

## Persephone's Return *Communing with the Spirit-Daughter in Morrison and Allende*

"Maybe the most important reason for writing is to prevent the erosion of time, so that memories will not be blown away by the wind. Write to register history, and name each thing. Write what should not be forgotten."

—Allende, "Writing as An Act of Hope," in  
*The Art and Craft of the Political Novel*

"This is not a story to pass on..."

—Morrison, *Beloved*

Both Toni Morrison and Isabel Allende create mothering situations which force the mother to come to terms with her limitations and her position in history through imagined dialogues with the deceased or dying daughter in their novels *Beloved* and *Paula* (for Sethe, with Beloved, and for Isabel, with Paula).<sup>1</sup> In recreating the story of their child, the mothers come to terms with and make sense of their own history. Finally, by extension, they make sense of their cultural past, and in joining with a community of women, maternal in nature, they are able to go beyond the arbitrary boundaries forced upon them by men. Their versions of history show how deeply intertwined a vision of the political and of the personal can be. Most of all, their examples show how the story of mothering is a story which does, indeed, need to be passed on—in the face of cataclysmic change and of political and oftentimes violent upheavals.

Isabel Allende's autobiographical work, *Paula* (1994), is a paradigm of the modern autobiographical impulse to stave off worldwide tragic events and personal impending disasters through a recounting and reconstruction of the self in the face of such apocalyptic forces. Indeed, on a personal level, Allende

is able to exorcise her fear of mortality and aging through writing letters to the dead, in the case of *Paula*, to her daughter. On a political level, too, she is able to weave in the events of an explosive situation in Chile with the disruption of her personal life through a universal communing with the spirits of the dead, more specifically, through evoking the spirits of her deceased family members. Though she already accomplishes this in her semi-autobiographical work, *The House of the Spirits*, she confronts the problem of the modern malaise, self-annihilation, in *Paula*, where the death of her daughter makes her reevaluate her entire mission in life. In fact, her autobiographical *Paula* makes it clear that there is only a fine line between fictional and realistic reconstructions of the self.

In *Paula*, Allende emphasizes the two crucial times in her life, when she feels compelled to communicate with the dying or near-dead. Early on, she tells the story of how, as an expatriate in Venezuela, when she receives news of her grandfather's fatal illness, she starts writing a letter to him, a letter which he never receives, but which, 400 pages later, ends up becoming her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*. Then, in 1991, as she begins to write a letter to her dying daughter (who died of porphyria in 1992), she universalizes her own experience as a woman who has suffered and suggests parallels between her life and that of her daughter. This exploration of death enables her to encode and finally exorcise her own fears and experiences of trauma and sexual molestation and violence, and it culminates in her book, *Paula*.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in *Beloved*, a semi-biographical account of the slave Margaret Garner, the character Sethe needs to make sense of the manner in which she has killed her daughter, as a result of the political reality, slavery. Both women, Isabel and Sethe, realize that they need to let go of their daughters in order to welcome a possible happy future in a partnership based on mature love (Isabel with Willie, and Sethe with Paul D.). They need to stop berating themselves for the tragic ends of their daughters and so they create these imaginary dialogues, to exorcise the demon-child. Whereas *Beloved* actually does appear as a demon-daughter, *Paula* is more passive, but both mothers appear supernatural in their efforts to exorcise the memory of the failed maternal (and hence personal) experiences and start anew.

Sethe explains her rationale for killing *Beloved* as rightful maternal proprietorship; she sees her children as an extension of herself, her own "best" things, and will go to any length to protect them from the slave-catcher: "The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean" (Morrison, 1987: 251). The confusion of mother-daughter boundaries in the incessant litany between mother (Sethe), daughter (*Beloved*), and sister (Denver), "I am *Beloved*, and she is mine" (200). In fact, Sethe suggests that it is through the intercession of the spirit of her deceased mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, that the ghost of *Beloved* has returned: "*Beloved*, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing . . . my love was tough and she back now . . . I bet you Baby Suggs, on the other

side, helped” (200). The distinctions between mother and daughter become blurred: “Beloved/You are my sister/You are my daughter/You are my face; you are me” (216).

Allende (1994) is also able to cross over into another realm of being in her autobiography. She bids farewell to Paula and welcomes her into another realm all in the same breath (in her concluding paragraph): “Godspeed, Paula, woman. Welcome, Paula, spirit.” She is ultimately able to accept Paula’s death, but it is only through her own final meditation on her inevitable demise (as Sethe feels the threat of annihilation and possession by the demon-child, a now pregnant Beloved) that she feels in harmony with nature. She has images of sinking into “cool water” and hearing “the music of thousands of voices whispering among the trees.” The identities of woman—as mother and as daughter—are interchangeable as Isabel projects herself onto nature. In a manner resembling that of the American Transcendentalists, she is able to break the artificial man-made bounds imposed upon natural cycles and time and enter a mystical sense of time:

“As I dissolved, I had the revelation that the void was filled with everything the universe holds. Nothing and everything, at once . . . I am the void, I am everything that exists, I am in every leaf of the forest, in every drop of the dew, in every particle of ash carried by the stream, I am Paula and I am also Isabel, I am nothing and all other things in this life and other lives, immortal. . . .” (Allende, 1994: 330).

This recalls the mystical and chantlike merging of voices between Sethe, Denver, and Beloved. In this way, the lives of all women—of all generations—are connected: as Allende reaffirms the connection between mother and daughter, she writes the story of everywoman. Moreover, Allende triumphantly reconciles the moment of birthing and dying, so that in her mind, she becomes, with her mother and daughter-in-law at her side, the midwife<sup>3</sup> who will allow Paula passage to the other realm. In fact, she imagines the spirits of the departed, especially the clairvoyant women in her family, appearing at her side to welcome Paula to the other realm: she is “surrounded by ethereal beings, by murmurs and tenuous fragrances from the past, by ghosts and apparitions, by friends and relatives, living and dead” (1994: 329). There is a mystical union between the living and the deceased women who come together over Paula’s body in celebration of her spirit: “We were filled with Paula’s spirit, as if we were all one being and there was no separation among us: life and death were joined” (328). The narrator compares birthing with dying, and concludes that “the two moments are much alike: birth and death are made of the same fabric” (328). She also realizes that she will keep the spirit of her clairvoyant grandmother and her sensitive daughter alive—within herself, through her writing.

In fact, both Sethe and Isabel are able to triumph over death through a magical and ritualistic union with the mothers in the community. In Paula’s

dying scene, the women in attendance, Isabel, her mother, and Celia, her sister-in-law, participate in a victorious manner by telling stories, singing, and lighting candles. Isabel distinctly recalls her Granny's mystical, "grandmotherly songs," which always soothe her at moments of death. Similarly, the demon-child Beloved is sent back to the nether world, as the community of chanting women, among them departed spirits as well as the living generation, drive her away through a communal purging of songs and prayers: "Mothers, dead now, moved their shoulders to mouth harps" (Morrison, 1987: 259). Just as Isabel and the surviving mothers (Celia has just had her first daughter) feel a sense of rebirth at the moment of Paula's death, Sethe is overcome by the strength of maternal voices, as images of birthing are allied with images of dying, as in the case of Allende: the singing "broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (261). And so the healing and recuperative powers of women (like the spiritual Baby Suggs or Isabel's mystic "Granny") are passed down from one generation to the next, through the communal rituals, which act as antidotes to the authority of male institutions. Allende casts herself in the role of such a supernatural mother-progenitor and protector: "I have the idea that we grandmothers are meant to play the part of protective witches; we must watch over younger women, children, community, and also, why not?, this mistreated planet, the victim of such unrelenting desecration" (261).

Mothering, witchcraft, and writing all become connected in these mystical dialogues with the departed or departing daughter.<sup>4</sup> Allende realizes that the story which the memory of her daughter gives life to is as much a child as the literal child; as she writes *Paula*, she is giving birth to another child, and so, is transforming herself, who lives on through the child of her imagination. As Allende says of the artist's craft:

The joyful process of engendering a child, the patience of gestation, the fortitude to bring it into life, and the feeling of profound amazement with which everything culminates can be compared only to creating a book. Children, like books, are voyages into one's inner life, during which body, mind, and soul shift course and turn toward the very center of existence. (1994:231)

And later Allende makes a more obvious comparison between child-bearing and writing: "my books are not born in my mind, they gestate in my womb and are capricious creatures with their own lives, always ready to subvert me" (1994: 281).

Beloved, too, is transformed from spirit to flesh, from idea to book, in Morrison's novel through maternal imagery. One recalls that the spirit of Beloved is evoked in a very watery, gestational description, in which Sethe emerges from the water. Upon seeing the newly reborn Beloved, Sethe feels the urge to urinate, and she recalls two other times, when her watery functions were uncontrollable—both events relating to mother-daughter relationships (the

first, when as a “baby girl, being cared for by the 18-year old girl who pointed out her mother to her, she had an emergency that was unmanageable”; the second time is when her water broke at Denver’s birth). The music which finally reconnects Sethe with the community is described as “a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water,” and which causes her to tremble “like the baptized in its wash” (Morrison, 1987: 161). Although in both cases, the mothers are renewed through the communal ritual catharsis surrounding the daughter’s death, both are still very heavily indebted to their daughters for an understanding of their own stories. Both titles speak out the daughters’ names, and the frontispieces of the texts memorialize the daughter. In Morrison’s work, one sees the engraving of Beloved’s headstone. Since the child was never officially named, we hear that Sethe had exchanged sex with the engraver as payment for having “Beloved” chiseled onto the tombstone (“ten minutes for seven letters, [5]), and wonders if she could have had “Dearly” engraved if she had given ten more minutes of her body: “But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered” (5). The book is a celebration of the fact that the child’s life could be vindicated, that the mother could give the child a name and then recount the entire story (the personal as well as familial), so that the final word of the text is a resounding, triumphant “Beloved.” And the story which was not supposed to be passed on becomes a living legacy to countless generations of silenced women.

Similarly, Allende’s tribute to Paula begins with a picture of Paula, and a brief explanation of how the story was written: “In December 1991 my daughter, Paula, fell gravely ill and soon thereafter sunk into a coma. These pages were written during the interminable hours spent in the corridors of a Madrid hospital and in the hotel room where I lived for several months, as well as beside her bed in our home in California during the summer and fall of 1992.” The book itself starts with the mother telling her comatose daughter a bedtime story of sorts: “Listen, Paula. I am going to tell you a story, so that when you wake up you will not feel so lost” (1994: 3). And the narrative ends, also, with the eternalizing and comforting phrase, “Welcome, Paula, spirit” (330).

What strikes the reader in both novels is the emphasis on the domestic space as magical, enshrined space for women: Allende says that “houses need births and deaths to become homes” (1994: 258).<sup>5</sup> And in the beginning of *Beloved*, we hear that the house “124 was spiteful” (Morrison, 1987: 3), and we know that 124 cannot be made into a home, until birth is celebrated and until the spirits of Baby Suggs and Beloved are reconciled with the surviving woman and child, Sethe and Denver. The hauntings which initially afflict 124 are most negative: “Together they [Sethe and Denver] waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of the place; against turned-over slop jars, smacks on the behind, and gusts of sour air. For they understood the source of the outrage as well as they knew the source of light” (4). They finally propose to call forth the ghost “that tried them so”: “Perhaps a conversation, they thought, an exchange of views or something that would help. So they held

hands and said, "Come on. Come on. You might as well just come on" (4). Denver proposes that the spirit of Baby Suggs is keeping the spirit of Beloved back, but the mother suggests that the baby (only two at her death) was too young to recall and to remember, even though her hauntings are "powerful," but not as "powerful" as Sethe's love for her, in Sethe's opinion. Sethe wants to commune with the dead, to make the story "clear" to Beloved, but her initial attempt to evoke the ghost only brings Paul D. to the door, whose appearance is crucial to the exorcism of the ghost.

Similarly, Allende feels moved to commune with the spirits and to teach her grandchildren about the other realm. She revels in the spirit world which brings life to her home:

In the basement I have hidden sinister surprises for the grandchildren: a plaster skeleton, treasure maps, and trunks filled with pirate disguises and fake jewels. I have the hope that a scary cellar will act as a stimulus to the imagination, as my grandfather's did for me. At night, the house shudders, moans, and yawns, and I have the feeling that memories of people who have lived here, the characters that escape from books and dreams, the gentle ghost of the former owner, and Paula's soul, which at times is freed from the painful bonds of its body, all roam through the rooms. (1994: 258)

The hauntings in Allende's home are positive, as she feels the continuity between generations, and certainly, Sethe, too, is finally reconciled with the spirit world of Baby Suggs, once she has allowed the story of Beloved to be told. But the strong maternal impulse is finally what curses but redeems both women. Allende recalls, for example, her encounter with evil during the cataclysmic events of a repressive Chile, and she points to a communal original sin, contradictorily connected to a strong maternal, life-preserving instinct:

We were all accomplices, the entire society was mad. The devil in the mirror... Sometimes, when I was alone in some secret place on the hill with time to think, I saw again the black waters of the mirrors of my childhood where Satan peered out at night, and as I leaned toward the glass, I realized, with horror, that the Evil One had my face. I was not unsullied, no one was: a monster crouched in each of us, every one of us had a dark and fiendish side. Given the conditions, could I torture and kill? Let us say, for example, that someone had harmed my children... What cruelty would I be capable of in that situation? The demons had escaped from the mirrors and were running loose through the world. (1994: 220)

In acknowledging her own place in an evil, destructive world, she points to her motherhood, which would give her the right to torture and kill (if

someone harmed her children). Similarly, Sethe's sin, the murder of Beloved, is more a reflection of the social evils (of slavery) imposed upon her. Throughout the novel, we hear that Beloved is her "best thing," indicating a strong maternal devotion, but also denial of herself (which Paul D. finally helps her with), but finally also a distorted vision of maternal ownership (allied with slavery). Paul D. describes Sethe's love as being "too thick." Though distorted, it is comprehensible. In an interview, in which Morrison describes the slave Margaret Garner's story as the basis for Sethe's story, she defends Sethe's maternal choice, "This is a real dilemma. Shall I permit my children, who are my own best thing, to live like I have lived, and I know that's terrible, or to take them out?' So she decided to kill them, and kill herself. And that was noble. That was the identification. She was saying, 'I'm a human being. These are my children. This script I am writing'" (cited in Moyers, 1990: 3). Allende laments the much-maligned motherhood which she sees around her: "It came to me how for countless centuries women have lost their children, how it is humanity's most ancient and inevitable sorrow. I am not alone, most mothers know this pain, it breaks their heart but they go on living because they must protect and love those who are left" (1994: 291-292).

For both Morrison and Allende, the script or story they write and rewrite (right), is the mother-daughter bond, which becomes a metaphor for communal love. As Morrison says in an interview, "We are here, and we have to do something nurturing that we respect before we go. We must. It is more interesting, more complicated, more intellectually demanding and more morally demanding to love somebody, to take care of somebody, to make one other person feel good." At the height of her daughter's illness, Allende remarks, "Perhaps we are in this world to search for love, find it and lose it again. With each love, we are born anew, and with each love that ends we collect a new wound. I am covered with proud scars" (1994: 314). And one finds solace in Paula's parting message from the dead to her mother:

I suppose there is nothing to fear, death is just a threshold, like birth. I'm sorry I can't keep my memory, but I have been detaching myself from it, anyway; when I go, I will go naked. The only recollection I'm taking with me is of the loved ones I leave behind; I will always be with you in some way.... After I die, we will stay in contact the way you do with your grandparents and Granny; I will be in you as a constant, soft presence. (1994; 315-316)

In this way, the wounded generations of mothers and daughters are healed through an eternal communion of spirits. And finally Morrison's story not to pass on is the story needed to keep the mother-daughter bond alive, to finally engrave a name on Beloved's headstone. More specifically, the women who come to Sethe's rescue to exorcise the ghost of Beloved are the same type of women (dead and alive) who stand around Paula's deathbed to release the ghost

of the dying daughter. And the grieving mother's story must be told in the same way women's grief has always been told—by sharing with her community through the magic of words (as Baby Suggs does initially) or through the magic of writing, often withheld from women. Thus, Allende postures herself as a “wise old crone” who aspires to “fly on a broomstick and dance in the moonlight with other pagan witches in the forest....” (1994: 261). Her supernatural wish is akin to the desire to engage in the taboo realm of writing. Allende concludes the passage on witchcraft by inadvertently summarizing her goals and techniques: “[witches] inhabit other dimensions and travel to other galaxies, they are navigators on an infinite ocean of consciousness and cognition” (261). Moreover, the product of such illicit behavior, whether that is a book or a child, can be perceived as a child of the imagination, or a monstrosity, as was the case of Mary Shelley's birthing of Frankenstein. As Allende concludes: “it is also possible that stories are creatures with their own lives and that they exist in the shadows of some mysterious dimension; in that case, it will be a question of opening so they may enter, sink into me, and grow until they are ready to emerge transformed into language” (260). The language reminds us of Sethe and the now transformed demon-child with a swelling pregnant belly, an image of Sethe's alter-ego, waiting to be reborn through a communal language. For both Allende and Morrison, transformation and transcendence can only come about through an immersion into the collective unconscious (or womb) of woman. And the ghosts of the past are exorcised, when the spirits of the present are assuaged.

The personal history of the child, the personal history of the mother, cannot be eradicated by time. Indeed, Morrison and Allende seem to be daughters of the 1960s in recreating a new type of history, in making over a mother's life, in making the personal political. And, the mother's identity, rather than the child's, becomes the major focus of the novel: it is not that the daughters are taking on the mother's identity, but that the mothers are trying to understand their own selves, their own histories, through the image mirrored back to them in their daughters. Indeed, as daughters of the '60s, Morrison and Allende, the post-Friedan mothers, realize the folly of supplanting one's identity with that of one's child. Though both *Beloved* and *Paula* have Gothic elements in their narrative structure, I would not go so far as to say that the mother figure becomes the “devouring” Gothic mother who usurps her daughter's identity, which Claire Kahane (1985) sees as the paradigmatic mother for Gothic texts. Instead, the mothers, living in the Now, become the vehicle to connect past generations of women with those of the future. As Naomi Ruth Lowinsky describes her notion of motherhood, or “motherlines,” the generational connections between grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, becomes the mainstay of women's history, as embedded in “the narratives of women's lives” (1992: 2). Walking along the shore with her mother and two daughters, Lowinsky meditates upon her mother's and grandmother's life as well as her daughters' lives and in her daydream, time is obscured, and women's



identities are blurred. She cannot exactly verbalize the experience, as the mother tongue is elusive in phallogocentric thinking (this, too, according to French feminists), and thus, she finds refuge in natural women's cycles. In a crescendo of feeling, she places herself within a larger sense of universal/maternal time and mystical lunar cycles: "But I do remember a surge of feeling that goes beyond words, of overarching connections, of the present moment holding within it the seeds of both past and future, and all of it held in the bodies of these four women of three generations" (2). This passage emphasizes generational bonding between women and recalls the deathbed scene of Paula, in which the spirits of deceased mothers and Isabel Allende, commune as if the generations have merged in maternal rhapsody. And it also recalls the "exorcism" section in *Beloved*, where the generations of dead and living mothers break into song to perform a maternal healing: "For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words" (Morrison, 1987: 261). These are sounds and emotions that surpass the limiting logocentric male thinking which tries to circumscribe the maternal experience. This idea of "breaking the back of words" is also compatible with Julia Kristeva's notion of writing and mothering, as she expresses it in "Stabat Mater: "Flash on the unnameable, weavings of abstractions to be torn. Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with the meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible" (1986: 162).<sup>6</sup>

And in the end, for Morrison and for Allende, the personal maternal identity is ultimately supplanted by the collective history, by a higher reality, than that of a narrow familial bond.<sup>7</sup> In her lecture, "Writing as an Act of Hope," Allende speaks about the harsh realities of Latin American life—earthquakes, hurricanes, revolutions, coups, tortures, and other atrocities, and asserts that these are realities, not just products of the imagination:

It is very hard to explain to critics that these things are not a product of our pathological imaginations. They are written in our history; we can find them every day in our newspapers. We hear them in the streets; we suffer them frequently in our own lives. It is impossible to speak of Latin America without mentioning violence. We inhabit a land of terrible contrasts and we have to survive in times of great violence. (1989: 46)

Allende thinks much about the contrasts in life, which are brought out in times of crisis—whether it be a political or a personal crisis, whether it be a coup d'état or death. Even before her daughter's death, Allende maintained that her acquaintance with pain was a motivating factor for her writing and a source of creativity: "All my books come from a very deep emotion that has been with me for a very long time. And those emotions are usually painful—abandonment,

pain, anger, death, violence" ("The Writer's Life," 1993: 84). But she also associates writing with "a prophetic or clairvoyant quality" (84). She shows how the political is indeed personal and how supernatural life is not so far removed from earthly life.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, for Toni Morrison, the life of Margaret Garner becomes a story that seems too horrific for reality, but as Allende would say, it is not "a product of our pathological imagination. [It is] written in our history." Thus, the story of the dispossessed or deceased daughter becomes a story that urgently needs to be passed on, as it unites generations of women and mothers. Interestingly, both novels have as their point of departure the names of the daughters, in the titles of the narratives, *Beloved* and *Paula*. And both narratives end with the evocation of the daughter's name, so as to preserve her memory, but also to connect the mother's story with that of her daughter. In Morrison's case, there seem to be two conclusions, the penultimate chapter, in which Sethe begins to discern her own separate identity, as she responds to Paul D.'s comment, "You your best thing, Sethe," with the question, "Me? Me?" (Morrison, 1987: 273). The final chapter ends with the narrator affirming the dead daughter's name, "Beloved." Similarly, Allende concludes, "I am Paula and I am also Isabel, I am nothing and all other things in this life and other lives, immortal" (1994; 330). She also asks Mother Earth to take charge of her daughter in the eternal cycle of being: "Earth, welcome my daughter, receive her, take her to your bosom; Mother Goddess Earth, help us" (324). Like a shape-shifting mother spirit, Allende, the earthly mother bids her daughter farewell, while Allende, the mother who is the collective mother/ancestor, casts herself in the timeless realm of the dead: "Godspeed, Paula, woman./Welcome, Paula, spirit" (330).

<sup>1</sup>No other critic, to my knowledge, compares the two novels *Beloved* and *Paula*, despite the obvious similarities. One critic, however, Gabrielle Foreman, does notice similar uses of history (in the context of magical realism) by Morrison and Allende in their works (respectively), *Song of Solomon* and *The House of the Spirits*. Linda Gould Levine has noted that in several of Allende's interviews, Allende has acknowledged a sisterhood with such contemporary authors as Amy Tan, Louise Erdrich, Gloria Naylor, and Toni Morrison (2002: 16).

<sup>2</sup>Though Allende genuinely grieves as she watches her daughter slipping away in a comatose state, it also serves as a point of departure, an occasion to write about the pain—to sustain her and to keep the memories of Paula alive. It also is a way in which to explore the byroads of her soul. Thus, she discusses the ways in which she (Allende), as a woman, has been violated—in the fisherman's molestation of her as a young girl, in her husband's sexist attitudes towards her as his housewife, in the censorship of her work as a journalist. Ultimately, she allies the witnessing of Paula's death with her own sexual and traumatic experiences, so that thanatos and eros (and their by-product, pain) are inextricably linked. And Allende notes that therapy could not heal her during the

grieving process for Paula, but rather the act of writing did (“Interview with Linda Gould Levine,” 8 August 2000: 182). In an earlier interview, Allende asserted “I think that most of the creative process comes from a very unhappy childhood” (“The Writer’s Life,” 1993: 85). It is interesting to speculate whether her own child’s death brought her closer to that creative process (and to her own childhood).

<sup>3</sup>As Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi points out, the goddess of death, Ananke, or Necessity, is also part of the Mother/birthing goddess image, and must be accepted as part of the natural cycle (1988: 186).

<sup>4</sup>For the role of repression in the sorceress’s life, and the way to alleviate symptoms of disease through creativity, see Cixous, and Clement, 1991: 50-57.

<sup>5</sup>Though Gaston Bachelard is by no means a precursor to feminist thinking, his notion of intimate space is inadvertently akin to that maternal space which French feminists have carved out as their own. For example, he notes the evanescent thinking of children, which is allied with memories of their first home. He discusses the need to return to the childhood home in poetic reverie to understand our present circumstances: “In short, the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the function of inhabiting other the particular house, and all the other houses are but variations of a fundamental theme” (1994: 15). Since mother is the creator of this first domestic space, I would certainly replace Bachelard’s notion of home with womb or mother. Moreover, his discussion of the childhood home accords with notions of “hauntings” and haunted houses in Allende and in Morrison.

<sup>6</sup>Certain feminist critics point to the dangers of the codification of women’s writing by French feminists and try to show that maternal writing, as the French feminists perceive it, is not the “only genuine mode of feminine writing” (Suleiman, 1985: 371). Certain American feminist thinkers, like Nancy Chodorow and Nancy Ruddick, seem to affirm the French feminist vision by allying mothering with other forms of female creativity (as, writing, or even carrying on household management). Marianne Hirsch, however, is daring enough to explore the darker side of motherhood, by looking at repressed anger and the experience of motherhood, especially for the mother who is “overly invested in her child, powerless in the world ... and an inadequate and disappointing object of identification” (169).

<sup>7</sup>In her autobiographical *Remembering the Bone House*, Nancy Mairs talks about her encounter with her body and disease as a source of enlightenment and creative discovery. Finally, she recognizes the parallels between her own personal story and that of the collective mind: “I think that my ‘story,’ though intensely personal, is not at all private. Beneath its idiosyncracies [sic] lie vast strata of commonality, communality” (1989: 10-11). And she asserts in a way that parallels Sethe’s choral merging with Denver and Beloved that her personal story reflects the communal story—in a Whitmanesque way: “The not-me dwells here in the me. We are one, and more-than-one. Our stories

utter one another" (11).

<sup>8</sup>This echoes the notion of maternal politics, set forth by Sara Ruddick, who contends that mothers, through their ability to nurture and teach children, can become arbiters of world peace. The cyclical/universal time which I evoke in my conclusion resists male categorization of history, and is related to Julia Kristeva's (1986) conception of "women's time."

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