, 2007).

Fiona Tinwei Lam is a Scottish-born Vancouver writer whose work has appeared in Canadian literary magazines and anthologies including *Swallowing Clouds*,

Vintage 2000, *In Fine Form*, *Writing the Terrain*, and *White Ink*. Her first book of poetry, *Intimate Distances* was a finalist for the City of Vancouver Book Award. She has twice been short-listed for the *Event* non-fiction prize. Her work was featured on local transit as part of B.C.'s Poetry in Transit in 2002. She was a co-editor of and contributor to *Double Lives: Writing and Mothering*, a critically acclaimed collection of personal essays by diverse literary writers about their experiences juggling their passions to write and to parent, published in spring 2008 by McGill-Queen's University Press. Her second book of poetry, *Enter the Chrysanthemum*, will come out spring 2009 with Caitlin Press. A former lawyer, she is the single parent of a young and exuberant son.

D. Memee Lavell-Harvard is currently President of the Ontario Native Women's Association, a full time student currently completing her Ph.D. in Education at the University of Western Ontario, and is the first Aboriginal person ever to receive a Trudeau Scholarship. Harvard is also a full-time mother of two little girls, Autumn Sky (eight) and Eva Lillie (two). Ms. Lavell-Harvard's research addresses the epidemic of low academic achievement and high drop out rates among Aboriginal populations in Canada.

Gayle Letherby is Professor of Sociology in the School of Law and Social Science at the University of Plymouth, UK. Her research interests include pregnancy loss, infertility and involuntary childlessness, teenage pregnancy and young parenthood and feminist considerations of methodology and epistemology.

Laura Lewis is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at King's University College at the University of Western Ontario. She has a Ph.D. in Social Work from Smith College. Prior to her academic appointment, she was a social worker providing counseling services in a local family service agency.

Brenda McGadney-Douglass earned degrees from the Universities of Chicago (Ph.D.) and Michigan (MSW and BA). Her career in social work, focused on gerontological practice, research, education, and administration, spans three decades in the U.S., Canada, and Ghana. Issues addressed in her work include cross-cultural gerontology and intergenerational decision-making processes, health care for the poor and underserved, well-being of family caregivers, grandmothers' role in survival of malnourished children, and international, legal, and social issues of refugees and immigration, mostly related to women and mothers. In addition to publications in numerous scholarly journals, she serves on three journal boards in the U.S., Kenya, and Canada.

Claire Millikin currently is a lecturer in the Studies in Women and Gender program at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Originally from Georgia, she grew up in the American south and overseas. She went north to school and has taught in New York City and in Maine. Her poems have appeared

in *Iris*, *The Recorder*, and the *North Carolina Literary Review*. “The Foxes” is dedicated to her aunt Julia, whose eleven-year-old daughter was killed in a hunting accident in rural Georgia.

Sharon Moloney has a background as a fertility/childbirth educator, pregnancy/birth counsellor, HypnoBirthing practitioner and hypnotherapist. She has a private practice, working with clients on a range of reproductive and other issues. With a Masters in Women’s Studies, Sharon is currently completing her Ph.D. on women’s spirituality around menstruation and birthing.

Susan Musgrave has received awards in five different genres: poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, children’s writing and for her work as an editor. She teaches in University of British Columbia’s Optional Residency in Creative Writing MFA Programme. Her new novel, *Given*, will be published by Knopf in 2009, and *When the World is Not Our Home: Selected Poems 1985–2000* in 2009, also.

Ruth Nemzoff, author of *Don’t Bite Your Tongue: How to Foster Rewarding Relationships with Your Adult Children*, Palgrave/Mcmillan 2005, is a resident scholar at The Brandeis Women’s Studies Research Center. More information can be found at www.ruthnemzoff.com. Her papers are archived at the Schlesinger Library Harvard University.

Gisela Norat is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Agnes Scott College, a liberal arts college for women in Atlanta, Georgia, where she teaches Latina and Latin American women’s literature in the Spanish department and Women’s Studies Program. She is author of *Marginalities: Diamela Eltit and the Subversion of Mainstream Literature in Chile* and various journal articles on female Latin American and U.S. Latina fiction writers.

Andrea O’Reilly, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the School of Women’s Studies at York University (Atkinson Faculty), Toronto. She is co-editor/editor of more than ten books on motherhood, including *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (2004), and *Maternal Theory: The Essential Readings* (2007). O’Reilly is author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, (2004) and *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering* (2006). O’Reilly is founder and director of *The Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM), founder and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, and founder and editor of Demeter Press, the first feminist press on motherhood. She has received thirteen *Social Science Humanities Research Council of Canada* grants over the last ten years, including one for her current research project on “Being a Mother in the Academe.” Dr. O’Reilly has presented her research at more than 50 conferences in over a dozen countries and was a keynote speaker at the *National Women’s Studies Conference* in 2006; as well she has been in-

interviewed widely on the topic of motherhood. In 1998 she was the recipient of the University wide “Teacher of the Year” award at York University, and in 2007 she was granted the Atkinson Deans’s award for “Outstanding Research.” Andrea and her common-law spouse of 25 years are the parents of a 23-year-old son and two daughters, ages 18 and 21.

Ruth Panofsky is Book Review Editor of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. She is Professor of English at Ryerson University in Toronto where she specializes in Canadian literature and culture. Her most recent books are *The Force of Vocation: The Literary Career of Adele Wiseman* (University of Manitoba Press, 2006) and *Laike and Nabum: A Poem in Two Voices* (Inanna, 2007), which received the 2008 Canadian Jewish Book Award for Poetry. Her new collection of essays, *At Odds in the World: Essays on Jewish Canadian Women Writers*, will be published by Inanna Publications in October 2008.

Barbara Pelman lives in Victoria B.C. where she teaches high school English. An active participant in the Victoria literary scene, her poems have been published in various literary journals, including *Descant*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, and *Fiddlehead*. Her first book of poetry, *One Stone*, was published in 2005, and her second, *Borrowed Rooms*, is forthcoming by Ronsdale Press in late 2008.

Marlene Pomrenke currently works as an Assistant Professor with the University of Manitoba. She has a Ph.D in social work and is the mother to a five-year-old daughter adopted from China. Her research interests include intercountry adoption, maternal health, resilience, caregiving, career motivations and outcomes for graduate students, and alternative dispute resolution.

Catherine Racine, MA, RCC, is a feminist counsellor and writer working in community mental health. She has published on mystical experience and is currently working on a series of stories about her mother.

Joanna Radbord is a lesbian feminist mother and a lawyer with the firm of Epstein Cole, LLP. Her practice focuses on family law and gay and lesbian equality rights, and she is particularly interested in the legal regulation of lesbian mothering. Joanna was involved with *M. v. H.*, a Supreme Court of Canada decision resulting in the recognition of same-sex relationships in dozens of federal and provincial statutes. She was counsel to a lesbian father in *Forrester v. Saliba*, which states that transsexuality is irrelevant to a child’s best interests. She has acted for the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund in cases involving the feminization of poverty, particularly the spousal support variation case Boston and the retroactive child support case DBS. She was co-counsel to the Ontario and Quebec same-sex couples who won the freedom to marry in Halpern and on the Reference re Same-Sex Marriage before the Supreme Court. Joanna also appeared as counsel in Rutherford,

achieving immediate legal recognition for lesbian mothers, and represented the Rutherford families as intervener counsel in *A.A. v. B.B. v. C.C.*, the case allowing recognition of three parents in law.

Yelizaveta P. Renfro's nonfiction and fiction have appeared in *Glimmer Train Stories*, *North American Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *So to Speak*, *ByLine*, and the anthology *A Stranger Among Us: Stories of Cross Cultural Collision and Connection*. She is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

M. Louise Ripley, M.B.A., Ph.D. is a professor of Marketing, Women's Studies, and in Environmental Studies at Atkinson College of York University in Toronto. She was a member of the Atkinson Poetry Group for many years until its demise in 2006, and has had a number of poems published.

Rachel Rose is a dual Canadian/American citizen whose work has appeared in various journals in both countries, including *Poetry*, *The Malahat Review*, and *The Best American Poetry*, as well as in several anthologies, including *Uncharted Lines: Poems from the Journal of the American Medical Association* and *In Fine Form: The Canadian Book of Form Poetry*. Her first book, *Giving My Body to Science*, (McGill/Queen's University Press) was a finalist for The Gerald Lampert Award, The Pat Lowther Award, and the Grand Prix du Livre de Montreal, and won the Quebec Writers' Federation A.M. Klein Award. Her second book, *Notes on Arrival and Departure*, was published by McClelland & Stewart. She is the poetry mentor at SFU's The Writer's Studio.

Rosie Rosenzweig, a liturgical poet, Feminist writer, and Resident Scholar in Women's Studies at Brandeis University, is the author of *A Jewish Mother in Shangri-la* about meeting her Buddhist son's Asian teachers. Currently she is writing a book about the sources of creativity based on interviews with woman artists.

Sara Ruddick lives in New York City where she taught for many years at New School University. Her most recent collection, *Mother Troubles*, co-edited with Julia Hanigsberg, a legal theorist who lives in Toronto, considers dilemmas of motherhood for which there are no easy answers. This book represents an early attempt to think about institutions and cultures of motherhood that might serve mothers well. In her first collection, *Working It Out*, published in 1976 and co-edited with Pamela Daniels, women wrote personal essays about their struggles doing their chosen work. This was followed by another collection of personal essays, *Between Women* edited with Carol Ascher and Louise de Salvo published in 1984 and later published in a second edition with an introduction by Carolyn Heilbrun. During these years she began to think about mothers' thinking and in 1980, published the essay "Maternal Thinking" and, in 1989,

the book *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, published with a new introduction in 1995. Throughout these years she has written steadily, though not copiously, about war, non-violence, maternal thinking, and the connections and contrasts between them. Two decades after promising that *Maternal Thinking* was at least connected to a politics of peace she is still trying to create transformative understandings of mothering as a resource for non-violent practices, still trying to forge the links that would make thinking maternally a way of thinking against the grain of violence.

Dominique Russell is the editor of *Rape in Art Cinema* (Continuum, 2009) and the author of numerous articles on film. Her most recent work on motherhood and visual media includes “Reconsidering Matricide in Spanish Cinema of the Transition: Furtivos [Poachers]” in *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* (2007) and “The Reality of TV Labour: Birth Stories” forthcoming in *Mothering and Popular Culture* edited by Elizabeth Podnieks.

Lori Saint-Martin is a professor in the literature department at the Université du Québec à Montréal. She has published two books of short fiction, *Lettre imaginaire à la femme de mon amant* (1991) and *Mon père, la nuit* (1999), French translations of six English-Canadian novels, in collaboration with Paul Gagné, and several books of non-fiction on women’s writing in Québec, including *Le nom de la mère: Mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin* (*The Name of the Mother: Mothers, Daughters and Writing in Quebec Women’s Fiction*), 1999. Her current research project is on fathers and children in contemporary Québec fiction (supported by SSHRC grant). With Paul Gagné, she has two children, Nicolas (15) and Anna (13).

K.V. Skene is a long-term expat Canadian. Her publications include *Only a Dragon* and *Calendar of Rain*, winners of the 2002 and 2004 Shaunt Basmajian Chapbook Award (Canada); a chapbook, *Edith* (a series of poems on Nurse Edith Cavell) courtesy of Flarestack Publishing (UK) and her latest book, *Love in the (Irrational) Imperfect*, published by Hidden Brook Press (Canada). She currently lives in Oxford, England.

Dorsía Smith Silva teaches English in the College of General Studies at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. Her research and teaching focus on Ethnic and Caribbean Literature, the Latino community and the Diaspora, and feminism. She is the author of several articles and is the co-editor of *The Caribbean without Borders: Caribbean Literature, Language, and Culture* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008).

Elizabeth Soliday is Associate Professor of Psychology at Washington State University Vancouver and is a licensed clinical psychologist. Her research focuses on women’s perinatal psychological health and pediatric health. Her articles

have appeared in academic and professional publications. Her work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and national foundations.

Judith Stadtman Tucker is a writer and activist. She is the founder and editor of the *Mothers Movement Online*, and a member of the NOW Mothers' and Caregivers' Economic Rights Committee. She previously served as co-coordinator for the May 2006 ARM Conference on Caregiving and Carework.

Theresa Nowlan Suart is a print journalism professor at Loyalist College, Belleville, ON, and a PhD candidate at the University of New Brunswick. Her research focuses on parents' interactions with schools in obtaining services for children with autism. Her youngest child has autism and will enter junior kindergarten in September. She and her family live in Kingston, ON.

Sylvia Terzian is a Ph.D. student at Wilfrid Laurier University in the Department of English and Film Studies. My research interests include Diasporic and Postcolonial Studies. My thesis, which focuses on the Arab-American and Arab-Canadian diaspora, examines Arab-diasporic literature and the strategies by which its contemporary fiction represents Arab diasporic experience and identity in Canada and the United States.

Tamara Toledo is a Chilean born Canadian visual artist, curator and educator living and working in Toronto. Toledo is a 1998 graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design in Drawing and Painting and holds an MFA from York University, 2005. Toledo is co-founder of the Latin American Canadian Art Projects and of the Salvador Allende Arts Festival for Peace. She has exhibited her work in several public and private galleries in Toronto and abroad and is recipient of several grants and awards in recognition for her artistic and curatorial merit.

Leslie Vryenhoek is a writer, editor and communications consultant whose poetry and fiction have appeared in several magazines and journals including *Event*, *The New Quarterly*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Cahoots*, *Room of One's Own*, *This*, *Prairie Fire* (forthcoming) and *Riddle Fence* (forthcoming). She lives in St. John's with the youngest of her two daughters, and is completing a collection of poetry.

Gina Wong-Wylie, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology at Athabasca University in Alberta, Canada. She is a Registered Psychologist and devotes her counselling practice to focusing on pre and postnatal issues with women. Wong-Wylie's area of research interest also includes prenatal/perinatal psychology, issues related to mothering, and mental health and maternal wellness issues from feminist and cross-cultural perspectives.



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In celebration of Mother's Day, the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) and MAMAPALOOZA are hosting our 2nd annual conference:

**Mothers Gone Mad:
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Thursday, May 28 - Friday, May 29, 2009
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We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, artists, community agencies, service providers, journalists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. Cross-cultural, historical, and comparative work is encouraged. We encourage a variety of types of submissions including academic papers from all disciplines, workshops, creative submissions, performances, storytelling, visual arts, and other alternative formats. Call for papers and additional information will be available on the ARM website September 2008: <www.yorku.ca/arm>.

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Founded in 1998 the **Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)** is the first and still only international feminist research devoted specifically to the

topic of mothering–motherhood. Our mandate is to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of research on motherhood and to establish a community of individuals and institutions working and researching in the area of mothering and motherhood. ARM houses the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, Demeter Press, and the feminist mothers group MOTHER OUTLAWS.

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MAMAPALOOZA Inc. connecting Women and Families through Music, Art, Activism, Commerce and Education for Cultural, Economic & Social Awareness.

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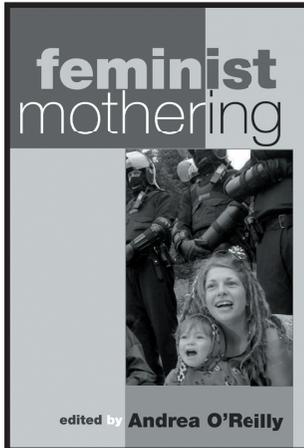
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September 2008

Feminist Mothering

edited by Andrea O'Reilly



September 2008

287 pages \$24.95

978-0-7914-7558-4

State University of New York Press,
194 Washington Avenue, Ste. 305,
Albany, NY 12210-2384
www.sunypress.edu

Feminist Mothering goes beyond critiques of patriarchal motherhood to locate and investigate feminist maternal practices as sites for women's empowerment and social change. The contributors see "feminist mothering" as practices of mothering that seek to challenge and change the norms of patriarchal motherhood that are limiting and oppressive to women.

Contributors—Aimee E. Berger, Kristin G. Esterberg, Fiona Joy Green, Shirley A. Hill, Amber E. Kinser, Colleen Mack-Canty, Shelley Martin, Kecia Driver McBride, Janice Nathanson, Gisela Norat, Andrea O'Reilly, Pegeen Reichert Powell, Michele Y. Pridmore-Brown, Sarah Trimble, Judith Stadtman Tucker, and Sue Marie Wright—explore the ways in which women integrate activism, paid employment, nonsexist childrearing practices, and non-child-centered interests in their lives in order to challenge existing societal inequality and create new egalitarian possibilities for women, men, and families.

"With intelligence and passion ... these essays remind us that carework—the work that mothers do—must be recognized as foundational to our political and personal well-being."
—Meredith W. Michaels, coauthor of *The Mommy Myth*

Andrea O'Reilly is Associate Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University and Director of the Association for Research on Mothering. She is the author and editor of many books on mothering, including *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* and *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, both also published by SUNY Press.

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Call for Papers

Demeter Press
is seeking submissions for an edited collection on

Queering Parenting

Publication Date: Spring 2011

New Editors: Susan Driver and Zoë Newman

A proliferation of experientially based essays, media stories, documentary films, television profiles, photographic essays and do-it-yourself manuals featuring lesbian mothers and gay dads have emerged to mark out cultural discourses in which to understand lesbian and gay families. But while these images and narratives enable positive representations that counter invisibility and marginalization, they often work to delimit transformative mode of thinking and acting beyond normalizing categories. For LG-BTTT2Q communities in Canada, the US, and Europe, family has been a site of struggle and invisibility, and has also been constructed as a site of transformation and pride, sometimes with the result that we have sidelined interrogations of how 'queer families' are normative and exclusionary. It is those troubling, ambiguous and unintelligible subjects that do not fit neatly into parental discourses that need to enter into public dialogues as part of a comprehensive project of queering parenting.

This book adopts a range of critically queer theoretical perspectives to rethink the parameters of parenting and family beyond heteronormative boundaries. Our goal is to engage with difficult knowledges and changing embodied parental experiences that include dynamic gender and sexual arrangements as they are lived through multi-layered racial, national and class relations. Rather than list those identities that fit into

a queer paradigm we encourage a more pliable framework that explores the institutions, languages and contexts of parenting, complicating the ways powers shape alternatives to white middle-class heterosexual nuclear formations. Our interest is in fostering interpretive work on parenting that bridges articulations of intimate subjectivity, and analysis of broad social and historical forces that cumulatively impact what can be done and said in the name of diverse family relations.

We hope to include a range of styles of academic writing, and encourage interdisciplinary modes of analysis. The following topics interest us but they do not exhaust the horizon of our search:

- Transgender parenting within and beyond bi-gender mother and father roles
- Transnational queer parenting or transnational and queer critiques of the family
- Affective/psychic/embodied transformations of queer parenting
- Queering public/private and national boundaries of reproductivity
- The status of ‘queer’ as a strategic and heuristic tool of family life
- Parenting and sexualities
- Media representations and spectacles of queer families
- Alternative visual and artistic depictions of family life
- Racialization of queer family discourses
- Queering family law
- Queer interventions with reproductive technologies
- Reflecting on gay and lesbian self-help parenting texts
- Community based queer family activism and organizing
- Commodification of queer parenting and queer families

Deadline for papers: October 31, 2008

All papers must be MLA format (7000 word limit)

Please send inquiries and complete essays to:
<sdriver@yorku.ca> and <znewman@yorku.ca>

Association for Research on Mothering / Demeter Press
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Email: arm@yorku.ca Website: www.yorku.ca/arm



Call for Papers

Demeter Press
is seeking submissions for an edited collection on
Latina/Chicana Mothering

Publication Date: Spring 2011

Editors: Dorsía Smith Silva and Janine Santiago

We are very excited to edit an interdisciplinary book on mothering in the Latina and Chicana communities. We seek papers that examine the narratives, histories, practices, and theories of Latina and Chicana mothering as they reflect the realities and complexities of diverse perspectives. Latina and Chicana mothering is a rich experience, which engenders a sense of identity, multiple viewpoints, and cultural orientations. Here, the Latina/Chicana mothering experience seeks to provide a site for inquiry of those life histories and legacies, which have been marked by undergoing childbirth, raising children, or becoming mothers, as well as transatlantic mothers. One of the main goals of this text will be to examine the complex representations of Latina and Chicana mothering and to address the space where Latina and Chicana perspectives are in many cases rendered invisible.

We encourage varied approaches from across the humanities and social sciences including, but not limited to topics as the following: theoretical, historical, cultural, feminist, maternal, transgender, and gender studies; personal and reflective essays; ethnographies; oral histories, cultural studies; literary representation; mother activists and activism perspectives; constructions and hybridity theories of identity and changes in identity; constructions of ethnicity and changes in ethnicity; Latina and Chicana/

mothering in global and transnational contexts; issues of immigration, diaspora, citizenship, national identity, embodiment theories; feminist philosophies of mothers and mothering; film and media representations; mothering conflicts; ideological and social debates and tensions within discussions of Latina and Chicana mothering; mothering critiques; issues of Latina and Chicana mothering, especially as they intersect with categories of race, discrimination, class, gender, economics, nation, family, community, education, and language; law, political, or scientific issues; politics and public policies; poverty; health, health care, reproduction, and reproductive rights; the role of web communities and technology; spiritual, cultural, emotional, communal, or social influences; support services for Latina and Chicana mothers; self-sponsored Latina and Chicana mothering communities and institutions; ideologies in Latino and Chicano communities

Abstracts/Proposals (250-400 words) due October 31, 2008
Acceptances made by December 1, 2008
Accepted and completed papers
(15-20 pp. double-spaced, MLA format) due: March 31, 2009

Please send inquiries and papers, along with a brief biography, to:
Editors, Dorsía Smith Silva and Janine Santiago at
<latinachicanamothering@yahoo.com>.

About the Editors:

Dorsía Smith Silva teaches English in the College of General Studies at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. She is the author of several articles and is the co-editor of *The Caribbean without Borders: Caribbean Literature, Language, and Culture* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008).

Janine Santiago is an Assistant Professor of English at University of Puerto Rico, College of General Studies. She has published several articles, including her work in *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia* (2006).

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—Call for Papers—

The editorial board is seeking submissions for Vol. 11.1 of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) to be published in Spring/Summer 2009.

The journal will explore the subject:

Maternal Health and Well-Being *(Physical, Psychological, Social, Economic, Sexual, Political and Spiritual Issues)*

The journal will explore the topic of Maternal Health and Well-Being from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, health care professionals and other health workers, artists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. Cross-cultural, historical and comparative work is encouraged. We also welcome creative reflections such as poetry, short stories, and artwork on the subject.

Topics can include (but are not limited to):

- maternal health promotion and education; • globalization and maternal health; • maternal health activism; • reproductive justice; • public policy and maternal health; • the environment and maternal health issues; • mothers and healthy living; • maternal health and challenges within Indigenous communities; • mothers with disabilities; • mothers with illnesses; • HIV/AIDS; • breast cancer; • mental health issues; • postpartum depression; • disease prevention; • psychiatry; • psychology; • medicine; • pregnancy; • childbirth; • breastfeeding; • young mothers; • mothers and aging; • work and family balance; • maternal nutrition; • disordered eating; • mothering children with disabilities; • violence against mothers and children; • sexual abuse, healing through the arts; • addictions and recovery; • raising healthy children; • politics of reproduction; • abortion; • sterilization; • maternal sexuality; • maternal health promotion and education; • LBGT maternal health issues; • menstruation; • menopause; • mothers and the health professions; • representations/images of mothers and health/well-being issues.

Submission Guidelines

Book reviews are to be no more than 2 pages (500 words).

Articles should be 15-18 pages (3750 words).

All should be MLA style.

Please see our guidelines for details:

<http://www.yorku.ca/arm/styleguide.html>

Deadline for submissions: November 1, 2008

<http://www.yorku.ca/arm/armmembership.html>

Please direct your submissions to:

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Or visit our website at www.yorku.ca/arm

*To submit work, one must be a member of the
Association for Research on Mothering.*

—Call for Papers—

The editorial board is seeking submissions for Vol. 11.2 of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) to be published in Fall/Winter 2009.

The journal will explore the subject:

Mothering and Poverty

The journal will explore the topic of Mothering and Poverty from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. We welcome submissions from scholars, students, social workers, anti-poverty activists and other professionals and community workers. Cross-cultural, historical and comparative work is encouraged. We also welcome creative reflections such as poetry, short stories, and artwork on the subject.

Topics can include (but are not limited to):

mothering at the margins; beginning poor, becoming poor, staying poor, beyond poor; carework and caregiving in poverty; criminalized mothers; maternal health, illness and poverty; neo-liberalism, mothering and poverty; anti-poverty activism and motherhood; public policy and maternal/child poverty; pregnancy and poverty; pre-natal care and economic inequality; impoverished pregnancies; maternal/child poverty and challenges within Indigenous communities; poor mothers with disabilities; motherhood, addictions and mental health issues; postpartum depression and poverty; mothering children with disabilities in poverty; violence against mothers and children and welfare; motherhood and the politics of poverty; LGBT maternal and economic issues; mothering youth-at-risk; feminist mothering and poverty; mothering in developing communities; activist mothering and the war on poverty; “poor mothering” and mothering in poverty; mothering: class/race/gender issues; African-American multigenerational families in poverty; the politics of maternal employment and child care; lone-mothers and family/social policy; sole motherhood, work and welfare; private/public mothering and poverty; welfare fraud and the criminalization of maternal poverty; homelessness/housing and motherhood; mothers responses to poverty—powerlessness, resistance, creativity, victimization, activism; voices of impoverished mothers; means of surviving poverty; poverty

and context: social/personal worlds of mothering; maternal reflections on poverty and young children; young mothers and/in poverty; student mothers and/in poverty; teen mothers and socio-economic issues; teenage mothers—poverty, social welfare policy and access to education; young motherhood, homelessness and relationships; child-welfare, substance (ab)use and pregnancy; “child” with child—discourses of teenage mothering; pregnant and parenting centres; migrant working mothers; transnational motherhood.

Submission Guidelines

Book reviews are to be no more than 2 pages (500 words).

Articles should be 15-18 pages (3750 words).

All should be MLA style.

Please see our guidelines for details:

<http://www.yorku.ca/arm/styleguide.html>

Deadline for submissions: May 1, 2009

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Please direct your submissions to:

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—*Call for Papers*—

Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
13th Annual Conference in conjunction
with York University's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Mothering and the Environment: *The Natural, the Social, the Built* October 23-25, 2009

We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, environmental agencies and workers, environmental educators, artists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. Cross-cultural, historical and comparative work is encouraged. We encourage a variety of types of submissions including academic papers from all disciplines, workshops, creative submissions, performances, storytelling, visual arts and other alternative formats.

Topics can include (but are not limited to):

maternal health and the environment; creating and maintaining sustainable family systems; public/private spaces and the pregnant body; procreation and fertility; declining fertility and the environment; disability, environments and the maternal body; mothers, cancer and pollution; mothering and HIV/AIDS, breastfeeding and environmental toxins; mothering, environments, sustainability and technology; women, children and 'nature'; gender, children and the language of 'the natural'; resisting, embracing and challenging the image of Mother Earth; the philosophy of nature and its relation to the feminine; nature and culture as gendered concepts; New definitions of "environment"; environmental theory and mothering; feminist natural science; feminist philosophy of natural science; essentialism and motherhood; Indigenous theories of mothering; mother environmental movements and maternal activism; ecofeminism, maternal environmental activism and global citizenship; the arts and mothering for social change; narrative inquiry as a mother's story; imagination and motherhood; environmental activism through the arts; representations/images of mothers and environmental issues; mothering and social and environmental justice; mothering with reduced

resources; social environmental support for mothering; race and (anti-) racism in parenting; mothering and educational environments; mothering and children's play environments; mothering children in data-driven school systems; mothering within the neoliberal context; corporations, capitalism and the environment; commercialization of nature; consumerism, the economy and performing motherhood; caring work, waste and water; the effects of resource privatization/commodification on poor and rural women; paternalism and dominant development models for the global south; private and public geographies of mothering; mothering and landscapes; geographies of mothering; mothering and geography; mothering in public space and private space; the maternal in architecture; modernist architecture as a symptom of patriarchy (phallic skyscrapers); internal environments (mothering the self; internal/personal landscapes of mothers); food, farming and the nurturer; GMOs; the role of mothers in creating food sovereignty; peace activism; mothering and violence; mothering and militarism; other' mothers; animal mothers, migration and climate change.

Invited Keynote Speaker

Cindy Sheehan,
Mother, Anti-war Activist, Peace Advocate, author of
Not One More Mother's Child

*If you are interested in being considered as a presenter,
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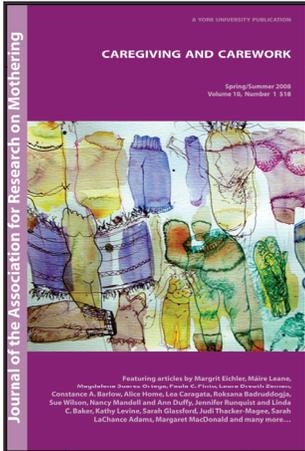
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To submit work to the journal, one must be a member of ARM.

Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering

May 2008

Caregiving and Carework Vol. 10.1



The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering proudly presents the publication of its eighteenth journal issue on the topic of Caregiving and Carework. It includes: *22 scholarly articles, 9 book reviews, a poetry Folio featuring Clarinda Harriss, and other poetry contributions from Alicia Casey, Lynda Perry, Jean Preston, Greg Alan Brownderville, and Gray Jacobik.

Articles include:

- *Integrating Carework and Housework into Household Work: A Conceptual Clarification (Margrit Eichler)
- *Re-Imagining "Progress": Motherwork, Human Flourishing and the Political Culture of Care (Robin G. Isserles)
- *Valuing by Doing: Policy Options to Promote Sharing the Care (Lyn Craig)
- *Women's Experience of Fatigue After Childbirth: Narratives of Ideology and Resistance (ennifer J. Runquist and Linda C. Baker)
- *Economies of Care: Remuneration and Recognition in Foster Care (Damien W. Riggs and Paul H. Delfabbro)
- *The Global Restructuring of Care: The Third World Nanny Phenomenon (Colleen Mack-Canty)
- *Feminism, Child Protection, and Mothers with Psychiatric Disabilities in the United States (Laura Dreuth Zeman)
- *Bonds of Bereavement: Care and Caregiving Among AIDS Mothers (Sharon Lang)
- *Birdy Bones (Judi Thacker-Magee)
- *Discourses of Elder Care: How Midlife Canadian Women Act and Feel in Caring for their Parents (Sue Wilson, Nancy Mandell and Ann Duffy)
- *and much much more!

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Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering
March 2008
Mothering, Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Class
Vol. 9.2



240 pages
\$18.00 pb

The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering proudly presents the publication of its sixteenth journal issue on the topic of Mothering, Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Class.

*16 scholarly articles, 13 book reviews, a poetry Folio featuring Meena Alexander and much more!

Articles include:

- *The Experiences of Mothers of Children of Mixed Heritage: The Theme of the "Body Physical" (Lousie Gormley)
- *Postcards from the Middle: The Journey of Transracial Adoption (Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Lynn Gidluck)
- *Cultural Competence: Beyond Culturally Sensitive Care for Childbearing Black Women (Josephine Etowa and Louise Adongo)
- *Mothering Through Acculturation: Reflections of Salvadorian Mothers in Canada (Mirna Carranza)
- *Perspectives from African American, West Indian and Latina Adolescents (Stacey L. Brown)
- *Breaking the Silence: Infertility, Motherhood, and Queer Culture (Michelle Walks)
- *Are Some Mothers More Equal than Others? Class Divisions in U.S. Family Leave Policy (Heidi M. Berggren)
- *The Daughters of Myrtle Baptist Church: Womanist Consciousness in Motion (Deidre Hill Butler)
- *Audre Lorde – "The Woman Thing" (Laura Major)
- *Towards White Anti-Racist Mothering Practices: Confronting Essentialist Discourses of Race and Culture (Lisa M. Comeau)

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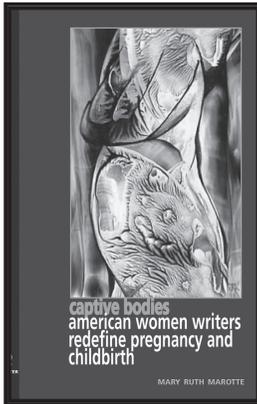
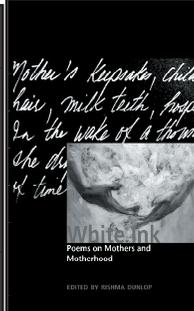
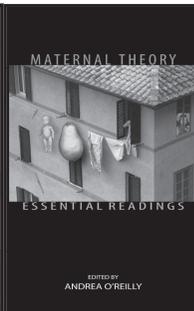
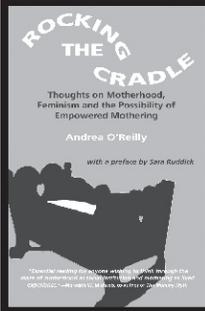
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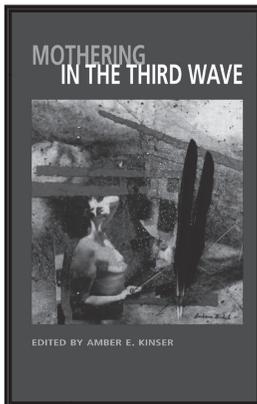
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**The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
proudly announces our new book publishing division**

DEMETER PRESS



SEPTEMBER 2008



AUGUST 2008



OCTOBER 2008

DEMETER PRESS is the newly launched publishing division of the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM). We are the first book publisher focused specifically on the topic of motherhood/mothering. DEMETER PRESS is currently accepting scholarly manuscripts for publication consideration for 2012/2013.

For more information or to submit a manuscript, please contact:

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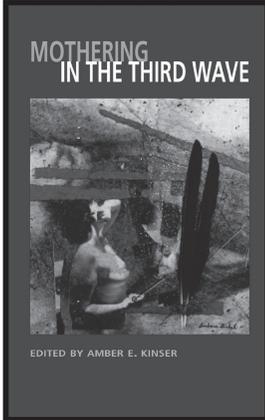
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JUST RELEASED!

August 2008

Mothering in the Third Wave

edited by Amber E. Kinser



August 2008
250 pages \$34.95
ISBN 978-1-55014-485-7

This important new collection

focuses on third wave as an era, in which we practice a diversity of feminisms in tension with “postfeminism.” Mothering in the Third Wave offers new insights into critical examinations of the institution of motherhood, intricately weaving together feminist theory with personal narrative. Contributors speak across feminisms to explore the particular complexities of feminist life in an era characterized by post-feminist, thank-goodness-the-struggle-is-over ideology, and examines the power of blurred family boundaries, contradictions, and evolving family structure in shaping feminist mothering.

The collection features four sections:

- *Motherhood Transforming; *Mothering Resistance;
- *Mothering Contradictions; Representing Motherhood

Contributing writers include: Andrea Fechner, Larissa M. Mercado-Lopez, Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Laura C. Tuley, Wendy Nakanishi, Heather Hewett and Judith Stadtman Tucker.

Amber E. Kinser is Associate Professor of Communication and Director of Women’s Studies at East Tennessee State University. Her research and writing interests explore mothering, family interaction, feminist theory, and gender. She currently is writing her next book, Motherhood and Feminism, for Seal Press. She is mother to a daughter and a son.

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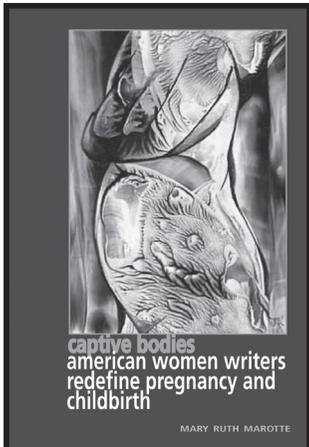
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September 2008

Captive Bodies: American Women Writers Redefine Pregnancy and Childbirth

Mary Ruth Marotte



Pregnancy and childbirth are no longer relegated to the margins of intellectual inquiry in Mary Ruth Marotte's *Captive Bodies: American Women Writers Redefine Pregnancy and Childbirth*, as she explores how pregnancy narratives continue to proliferate, sometimes in unexpected mediums. Marotte's book and her methodology provide us a tool through which to study these experiences as ones that are philosophically-charged and critically relevant.

While classifying the pregnant condition as a state of captivity might elicit negative connotations, Marotte underscores how American women writers have envisioned the condition of captivity as one in which the pregnant woman can realize, perhaps even find power in, a challenging and disturbing loss of subjectivity. In *Captive Bodies*, Marotte explores the use of the term "captive," locating in it a multivalent meaning. To be captive in pregnancy is to reach a kind of sublime, a rapturous experience that has both negative and positive effects on the experiencing subject. In working with both primary and theoretical texts, Marotte reveals a genre of "pregnancy literature" that will validate this subject as one worthy of continued intellectual study and critical attention.

Mary Ruth Marotte, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of English at The University of Central Arkansas, where she specializes in women's studies and critical theory. She is the co-founder and co-director of UCA's annual graduate literature conference and serves on the board of the Arkansas Shakespeare Theater. Her scholarly pursuits remain those that address the problems and possibilities of merging the worlds of mothering and academia. She lives in Conway, Arkansas with her husband and three young children.

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Mother Knows Best: Talking Back to the "Experts"

edited by Jessica Nathanson and Laura C. Tuley



October 2008
250 pages \$34.95
978-1-55014-487-1

This important new collection

analyzes, reevaluates and, in some cases, challenges "expert" advice on pregnancy, mothering and mothering practices. *Mother Knows Best* argues for a feminist, mother-centered critique of authoritative messages, one that takes into account the vast socio-economic and cultural differences mothers experience, as well as the different experiences of privilege and oppression. The book is comprised of twenty chapters by writers including Amber Kinser, Laura Major, Meredith Nash, Catherine Ma, Chris Bobel, May Friedman and Susan Driver.

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Jessica Nathanson is Visiting Assistant Professor of English and Gender Studies at Augustana College. She has written on bisexual and multiracial identities and politics, issues of feminist pedagogy as well as pregnancy loss. She is currently at work on a history of the South Dakota abortion rights movement. **Laura C. Tuley** is an Instructor in English and Women's Studies at the University of New Orleans and a graduate student in Counseling at Loyola University. She has written on the theme of feminine embodiment in the work of Luce Irigaray and has published on feminist theory, art and culture. Laura writes a regular column on mothering in *Mamazine*.

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Spring 2009
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978-1-55014-488-8

THIS IMPORTANT, TIMELY COLLECTION considers how critical mothering and writing about motherhood have, in the last few years, begun to engage with a new form of communication. All over the Internet, mommy bloggers are commenting on the radical act of being mothers and women within a world hostile to both of these identities. What are some of the questions posed by this new context for motherhood? What are the implications for sites of marginalization and diversity within the blogosphere?

Shana L. Calixte, is a PhD Candidate in the School of Women's Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her current academic work is focused on the history of Caribbean Girl Guide associations and HIV/AIDS education. Her recent publications include a co-authored chapter entitled "Liberal, Socialist, and Radical Feminism: An Introduction to Three Theories About Women's Oppression and Social Change" (Feminist issues: Race, class, and sexuality, 2004), and "Things Which Aren't To Be Given Names: Afro-Caribbean and Diasporic Negotiations of Same Gender Desire and Sexual Relations" (Canadian woman studies/ Les cahiers de la femme, 2005). Shana lives with her family and their new son Dré in Toronto.

May Friedman lives in Toronto with her partner and two children. May combines social work with graduate studies and, of course, mothering. One of her most cherished activities is sitting on the sofa reading mommyblogs, an activity she hopes to put to work in the context of her forthcoming dissertation.

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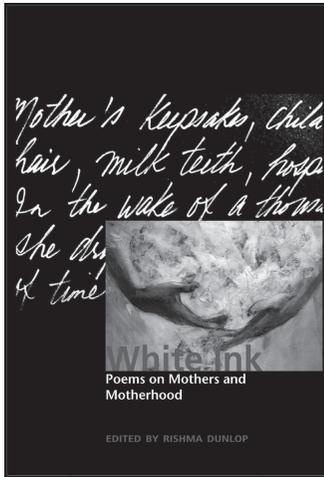
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edited by Rishma Dunlop



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Rishma Dunlop is the winner of the 2003 Emily Dickinson Award. She is the author of three books of poetry: *Metropolis* (Mansfield Press, 2005), *Reading Like a Girl* (Black Moss Press, 2004) and *The Body of My Garden* (Mansfield Press, 2002). Rishma is also co-editor of *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets* (Mansfield Press, 2004), and her work has appeared in numerous journals and magazines. She is a professor of literature and education at York University in Toronto, Canada.

October 2007
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"Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground:"

Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth

edited by Dawn Memee Lavell-Harvard & Jeanette Corbiere Lavell



OCTOBER 2006
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- *"Conceptions and Practices of Aboriginal Mothering"
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Ms. Lavell-Harvard is currently President of the Ontario Native Women's Association, a full time student currently completing her PhD in Education at UWU, and is the first Aboriginal person ever to receive a Trudeau Scholarship. Ms. Harvard is also a full time mother of two little girls, Autumn Sky (8 years) and Eva Lillie (two years). Ms. Lavell-Harvard's research addresses the epidemic of low academic achievement and high drop out rates among Aboriginal populations in Canada.

Jeanette Corbiere Lavell is Ojibway First Nation, and member of the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island. In 1970 her marriage resulted in the loss of her rights to membership to her Reserve under the Indian Act. This initiated a three year pursuit to ensure that the rights of Indian women were equal to the rights of Indian men in the Indian Act. Jeanette is one of the primary and founding Board members of: Ontario Native Women's Organization (ONWA) and Indian Rights for Indian Women Native Women's Organization of Canada. Currently, Jeanette teaches Fine Arts and Parenting at Wasse-Abin Wikwemikong High School.

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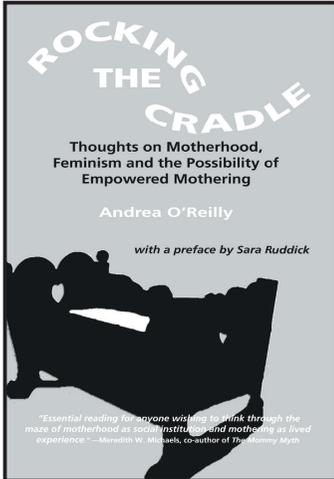
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Andrea O'Reilly



May 2006
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University of Southern California

Andrea O’Reilly is an Associate Professor of Women’s Studies, York University, Toronto and Director of the Association for Research on Mothering. She is the author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, and editor of eight books on mothering including *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*.

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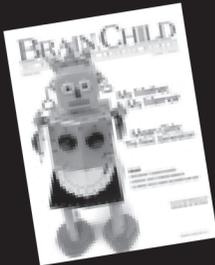
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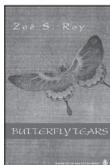


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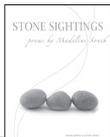
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