Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood in Literature

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Gioia Albano, "Alys and the Children," 2013, oil and acrylic on canvas, 46cm x 55cm. <http://albanogioia.com/index_uk.html>

Artist statement: *I always painted women and their endless meanings. Motherhood is for me the celebration of the creation power itself.*

DEBORAH L. BYRD

The Power of a Black Mother's Anger

"The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" as a Critique of White Abolitionist Discourse

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" gives voice to a black mother who is morally outraged by the horrors that she has experienced as an enslaved female. After observing the brutal beating (and, most likely, the murder) of the male slave she loves, this unnamed black woman is gang raped and impregnated; shortly after giving birth, she kills her light-skinned son and flees in search of freedom. Before being stoned to death when her owner-rapist catches up with her, she openly castigates all whites who actively defend or passively condone slavery and calls on her fellow slaves to rise up in militant resistance. In addition to being a sophisticated critique of slavery, "The Runaway Slave" is also a powerful critique of Anglo-American abolitionist discourse about enslaved black women. Almost all other white abolitionist poets depict female slaves as mothers who helplessly lament their inability to protect their children from harm; though certainly sympathetic figures, these black mothers are presented as helpless victims who feel little anger or sense of agency. By contrast, "The Runaway Slave" anticipates the arguments advanced in bell hooks's Killing Rage, *presenting an enslaved black mother's anger as a legitimate, empowering, and morally justifiable response to white supremacist patriarchy.*

> *Black rage is … a potentially healthy, potentially healing response to oppression and exploitation.*
> —bell hooks (*Killing Rage: Ending Racism* 12)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's powerful, feminist, and actively anti-racist dramatic monologue "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"[1] first appeared in the 1848 issue of *The Liberty Bell*, an annual collection of abolitionist writings that the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society sold at its December 1847 fundraising

bazaar. As the poem's title suggests, the speaker of the poem is a fugitive slave who has fled to the spot where "God was thanked for liberty" by "the first white pilgrims" (2-4). Initially, one might expect the unnamed black woman to invoke the "pilgrim-souls" because she believes that they will be appalled by her white master, a man "Who in your names works sin and woe!" (8, 14). But kneeling where the pilgrim fathers knelt, the runaway lifts her black face and black hand not to request solace, but "Here, in your names, to curse this land / Ye blessed" (20-21). As the poem continues, it becomes obvious that the runaway never expected the spirits of white male pilgrims to understand or sympathize with her plight. She is not in the least bit surprised when they slink and "slid[e] away" as she finishes recounting her horrific experiences as an enslaved black woman and mother (200). In fact, Barrett Browning's speaker suggests that "the pilgrim-ghosts" flee as the sun rises because they fear this angry, dark-skinned woman (200). "My face is black," she reminds them one final time, "but it glares with a scorn / Which … [you] dare not meet by day" (202-203).

The story Barrett Browning's protagonist recounts is one that should fill the speaker with what bell hooks calls "killing rage." The speaker relates that as a young woman, she fell in love with a male slave; the two were so happy that even though "drivers drove us day by day," the young couple felt "As free as if unsold, unbought" and "no better a freedom sought" (64-70). But then her beloved is either killed, or severely beaten and sold to another slaveowner; as Barrett Browning's protagonist bitterly notes, "We were black, we were black," and thus "had no claim to love and bliss" (92-93). This traumatic event is "followed by a deeper wrong!"; the black woman is gang raped and impregnated by her owner and his friends (99). For reasons that will be explored later, soon after his birth, the young mother kills her infant son; then a few weeks later, she flees the plantation in search of liberty. The poem closes with the runaway being surrounded and then killed by her owner and the other white males who have hunted her down; defiant to the end, she openly castigates her pursuers and urges her fellow slaves to rise up against their oppressors and "end what I [have] begun" (231).

Clearly, Barrett Browning's speaker is morally outraged by the cruelty and violence that she has experienced as a black woman living in a white supremacist, patriarchal society. And the poem presents this black mother's anger as a legitimate, empowering, and ethically appropriate response to systemic racism and sexism. It is her anger that fuels this imaginary black woman's physical, psychological and verbal resistance, which allows her to speak her mind and assert her agency. And it is the speaker's defiant rejection of the status of helpless victim that differentiates her from most of the fictional female slaves who appear in white Anglo-American abolitionist verse. Certainly late eigh-

teenth- and early nineteenth-century anti-slavery poets were well intentioned and produced texts that helped advance the abolitionist cause. However, these texts often unwittingly perpetuate racist and Eurocentric ideas, such as the notion that Christianity was gratefully and enthusiastically embraced by all enslaved African Americans, who after conversion to this "superior" religion harboured no resentment towards their oppressors but were eager to forgive and forget. As Moira Ferguson has demonstrated, white women, who played a major role in both the American and English abolitionist movements, often relied on patriarchal discourse about motherhood when writing about their enslaved black sisters. More often than not, they presented the enslaved black mother as a powerless, suffering victim of forces beyond her control and as an "ideal mother, whose life a callous patriarchy disrupts" and, in most cases, utterly destroys (Ferguson175-177, 220).

This article takes an intertextual approach to "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" and juxtaposes Barrett Browning's intersectional analysis of the experiences and mindset of a militant, outspoken female slave with representations of enslaved black women published by other white abolitionist poets. For the purposes of this article, I examine several poems from the first ten issues of *The Liberty Bell* (1839-1848) as well as representative poems from *The Bow in the Cloud* (1834),[2] an English anthology of anti-slavery writings from the period between 1827 to 1834. In the case of both *The Liberty Bell* and *The Bow in the Cloud*, some contributors are British and others are American. Reading "The Runaway Slave" in the context of white abolitionist verse, one can appreciate why Barrett Browning feared that the Americans who had solicited an anti-slavery poem from her might find her protagonist's voice—and her poem's bold and astute exploration of racial and sexual politics—too "bitter" and "ferocious" to print (Raymond and Sullivan 203-204; Kenyon 1: 315).

Thankfully, Boston abolitionists were not afraid to publish "The Runaway Slave." In fact, Marjorie Stone argues that "the chain of curses" and "the call for insurrection" uttered by Barrett Browning's protagonist are perfectly in keeping with other pieces in the 1848 issue of the *Liberty Bell* (34). But if this particular volume contains a number of texts in which "Garrisonian abolitionists … the radical wing of the American abolitionist movement" celebrate slave rebellions (38), this and other issues of *The Liberty Bell* do not tend to present enslaved black women as angry insurrectionists leading a heroic charge. Nor does white abolitionist discourse as a whole acknowledge the force, legitimacy, and power of an enslaved black woman's anger.

On the contrary, when the focus of an anti-slavery poem is on an adult female slave, she almost always is presented as a mother who sorrowfully recounts the horrors of slavery, foremost among these being her inability to protect her children from harm. If the woman has a daughter, she is often anguished

by the knowledge that her child will probably be raped by white men, a fate that she herself is likely to have experienced. Many of these poems suggest that as long as the black mother has at least one child that she can love and care for, she will remain a productive worker and almost be reconciled to her oppression. Of course, such is not usually the fate allotted to her. To emphasize the extent of the slave mother's grief when all her loved ones have been torn from her, abolitionist poems sometimes characterize the woman as being so overcome with despair that she has a nervous breakdown or goes (as opposed to feels) mad. These poems rarely attribute thoughts of vengeance or rebellion to slave mothers; instead, the women lament a fate that they feel helpless to alter. Finally, it is worth mentioning that most abolitionist poems focusing on slave mothers are written by white women, and many explicitly urge white women to feel compassion for their black sisters and help rescue them from a fate that they themselves would find heartbreaking.

A poem that succinctly illustrates some of the basic features of the paradigm is Jane E. Roscoe's "Sonnet. The African Mother. A Fact." The poem opens with a short declarative sentence: "The mother sat and wept" (*Bow in the Cloud* 1). The reader learns that she cries because yet another of her children has been taken from her, but that she is not completely heartbroken because one child still remains. When her master sells this child, too, the slave raises an "agonizing scream in vain" (10). The poems ends abruptly with the following couplet: "The light of madness flashes from her eye! / And loud to Heaven ascends her wild appealing cry!" (13-14). Without a doubt, this enslaved black mother is depicted sympathetically. But she is presented as a helpless victim lamenting her cruel fate, not as a woman whose experience of oppression leads her to speak or act in defiance of white slaveowners.

Rather than crying out in anguish at her childless state, the protagonist of G. S. Burleigh's ballad "The Dying Slave Mother" is presented as a devout Christian who is looking forward to a heavenly reunion with her dead son. The poem opens with the speaker telling a Christian "brother" that the preceding evening, a band of angels had appeared to her singing "of Hope, of Mercy, and of Love" (1842 *Liberty Bell* 2, 24). "Amid that band" was her "darling" son Leon, murdered in his youth by their white master (25-27, 31). Free of his chains, "gentle Leon" urges his mother to join him in a land where "The dark hue of the skin, / Is no foul mark of sin" (52-53). Whereas before the angels' appearance, this woman "had not quite forgiven … all the evil done / By the oppressive one," the poem concludes with her asking God to "forgive the wrong, / That [white] man hath done me long" (15-17, 100-101). Having lost all hope of justice in this world and turned the other cheek, this woman is eager to join her son in a Christian heaven, where she will sing "sweet songs, of love / And praise to God, through all eternity!" (95-96).

In Bernard Barton's "A Negro Mother's Cradle-Song," the title character also views slavery as an earthly reality that a black mother has no power to change. But rather than looking forward to her own demise, this mother hopes that her sleeping infant daughter will die young. Even more than the "Ruthless lash" and "Ceaseless tasks" that await her child, this mother rues the day—which she seems to consider inevitable—that her daughter will experience "White man's cruelty and lust" (*Bow in the Cloud* 13). Reflecting on the girl's probable future, the speaker asserts that it is "Worse [for my daughter] to live a helpless slave, / Than to fill an early grave" (9-10). But this mother (understandably enough) does not kill her sleeping infant; instead, she reluctantly accepts the fact that her daughter will have a "worse" fate. Full of "despair," this loving mother believes that she and her daughter have no option but to acquiesce to their "hopeless doom" until they are fortunate enough to become "senseless clod[s]" in a "silent tomb" (2, 12, 16).

In many respects Maria Lowell's "The Slave-mother" closely resembles Barton's poem, but there are two key differences. First, with the exception of two lines, in Lowell's poem the feelings of the slave mother are presented to us by a third-person narrator. Secondly, in this case, the female child's father is definitely (rather than probably) a white man. Like the speaker of Barton's poem, this woman asks God to give her daughter an early death. The reader is told that the mother experiences "bitter pain" rather than "joy" as she feels her daughter's hands at her breast and gazes at a cheek whose hue is "fairer" than her own (1846 *Liberty Bell* 9-11, 16). This rape survivor "trembles in … agony" and can hardly bear to "look upon that face, where, in the child's pure bloom, / Is writ with such dread certainty the … loathsome doom" that awaits her daughter (17-20). But as in Barton's poem, the slave mother sees but one way her daughter can be delivered "from infamy and sin, / And so she cries at midnight, with exceeding bitter cry, / 'God grant my little helpless one in helplessness may die!'" (22-24).

Whereas the slave mothers in the preceding two poems think that it would be a blessing if their daughters died in infancy, the woman in Mary Howitt's "The Negro-Mother" (1826) has an infant son, and she only comes to the conclusion that his early death is a blessing after he dies. This poem is narrated by a white woman, who thanks God that her children "were not born slaves" before explaining how a slave mother coped when her "little Negro babe grew sick and died" (*Bow in the Cloud* 3). The white mother tells her children that the black woman's life was full of "toil and insult, taunt and blow," but that "her bright-eyed Negro child, / Almost to slavery reconciled her spirit"; she explains that the joy the slave mother experienced during those rare moments when she had time to play with her son was "recompense" for "all [the] pain" the woman experienced at other moments (18-21, 32). When the slave mother

is forced to go to the fields when her son is seriously ill, she feels "a mother's outraged feelings wild" (64, 70). And when she returns to find her son's body "cold and stiff," she wails at the thought of the anguish that her boy must have experienced when "the only one who was dear to him" did not respond to his deathbed cries (78, 85).

But if the slave mother had experienced "outraged feelings wild" when her master refused to let her care for her seriously ill child, she responds to her son's death calmly, considering him blessed to be permanently "freed from the white man's chain" (93). The poem concludes with the title character burying her infant, then "lulling him to rest" with a "lowly warbled strain" (90-91). Perhaps she keeps her voice low because—like Barrett Browning's crooning mother—she has rejected notions of a Christian heaven. What she celebrates in her song is her son being reunited with his father in an Afrocentric afterlife where she, too, soon hopes to be "sporting joyfully" (12).

Maria Lowell's "A Twilight Vision" resembles Howitt's poem in that the narrator is a white woman whose awareness of the plight of slave mothers makes her grateful for the blessings that God has bestowed on her and her children. In this case, the narrator focuses on a slave mother who is on her deathbed, giving the black woman the majority of the poem's lines. In tones of anguish, the slave mother laments that none of her six children can "hold my dying head," for all have been taken from her over the years (1847 *Liberty Bell* 16). The woman relates that as a young mother, her fears of being separated from her children sometimes made "the sunshine of summer days feel cold," but she notes that as years passed and her children remained with her, she "dared to look at them and think of them as mine" (19, 26). Not surprisingly, almost as soon as she had begun feeling this way her master started selling the children, until, at last, she had with her only the youngest, a six-year-old girl, whose freedom she hoped to purchase by working overtime. After labouring for ten years, she offered her master the money she had saved, only to be told: "'Ten times the money that lies there, was paid for her to-night, / And she must go!'" (55-56).

Again, the slave mother's reaction is not one of anger and outrage; she notes that upon hearing this news, she fainted ("everything grew black before my sight") and that "from that time [on] I only wished for death" (56-57). The poem concludes with the black mother eager to die and hopeful that God will soon liberate slaves and with the white narrator rhetorically asking other white women: "Do ye remember those in bonds as [if] ye with them were bound?" (64).

Whereas it is only in the concluding lines of Lowell's poem that white women are urged to fulfill their Christian duty towards their black sisters by becoming active in the abolitionist movement, this exhortation is present from start to

finish in Ann Gilbert's "The Mother." The poem opens with the narrator rhetorically asking a white woman to think about how much she loves her children; she then abruptly tells this woman that her children are not hers any longer because "I've bought them!" and "They go, to join my gang of slaves!" (*Bow in the Cloud* 15, 18). Two of the poem's seven stanzas detail the anguish and toil to which the white mother's enslaved eldest daughter will be subjected, before a white female abolitionist steps in to speak the poem's concluding lines. In these two stanzas, the mothers of England are urged to "strong in woman virtue rise! / And heed the Negro mother's cries!" (35-36). The speaker calls on white mothers to join hands and "sally forth" as "Crusaders" and to only allow death to stand in the way of their collective effort to bring "love and Liberty" to the black mothers who do not share white women's experience of a secure and "happy home" (37-42, 1).

Like many of the enslaved black mothers who appear in abolitionist poems, Barrett Browning's speaker must endure the torment of being separated from a loved one. And as in other anti-slavery texts, the experience of loving and being loved (though in this case by an adult male rather than a child) initially reconciles Barrett Browning's speaker to life as a slave: "I laughed in girlish glee,"she relates, and believed that "our spirits" were "strong enough, since we were two, / To conquer the world" (58, 64-67). When her separation from her lover teaches her that in a white supremacist society, blacks have "no claim to love and bliss," Barrett Browning's speaker initially just wants to "weep pure tears and die" (93, 105). But she learns that white men consider such a fate "too merciful" for a black woman (104). Believing that "Mere grief's too good for such" a creature, the woman's owner and his friends rape and impregnate her (100).

By doing so, the white men do, indeed, manage to "strangle the sob[s]" of the slave—but not in the way that they anticipate (102). Rather than murdering the woman's independent spirit, her rapists unwittingly help to create a female seething with righteous indignation who is determined to seek both freedom and vengeance. She repays the rapists by destroying their "property," her infant son. And four weeks later, she flees the plantation in search of her own liberty.

It is clear that murdering her child was an incredibly painful decision for this young mother to make; she notes that as her infant struggled for breath, his feet had struck against her heart as if "to break it through" (130). Although, at times, she speaks calmly and logically about the infanticide, this section of the poem is punctuated with hysterical laughter, which indicates that the mother was so deeply distressed to discover that her son resembled her rapist that death seemed a fate better for him than being raised by a mother who could only curse his existence. The anguish that she experienced after killing her infant is particularly evident in stanza twenty-four, in which she reports

that she carried her dead son's body around for several days before burying him. His body "lay on my heart like a stone, as chill," she relates, adding: "I am [still] cold, though it happened a month ago" (166-68).

Nevertheless, this woman, who was only briefly a mother, is convinced that her action was morally justifiable, since by killing her son she not only removed the infant from the evils of slavery but also "save[d] it from … [the] curse" of going through life without a mother's love (146). The mother could not love her child, she emphasizes, because he was a visible reminder of her rapists. Not only was his skin "so white" that she "could not bear to look upon his face," but his moans and kicks seemed to her those of a "white child" striving for—and believing that as a light-skinned male he was entitled to—"iberty … he wanted the master-right" (120-126). The one time that she had glanced at him, she saw "a look that made me mad"—a look that not only had mentally disturbed her but also had made her angry (143). For her son had gazed at her with "The master's look, that used to fall on my soul like his lash"—"or [even] worse," like his leer (144-145). Barrett Browning's protagonist claims that her act of infanticide was "best" both for her and her son; she argues that "A child and mother / Do wrong to look at one another / When one is black and one is fair" (112, 138-40).

Barrett Browning's protagonist also views her act of infanticide as a way of defying a Christian God that whites proclaim endorses the institution of slavery. She wants to save her son from the clutches of a God who when he created black people, smiled as he tossed them "Under the feet of His white creatures, / With a look of scorn, that the dusky features / Might be trodden again to clay" (26-28). The young mother sees herself as vying for her son's soul with "fine white angels," whom she envisions as trying to pluck the "fruit" her body had borne in hopes of sending what they deem a "white child's spirit" to an all-white Heaven (155-63). The mother asserts that these angels "With a white sharp finger from every star, / Did point [at] and mock" her when she buried her child for the express purpose of converting her baby "to black earth,—nothing white,— / A Dark child in the dark!" (180-86). But she is confident that her attempt to keep her son out of a racist God's afterlife has succeeded. The angels might have tried to claim the infant as their own, but she is convinced that she has removed the moral taint of whiteness and that her son is now "A dark child in the dark" earth, not the inhabitant of some white angelic realm far above the "forest-tops" (186, 180).

But it is not just male slaveowners who are the targets of this black woman's powerful critique of interlocking systems of power and privilege. Whereas most white-authored abolitionist texts refrain from criticizing white women who through their passivity condone the institution of slavery, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" harshly castigates such women.[3]

Barrett Browning's protagonist resents the fact that she could not bear to sing to her "white-faced child" a song about the black man whom she had loved, whereas a white woman—including those married to her rapists—"May keep live babies on her knee, / And sing the song she likes the best" (142, 216-217). The runaway slave is outraged that these white women felt no sympathy for a black woman who had been impregnated by their husbands; she speaks bitterly of "the ladies who scorned to pray / Beside me at church … Though my tears had washed a place for my knee" (117-119). So angry is she with white women that the slave hopes that each of them will be cursed with the early death of a child. As the poem nears its conclusion, she tells the white men who have pursued her that she wishes "Each, for his own wife's joy and gift, / A little corpse as safely at rest as mine" (212-15).

Most of this black woman's anger, however, is directed at those who established and who benefit most from living in a racist and sexist society: white males. When the "hunter sons" of the hypocritical pilgrim fathers surround her, she defiantly yells: "Keep off! / I brave you all at once" (204-206). She commands her pursuers to listen to her, punctuating her critique of the institution of slavery with orders such as "Stand off!" and "Man, drop that stone you dared to lift!" (243, 211). Drawing attention to the scars that she has received from frequent floggings, she reminds the white men that she has proven herself to be a woman who will not shriek or beg for mercy when being physically abused. And most importantly, she stresses her sanity: "I am not mad," she states emphatically, "I am black" (218). For this woman, as for bell hooks, her own rage is a reasonable, morally justifiable response to oppression; what is pathological is "white supremacy … the madness of white racist hatred of blacks" (26).

Knowing that her auditors are Christians, the runaway brings Christ into her discourse to argue that unlike Christ, some slaves—herself included—intend to respond to their wounding with "curses" and acts of violence rather than in a spirit of forgiveness. She audaciously tells her auditors that although they may feel righteous and all-powerful, they "Are, after all, not gods" who can make blacks "Do good with bleeding" (240-42). "We are too heavy for our cross," she avers, as she warns her pursuers that if blacks continue to be enslaved and abused, they eventually will "crush you and your seed" (244-245). And she openly calls on other blacks to fight for their independence, exclaiming: "from these sands / Up to the mountains, lift your hands, / O slaves, and end what I begun! / Whips, curses; these must answer those!" (229-32).

To be sure, in the last stanza of the poem the dying fugitive recalls her curses. But she does so in a spirit of "disdain" rather than forgiveness and in a way that by no means undercuts her explicit and powerful exposé of the evils of racism and sexism that exist in a supposedly Christian, democratic land (253). Using the oxymoronic phrase dying "of liberty's exquisite pain," the runaway

simultaneously foregrounds the brutality of her attackers and proclaims herself free in soul and spirit—in the present, not just in the near future when she will be dead (249). The slave ends her life by announcing that she feels such "disdain" for her oppressors that she no longer considers it worth her time to rail at them. "I leave you all curse-free," she announces, which implies that her words have the power to harm them but that she considers it beneath her to expend any more energy on her oppressors (252-253).

In short, Barrett Browning's speaker ultimately responds to systemic racism and sexism differently than the enslaved black women who are commonly found in abolitionist poems by white writers. Although at moments the runaway slave may seem emotionally unstable, her "Madness is divinest Sense - / To a discerning Eye" and primarily manifests itself in legitimate feelings of moral outrage (Dickinson, "Much Madness Is Divinest Sense" 1-2). This black woman does not helplessly lament her tragic plight, nor does she ask a Christian God to bring an early death to her and/or her loved ones. Instead, she strikes back at her oppressors and tries to escape from the horrible situation in which she finds herself. By committing infanticide, she simultaneously takes revenge against her master by destroying a valuable piece of his property, releases her son from the curse of being a slave and of growing up without a mother's love, and prevents herself from being daily and tangibly reminded of the experience of being raped. Moreover, this "madwoman" has the audacity to assert that it is the "fine white angels" and their earthly counterparts who bear ultimate responsibility for her son's death (157), since it is they who created a situation in which a mother could feel nothing but anguish when gazing at her child. And Barrett Browning's protagonist refuses to let white women off the hook: "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" foregrounds the fact that white women can be—and often are—as racist as white men.

* * *

In a letter written five years after the publication of "The Runaway Slave," Barrett Browning urges Anna Jameson to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel whose success thrilled the poet "both as a woman and a human being" (Kenyon 1: 110-111). Appalled by Jameson's assertion that "a [white] woman has no business with questions like … slavery," Barrett Browning bluntly replies: "Then she had better use a pen no more. She had better subside into slavery and concubinage herself, I think [and] as in the time of old, shut herself up with the Penelopes in the 'women's apartment,' and take no rank among thinkers and speakers" (Kenyon 2: 110-111). That women have a moral obligation to expose and protest against injustice is an idea that the poet reiterates in a February 1856 letter to Julia Martin, in which she responds to criticism of the passages in *Aurora Leigh* that describe the rape of Marian Earle. "If a woman

ignores these wrongs," argues Barrett Browning, "then may women as a sex continue to suffer them; there is no help for any of us—let us be dumb and die" (Kenyon 2: 254). Several years later, she made a similar statement to William Makepeace Thackeray, who had refused to publish her poem "Lord Walter's Wife" in *The Cornhill Magazine* because he believed "squeamish" readers would object to the poem's account of a man who attempts (unsuccessfully) to seduce the wife of one of his close friends:

> I am deeply convinced that the corruption of our society requires not shut doors and windows, but light and air: and that it is exactly because pure and prosperous women choose to *ignore* vice, that miserable women suffer wrong by it everywhere. Has paterfamilias, with his Oriental traditions and veiled female faces, very successfully dealt with a certain class of evil? What if materfamilias, with her quick sure instincts and honest innocent eyes, do more towards their expulsion by simply looking at them and calling them by their names? (Keyon 2: 445)

"The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" is a poem that tries to name not only the evils of slavery but also the inadequacies of most white-authored abolitionist discourse. Unlike many anti-slavery poems, "The Runaway Slave" rejects the notion that Christian "virtues" such as meekness and forgiveness are beneficial to—or even accepted by—all slaves. The poem foregrounds the fact that female slaves experienced a form of abuse generally not experienced by male slaves—rape—and acknowledges the existence of—and reasons for—maternal acts of infanticide. Perhaps most importantly, "The Runaway Slave" refuses to cast the enslaved black mother as a helpless victim and instead presents a courageously defiant black woman who attempts to escape her oppression and who "talks back" to those whites—female as well as male—who passively condone or actively endorse slavery. This fictional black woman—like the white marble statue that Barrett Browning describes in her 1850 sonnet entitled "Hiram Powers' 'Greek Slave'"—points "Art's fiery finger" at both sexism and racism (9). But whereas Powers's statue is described as "thundering" against "serfdom" through "white silence," Barrett Browning's "The Runaway Slave" "confronts man's crimes" by giving voice to an angry black woman who articulates the righteous indignation that is "a necessary aspect of resistance struggle" (hooks 16). And as is the case with her later abolitionist poem "A Curse For a Nation" (1860), "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" is informed by Barrett Browning's conviction that when one is attempting to eradicate social ills, "A curse from the depths of womanhood"—in this case, black woman and motherhood—"Is very salt, and bitter, and good" (47-48).

Endnotes

[1]All three Elizabeth Barrett Browning poems quoted in this essay—"The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," "Hiram Powers' 'Greek Slave,'" and "Curse For a Nation"—appear in volume three of *The Complete Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*; line numbers are cited parenthetically.

[2]Each poem from *The Liberty Bell* is cited parenthetically as *Liberty Bell*, with a notation of the year of publication and the line number(s) of the poem being quoted. *The Bow in the Cloud*; or, *The Negro's Memorial. A Collection of Original Contributions in and Verse, Illustrative of the Evils of Slavery, and Commemorative of its Abolition in the British Colonies* is cited parenthetically as *Bow in the Cloud*, followed by a reference to the lines that are being quoted from a given poem.

[3]As noted earlier, Mary Howitt's "The Negro-Mother," Maria Lowell's "A Twilight Vision," and Ann Gilbert's "The Mother" implicitly or explicitly seek to recruit white women to the abolitionist cause. Several other texts in *The Liberty Bell* do the same, which is not surprising, given that this yearly collection was published by the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society. Among such texts are the anonymous poem "Woman and Her Pastor" (1842), Eliza Lee Follen's essay "Women's Work" (1842), and Charlotte H. L. Coues's essay "An Appeal to Mothers" (1845). However, of the six texts mentioned above, only Follen's essay argues that white women's silence and inactivity makes them complicit in institutional racism. Addressing white women living in the North, Follen urges them not to emulate "the pale, sensitive fine lady of the South" who knows that her husband is raping black women but who does not utter a word of protest (8). "Let no woman set herself apart, and say she has nothing to do with the corruption of woman in the South," Follen proclaims, telling her readers that is the Christian duty of all white women to try to "break the fetters of the slave" (9-10).

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ANISSA JANINE WARDI

Maternal Ecocriticism and the Ecology of Motherhood in Jean Toomer's *Cane*

In Cane, *Jean Toomer illustrates that human corporeality is tethered to the material world, a concept that feminist theorist Stacy Alaimo, in* Bodily Natures, *refers to as "transcorporeality." Human bodies are not inured to their environment but are affected by the flow and substances of matter in which they are surrounded. In this modernist text, the natural world is enmeshed with female bodies, both seemingly carrying the DNA of the other. The assemblage of the agrarian South, African American women, and scenes of racial violence coalesce and construct a narrative of violated fertility and motherhood. The women of* Cane *are denied their motherhood because their bodies and being cannot be divorced from the trans-Atlantic trade route, plantation labour practices, and unsustainable logging of old-growth pine forests in post-Reconstruction Georgia. This article examines moments of transcorporeal exchange in* Cane *(i.e., felled pine trees and fetuses, and maternal bodies and cotton fields) and, in so doing, provides an ecocritical reading of mothering and material interconnectivity—a maternal ecocritical reading—of Toomer's masterpiece of the Harlem Renaissance.*

Alice Walker opens her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"—a treatise on African American mothering, artistry, and the natural world—with a reverie on Jean Toomer's masterpiece of the Harlem Renaissance, *Cane*. The women of *Cane*, Walker argues, are carnally abused and mutilated yet remain intensely creative and spiritual. Walker declares that "[s]ome of them, without a doubt, were our mothers and grandmothers" (32). Walker's claim of matrilineal ancestry is metaphorically rich but not textually grounded, given the fact that most of the women in *Cane* are denied maternity, a violation that is fruitfully understood in the context of post-Reconstruction Georgia. The recent turn

to materialism in the field of ecocritical theory provides innovative ways of regarding the natural elements of the text and complicates an anthropomorphic reading of the non-human world where human characteristics are simply mapped onto the biotic environment. Instead, reading *Cane* from the prism of material ecocriticism invites a reflection of the human and the non-human as part of an interdependent web of vibrant matter.

Iovino and Oppermann in *Material Ecocriticism* argue that the material world is endowed with narratives, and this "storied matter" is transmitted through interchanges of organic and inorganic matter, human and non-human forms (1). Janet Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* uses the concept of assemblage to describe the relational networks of human and non-human matter: "assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistence presence of energies that confound them from within" (23-24). Although the storied matter of *Cane* is not monolithic, the assemblage of the agrarian South, African American women, and scenes of violence coalesce and construct a narrative of violated fertility and mothering. Moreover, Stacy Alaimo puts forth a concept of "transcorporeality" in *Bodily Natures*, in which she argues for the porosity of bodies. Human bodies, she maintains, are not inured to their surroundings but are affected by the flow of substances and matter in which they are surrounded. In this way, the women of *Cane* are denied their motherhood because their bodies, being, and identity cannot be divorced from the racist social landscape of the agrarian South, plantation labour, and unsustainable farming practices. Toomer highlights the intractable relationship among vibrant, living beings; the natural world is enmeshed with female bodies in *Cane*, both seemingly carrying the DNA of the other.

For Toomer, the violation of African American motherhood is a metonym for the destruction of community. Andrea O'Reilly, in *Rocking the Cradle,* sheds light on the role of mothering in the African American community: "Two interrelated themes or perspectives distinguish the African American tradition of motherhood. First, mothers and motherhood are valued by, and central to African American culture. Secondly, it is recognized that mothers and mothering are what make possible the physical and psychological well-being and empowerment of African American people and the larger African American culture" (109).

Using O'Reilly's paradigm of mothering and communal health and survival, I argue that Toomer focuses on the mother-body not only to showcase maternal desecration but also to recognize the myriad ways in which the African American community in the post-Reconstruction South is violated and fragmented.

Denied Motherhood in Cane

"Karintha," the inaugural piece of *Cane*, is perhaps the most tragic of the narratives because the reader bears witness to the eponymous girl's too-short lifecycle, which has been created and destroyed by male sexual desire, resulting in stolen fertility, an aborted fetus, and spiritual death. Karintha's body is botanical in nature: men desire her and want to "ripen a growing thing too soon" (3). As a fruit bearing body, Karintha has a natural cycle of maturation that has been perverted by old men who ride her hobby horse and young men who impatiently count time before they perceive her as old enough to "mate with" (3). The diction here unmistakably places Karintha alongside fauna; she is not a woman with agency who chooses a partner but one who is selected for mating. She is a mere vessel for male desire. The character vignette rhetorically highlights Karintha's subordination through extended silence. Not only is Karintha silenced in her victimization, but her perspective is withheld from the reader. Instead, Toomer routinely moves from Karintha to the Georgian countryside. In one instance, Toomer interrupts his narrative of Karintha's hastening sexual development with a reverie on sunsets: "her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon / O cant you see it / her skin is like dusk / when the sun goes down" (4). As the sun rises and sets, so, too, does Karintha, whose beauty is enmeshed with the fading radiance of sunsets. Although it could be argued that Toomer withholds a sufficient exploration of Karintha's interiority, Karintha can only be understood in relation to her surroundings when read from a material ecocritical prism. Just as Toomer suppresses Karintha's desire, the reader is, likewise, left unware about the actions surrounding her baby. Toomer writes:

> A child fell out of her womb onto a bed of pine-needles in the forest. Pine-needles are smooth and sweet. They are elastic to the feet of rabbits…. A sawmill nearby. Its pyramidal sawdust pile smouldered. It is a year before one completely burns. Meanwhile, the smoke curls up and hangs in odd wraiths about the trees, curls up, and spreads itself out over the valley…. Weeks after Karintha returned home the smoke was so heavy you tasted it in water" (4)

Toomer's choice to employ vague diction to describe the baby's untimely birth (i.e., "fell") suggests that Karintha either miscarried or aborted the baby. Culturally, these acts signify differently, and, thus, the ambiguity surrounding the baby's death complicates Karintha's motherhood. Moreover, that the baby ostensibly burned implies that Karintha cremated it, extinguishing the corpse of her baby with a natural element.

Fire, as an element that both destroys and purifies, invites a reading of Karintha's act as either violent (if she committed infanticide) or a ritual of purification (if Karintha miscarried). Either way, Karintha's choice to burn the corpse and not bury it sheds light on the community's complicity in Karintha's pregnancy. Since a collective "you" tasted it in water, a shared resource, Toomer indicates that the entire community ingests the result of Karintha's victimization. Moreover, that the baby falls onto "smooth and sweet" pine needles—a bed-like description—highlights the continuity between Karintha's body and the South, as both mother-body and plant life are potentially safe harbours for the baby, yet these sites of home are sullied by the social landscape of rural Georgia.

Of note in this vignette is the smoke that encircles the trees and spreads through the valley. While the male community victimizes the young girl, the pine trees cushion the baby's fall and the smoke, resultant from the burning, clings to those trees. Toomer's characterization of the smoke as ghost-like indicates that the spectre of the baby is enmeshed with the biotic world. From this opening character sketch, Toomer casts the natural world as haunted by violated motherhood. The fetus is dispersed among pine trees, water, valleys, and cane stalks, and in that way, the reader reads *Cane* through the lens of Karintha's desecrated motherhood. Toomer deftly uses the four natural elements—earth, air, water, and fire—to suggest the omnipresence of Karintha's victimization and its manifestation throughout the natural world. Kathleen Brogan in *Cultural Haunting* argues that ghosts are agents of cultural memory (12). In that way, the ghost, the aborted infant, is a site of cultural memory, as she is a reminder of the millions lost to the trans-Atlantic trade route and the families torn apart by chattel slavery. Karintha's baby haunts the Georgian countryside, and is the ghost who will, in various guises, haunt *Cane*.

Whereas Karintha inspires the narrator's ode to beauty, death permeates the vignette and, likewise, haunts another character sketch in Toomer's opening section titled "Esther," in which the named protagonist is repeatedly cast as a spectre: "her cheeks are too flat and dead for a girl of nine" (22). Esther is the fair-skinned daughter of a wealthy store owner, and, like Karintha, the story marks her transition from childhood to womanhood. As she matures, her physicality continues to deteriorate so that at age twenty-two, her "hair thins [and] looks like the dull silk on puny corn ears. Her face pales until it is the color of the gray dust that dances with dead cotton leaves" (25). Esther's elision with crops is noteworthy insofar as Toomer was moved to write *Cane* while he worked as a principal for a school in Sparta, Georgia. Sparta, the inspiration for Toomer's fictional landscape, is, according to Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr in *Jean Toomer and the Terrors of American History,*

> located almost at the center of Hancock County, a little over one hundred miles southeast of Atlanta, seventy-five miles southwest of Augusta. Hancock County is in the upper half of what was historically the "Black Belt" of the state, the cotton growing heartland where the plantation system of antebellum Georgia was established, to be succeeded in Reconstruction and the following years by the system of tenant farming and sharecropping, piece-work labor, and peonage which would last well into the twentieth century. (8)

African Americans, during the antebellum and postbellum periods, constituted the majority of the labour force that was put in the service of growing cash crops, such as cotton and tobacco. The ecological consequences of cotton plantation practices, in which a premium was placed on increased crop production, resulted in significant soil erosion. Not only did such unsustainable cotton farming deplete the soil, but it necessitated the removal of large tracts of forests. Therefore, the death-like imagery describing Esther—desiccated and dusty—suggests that both Esther and the plants have been unnaturally stripped of their vitality.

The story charts Esther's desire for the dark-skinned King Barlo, a man beset by religious visions and, according to Esther, "the best cotton picker in the county, in the state, in the whole world for that matter" (25), which again aligns people and plants. She fantasizes about him, which becomes the sole animation in her otherwise insipid life. As an adult, Esther professes her affection for Barlo. Her mind is described as "a pink meshbag filled with baby toes" (26). Like Karintha's baby who transforms to smoke, ethereal and evanescent, Esther's offspring is reduced to a metonym of an infant. Toomer offers a stark and disturbing image of motherhood, as there is no living child, only a violated and fragmented being. Although Esther never explicitly dreams of marrying and raising a family with Barlo, each of her fantasies includes babies: in one, she takes an abandoned infant, and in other, she "frantically" loves a dark-skinned baby, whom she perceives as "ugly as sin." Employing the discourse of racial caste hierarchy, Esther, nevertheless, claims the baby and her position as mother as she holds it "to her breast" (24). Indeed, by the piece's end, after Barlo rejects and mocks her advances, "the thought comes suddenly, that conception with a drunken man must be a mighty sin [and] she draws away, frozen" (27). In this passage, the diction unmistakably points to sex as a means to motherhood. Her desire, highlighted throughout the piece with images of fire and passion, is revealed to be a yearning for procreation. Just as the baby's toes are cut off and distorted, so too is Esther's fertility aborted. Lest motherhood be relegated to the margins of "Esther," Toomer includes a story about a woman who was so inspired by Barlo's religious prophesy that she "drew a portrait of a black

Madonna on the courthouse wall" (23). This seemingly tangential narrative is significant enough that Toomer repeats it in "Fern," another character sketch in the first section of the book: "A black woman once saw the mother of Christ and drew her in charcoal on the courthouse wall.… When one is on the soil of one's ancestors, most anything can come to one" (19). Very little information is given about this artist; instead, this "sanctified negress" (23) is placed in *Cane*, I would offer, to render the importance of Black motherhood. Elevating the Black woman as the mother of God refutes the general disregard for African American mothers in the South's Black Belt. Recasting these mother bodies as sites of holiness, in fact, counters the dismembering of families common in chattel slavery. Read from the prism of material ecocriticism, it is of note that Toomer moves from this unnamed woman's act of artistic rebellion to a reflection on soil. Ancestral soil, the narrator contends, inspires otherworldly visions. It stands to reason that those who toiled on the land and are buried in the earth have left their imprint. The red Georgia clay, an intermediary between the past and the present, is infused with ancestral bodies and blood, an embodiment that continues to affect the community.

Aborted acts of reproduction not only mark the female character sketches in part one of *Cane*, they culminate Toomer's treatise on African American women's stolen motherhood. The final section, "Kabnis," is a highly autobiographical drama that focuses on an African American man from the north, Ralph Kabnis, who takes a teaching position in Georgia. Tied to the agrarian South through history and bloodlines, Kabnis returns to the land that began the collection. In this piece, the title character is drawn to the rural South but is paralyzed by the paradoxes that he encounters, which render him unable to come to terms with the spectres that trouble the landscape. The natural and built environment haunts Kabnis. Being on the soil of his ancestors, Kabnis is overwhelmed, a fact that is highlighted by his first night's stay on former plantation grounds. Kabnis's living space in the South is a one-room cabin; thus, he literally inhabits the quarters of his enslaved forebears: an elision of the self and the ancestral corpus, the past and the present.

On the first night of his stay, he is tormented by the night sounds as he imagines the brutality that has taken place in these quarters. Indeed, the land speaks to Kabnis: the moon casts spells, cane fields whisper, and the night winds sing. It is the land that first introduces Kabnis to the African American southern experience. The cracks in the wall, which are referred to as "lips," that give voice to the night songs physically shower Kabnis with dirt: "[d]ust of slavefields, dried, scattered" (84). The southern dust is richly embodied, and Kabnis's description of himself as an "atom of dust" (85) registers his transcorporeal connection to the land and his forebears. Kabnis wanders into the night searching to make meaning of this senseless brutality:

> Kabnis is about to shake his fists heavenward. He looks up, and the night's beauty strikes him dumb. He falls to his knees…. The shock sends a shiver over him. He quivers. Tears mist his eyes. He writhes…. "Dear Jesus, do not chain me to myself and set these hills and valleys, heaving with folk-songs, so close to me that I cannot reach them. There is a radiant beauty in the night that touches and … tortures me." (85)

In this scene, Kabnis is overwhelmed by the irreconcilable mosaic that he encounters in rural Georgia—the richness of folk culture, the opulence of the natural world, and the racial atrocities that have occurred on that land.

Kabnis's torment culminates when a resident of the area, Layman, relates a horrific story of mob lynching, which is, again, imbricated with aborted motherhood. A pregnant Mame Lamkins refuses to reveal the whereabouts of her husband to an angry mob, and, in retaliation, she is viciously lynched. The mob's terror does not end there. They proceed to cut the living fetus from the mother's stomach and hang it from a tree. Of note in this scene of horrific racial violence is the brutal displacement of the mother from her unborn baby. This separation is a ruthless re-enactment of the denial of motherhood threaded throughout *Cane*. The assemblage of the tree, the baby's corpse, and the mother-body illustrates, once again, a link between the human and the non-human, an alliance that Toomer articulates from the outset of the text. Using the tree as an accomplice for the murder of the fetus reveals that even though the crime is no longer physically visible, the baby's brutal murder is grafted onto the tree. The composition is further expanded as the reader realizes that Toomer, in his fictional Mame Lamkins story, recreates many of the details of the much publicized lynching of Mary Turner. Mary Turner was a pregnant woman who was lynched in Valdosta, Georgia, in 1918, three years before Toomer moved to Sparta, because she publicly asserted that her husband, Hayes Turner, was hanged for a crime that he did not commit. The mob took her to a stream, tied her ankles together, hung her upside down from a tree, and then burned her body. She was in her eighth month of pregnancy. While she was still alive, one of the men cut open Turner's abdomen, causing her unborn child to fall from her womb to the ground, and another mob member crushed the baby underfoot.

In both instances, the land, stream, and trees are put into the service of barbarous acts of white supremacy. This violent performance was designed to silence the African American community in registering complaints about the social conditions of the Jim Crow South. The conflation of voice, land, lynching and silence is marked in the hushed telling of the lynching tale itself, as Layman's voice is "uniformly low and soothing," (92) a rehearsed retelling that does not transgress the parameters of white censorship. Indeed, Toomer

draws attention to Layman's inability to claim voice by analogizing his storytelling to the land's: "A canebrake, murmuring the tale to its neighbor-road would be more passionate" (92). Again, the earth, an unwitting accomplice to these murders, is embodied with narratives; it, too, bears witness to the past, lamenting the crime and mourning the dead.

Ecosystems and Family Systems

Like Kabnis, Toomer is the son who returns to the mother-land of Georgia to reclaim his past. In recognition of the manifold traumas that resulted from the African Diaspora—a term from the Greek, which literally means the scattering of seeds—Toomer mourns the dislocation of the family and specifically locates that as the fragmentation of the mother-body. In fact, the interrelationship of Toomer, the narrator of *Cane*, the natural elements of the South, and the mother-body is nowhere more explicit than in the poem "Song of the Son." Here, the homophonic elision of the son/sun underscores the porosity of living entities.

In a letter to his close friend Sherwood Anderson, Toomer writes of his southern experience, "My seed was planted in the cane-and cotton-fields, and in the souls of the black and white people in the small southern town. My seed was planted in *myself* down there" (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 84). In rejoicing for this newly identified cultural affiliation, Toomer uses an obvious birth metaphor. The word "seed" is particularly resonant, as Toomer employs it as a leitmotif in "Song of the Son." Tracing his family's ancestry to Georgia, Toomer felt an immediate sense of connection, typified in the poet's identification as a "son" who has returned to capture the fading folk culture. The poet addresses the "land and soil" in order to communicate with the "song-lit race of slaves," an image that further conflates the ancestors and the earth. The poet recognizes that the enslaved worked the southern land and tended to the crops, and, thus, he mines the natural world as a repository of his own past.

With a keen awareness of the passing of time, Toomer projects a sense of urgency in the poem. The poet's concern for preserving the folk culture is palpable, as he claims that he has arrived just in time to inherit the dying traditions of the culture:

> O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums, / Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air, / Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare / One plum was saved / for me, one seed becomes / An everlasting song, a singing tree, / Caroling softly souls of slavery, / What they were, and what they are to me, / Caroling softly souls of slavery. (14)

The narrator does not merely analogize the ancestral body to the plum eschewing, for example, similes of "like" or "as"; rather, the "Negro slaves" *are* the dark-purple, ripened plums. Both are rooted in the southern earth, and their histories are elided. Indeed, as Neil Evernden argues in "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy": "Where do you draw the line between one creature and another? Where does one organism stop and another begin? Is there even a boundary between you and the non-living world, or will the atoms of this page be a part of your body tomorrow?" (95). To this list of rhetorical questions, I would add, where is the separation between mother and child? In utero, is there a place where the mother-body stops and infant begins? This material entanglement is particularly evocative in the context of *Cane*, as the African American community who worked the land amid the pine-wood air inhabits that space, flora, and fauna. Plaintively singing the souls of slavery, the poet's intention (much like Toomer's) is to capture that "everlasting song," which the environment engenders. From this tree, read as both a family tree and a literal plant, the poet characterizes himself as the last seed of the plum. It is not surprising that Toomer turns to trees, seeds, and fruit in this poem because tree bodies are often bound up with human bodies: "Associations between … sap and blood, leaves and hair, limbs and arms, bark and skin, or trunk and the human body should not be taken as merely analogical, for they establish a kind of identity between signifier and signified" (qtd. in Silvis 90). Insofar as the discourse of kinship lines is mapped onto trees, (i.e., tree of life and the family tree) trees are simultaneously maternalized and rendered as sites of history and memory. Perhaps the most notable example in African American literature of trees and their link to the mother-body can be found in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in which Sethe, the protagonist who refutes the system of chattel slavery by insisting on owning her identity as mother, has a scar on her back that is discursively rendered as a tree, complete with branches and fruit. The mother, then, is the tree; without her root system, the children and the branches cannot thrive. Just as Sethe's scar was the result of being whipped during her late-stage pregnancy, the mother-as-tree portrait is not a pristine vegetal and human image; in fact, throughout *Cane*, the beauty of the pines is, simultaneously, grafted with cruel images of lynching and industrial-scale logging. Indeed, it is of note that the fruit of the earth is saved for the speaker from a *dying* tree. Toomer describes the tree as being stripped, an image that gestures to the increase of large-scale logging practices in the post-Reconstruction South. Jeffrey Myers explores the exploitation of the natural world as represented in Charles Chesnutt's work, which sheds light on Toomer's ecological treatise in *Cane*: "Both the bodies of slaves and the pine forests of the American Southeast had to be exploited in order to make the fortunes—and the culture—that cotton and tobacco plantations made possible … plantation

owners literally carved this culture from both the bodies of slaves and the forests themselves" (6). Meyers further offers that during this period, the Southeast was beginning "an acute phase of natural resource exploitation, despite the fact that such calls were preserving wild lands elsewhere in the United States … [and] that the industrial timber production or cotton and tobacco cashcrop agriculture [were] practices that created a system of debt peonage for—and in some cases virtual reenslavement of—African American farmers in the latter part of the nineteenth century" (6). The speaker of "Song of the Son" recognizes that the forests and its inhabitants are the holders of history, and, thus, the destruction of this habitat reveals the loss of memory and kinship. The image of the sole seed indicates that the speaker will attempt to replant himself, his art, and his history back into the earth, but that possible birth image, set against the myriad narratives of barrenness or stolen fertility, is not a hopeful one. Moreover, that only *one* plum with *one* seed remains reveals the smallness of the gesture against the large-scale destruction of an ecosystem. Cowdrey in *This Land, This South: An Environmental History* explains the region's "forests and wildlife were brutally used by outsiders, who cut its forests, bought up its land, and financed its railroads and many of its nascent industries" (Cowdrey 103), a history which underlies *Cane*.

Toomer's use of the saw mills, omnipresent in section one of *Cane*, culminates in "Georgia Dusk," a poem in which Toomer analogizes the destruction of the pine forest to violence against the African American community. The pine trees, whose sounds are described as "sacred whispers," create a haunting melody along with the "chorus of the cane," perhaps as a plaintive protest to the decimation of the ecosystem. In the third stanza, the mill workers' day is done, and the "buzz-saws stop," only to leave sawdust piles in its wake: "blue ghosts of trees, tarrying low / where only chips and stumps are left to show / the solid proof of former domicile" (15). The trees—felled and reduced to sawdust—are gone, only the "ghosts" of their being remain. Such imagery returns the reader to "Karintha," in which the female protagonist uses the sawdust pile as a funerary pyre for her infant. The spectre of Karintha's infant transmogrifies into the "blue ghost of the trees," as Toomer subtly links the exploitation of African Americans, and especially mothers, with the exploitation of the environment. Trees are a particularly maternalized plant. Forest scientist Suzanne Simard's research focuses on "Mother Trees"—the larger, older trees in the forests—and their role in maintaining the health and survival of their surrounding ecosystem. Through a vast and complex network of root systems and fungal threads, Mother Trees actually provide nutrients to the saplings. When a Mother Tree is cut down, the survival rate of the younger members of the forest is "substantially diminished" (Engelsiepen). The significance of the Mother Tree is such that the community's health and

survival depends on her presence. Although Toomer could not have foreseen this pioneering dendrology research, it offers a striking parallel to Toomer's ideological stance in *Cane*, in which white, patriarchal, hegemonic culture destroys both human and plant communities by desecrating and denying the mother-body.

Inspired by his link to the natural environment of the agrarian South, Toomer responded to it narratively and, for a brief time, celebrated his Black heritage by finding the "seed" of himself in Georgia. Employing a seminal image of fertility, Toomer recognized Georgia as the matrix of his writing and his identity, and, thus, it is apt that *Cane* is haunted by complex birth imagery. Yet although Toomer celebrated this gift—he claimed that "a visit to Georgia last fall was the starting point of almost everything of worth that I have done" (Scruggs and VanDemarr 9)—soon after the publication of *Cane*, he distanced himself from his work and his blackness. In fact, Toomer believed that the African American folk culture of the American South that inspired *Cane* was dying. He wrote that *Cane* was a "swan song" to a fading culture that could not last in the face of industrialization and modernization. In his autobiographical writings, Toomer claims that "[t]he folk-spirit was walking in to die on the modern desert. That spirit was so beautiful. Its death was so tragic. Just this seemed to sum life for me. And this was the feeling I put into *Cane*" (*Wayward* 123). Death, birth, the seeds of life, and the agrarian history of the region illustrate the nature-culture interaction that permeates Toomer's masterwork.

To highlight the porosity of human and plant life, Toomer entitles his text *Cane*, an element of the biotic world made clear in the epigraph—"Oracular. Redolent of fermenting syrup, Purple of the dusk, Deep-rooted Cane"—and then plunges the reader in rural Georgia, a post-Reconstruction world in which women are displaced from their motherhood. The botanical narratives in *Cane* coalesce with narratives of ecological and female barrenness. Although motherhood may seem disparate from antebellum plantation labour and the unsustainable logging of old-growth pine forests, these are the material bodies that Toomer encountered during his stay in Georgia. In Toomer's able hands, the reader readily grasps the composition in which human and more than human life are not bifurcated but part of a larger ecosystem of interaction and transformation.

Homes, Gardens and Wombs

Alice Walker's mother was also situated in the environs of Jean Toomer's agrarian Georgia, yet she altered her maternal and physical landscape. Walker writes of her mothering:

> By the time she was twenty, she had two children and was pregnant with a third. Five children later, I was born. And this is how I came to know my mother: she seemed to me a large, soft, loving-eyed woman who was rarely impatient in our home. Her quick, violent temper was on view only a few times a year, when she battled with the white landlord who had the misfortune to suggest to her that her children did not need to go to school. (238)

In this way, Walker's mother's creation of home physically and emotionally contests a racially hegemonic society. Walker concretizes her mothering in a list of seemingly exhaustive domestic duties: "she made all the clothes we wore, even my brother's overalls. She made all the towels and sheets we used. She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover all our beds" (238). These acts are renarrated and reconceptualized as empowering. Not only does Walker's mother bear children but she ensures their educational development and physical and emotional safety in a society that treated Black children as detritus. These moments of radical maternity are transcorporeally linked to her radical act of creating beauty and of asserting agency over her family's micro-landscape:

> My mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in. And not just your typical straggly country stand of zinnias, either. She planted ambitious gardens—and still does—with over fifty different varieties of plants that bloom profusely from early March until late November…. Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms—sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena … and on and on. (241)

Walker's mother does not merely ornament their impoverished home with flowers; through botanical abundance, she provides her children with a sense of dignity. The mother's creation of organic beauty interrupts narratives of unworthiness mapped onto families of poor, Black sharecroppers. By surrounding her children with beauty, she publicly reveals that they and she *are* worthy of beauty, an enmeshment that bespeaks the tenets of material ecocriticism. In this context, material ecocriticism becomes maternal ecocriticism, a theory in which maternal and environmental landscapes are intertwined. Her mothering is tied to her stewardship with the land.

bell hooks in "An Aesthetic of Blackness" provides insight into African American mother's acts of creating beauty: "Remembering the houses of my childhood, I see how deeply my concern with aesthetics was shaped by black women who were fashioning an aesthetic of being, struggling to create an oppositional world view for their children, working with space to make it livable (132). Here, again, African American women's mothering is tied to the creation of external space. In "Homeplace," hooks further explores the porous boundary between the self and environment: "Historically, African American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (42). bell hooks's work echoes Walker's, insofar as the world outside the boundaries of the self and family, though seemingly stagnant because of class and race stratification, can be acted on and, in so doing, affect the emotional landscape of the inhabitants.

Walker implicitly answers Toomer's call. Where he sees macro-landscapes of destruction over both earth and women, she sees the radical potential of mothering as work that includes the transformation of place. In writing back to Toomer, Walker renarrates the lack of mothers in the text by bestowing maternity on them—"Some of them, without a doubt, were our mothers and grandmothers" (232)—in recognition that the folk culture was not dying, as Toomer portended, but instead was being nurtured through radical acts of African American motherwork.[1] Inserting the "maternal" in material ecocriticism is a discursive reminder of not only the physical entanglements of humans in a fertile, vibrant and living world, but specifically the blending of the mother-body and the biosphere in such a way that those who do motherwork are shaped by and can shape built and natural environments.

In *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood*, Steingraber, too, highlights the intricate crossings between human and non-human spheres as she theorizes the mother-body as an interactive ecosystem. Steingraber's womb, an interior maternal landscape, fuses with the natural world. Claiming her body as a "habitat," she rhetorically positions it alongside other living environments. During amniocentesis, for example, Steingraber reflects on fluid—blood, drinking water, creeks and rivers—and its flow through human and non-human nature:

> I drink water, and it becomes blood plasma, which infuses through the amniotic sac and surrounds the baby—who also drinks it. And what is it before that? Before it is drinking water, amniotic fluid is the creeks and rivers that fill reservoirs. It is the underground water that fills

> wells. And before it is creeks and rivers and groundwater. Amniotic fluid is rain…. The blood of cows and chickens is in this tube. The nectar gathered by bees and hummingbirds is in this tube. Whatever is inside hummingbird eggs is also inside my womb. Whatever is in the world's water is here in my hand. (qtd. in Alaimo 103-104)

This graphic musing on transcorporeality, in which the non-human world and its inhabitants seep through human bodies, offers a particularly evocative elision when read in terms of the mother-body, which is not a closed ecosystem, but serves as home and food source for offspring. In the preface, Steingraber explains that as an ecologist, she is interested in "how living things interact with the environments they inhabit" (ix). She moves from this broad statement regarding the interfacings of the biotic world to a precise thesis on mothers and the biosphere: "If the world's environment is contaminated, so too is the ecosystem of a mother's body. If a mother's body is contaminated, so too is the child who inhabits it" (x). This memoir goes on to reveal how chemicals and toxins can potentially disrupt female bodies (including breastmilk), which is an important argument but outside the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, Steingraber's trenchant revelation of the porosity of the mother-body with the biotic world is apt for conceiving a theory of maternal ecociriticsm. With such an awareness that humans (and in this context, mothers) are the very stuff of the material world, alterations to the environment, however broadly or intimately conceptualized and configured, can result in profound interventions in physical, social, and political spheres.

Endnotes

[1]I am borrowing the term "motherwork" from Andrea O'Reilly's insightful work on Toni Morrison's representations of mothering. O'Reilly argues that the responsibilities of motherwork, as portrayed in Morrison's fiction, include "preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing and healing" (131). Applying an ecocritical approach to this framework, I would add that the alteration of physical environments is intimately tied to nurturance and healing.

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NAOMI MERCER

Masculine Expansions of Othermothering in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy, Jazz,* and *Beloved*

Othermothering in African American communities began as a system of childcare but has evolved into the care of individuals in need. Toni Morrison's work presents myriad examples of othermothering performed by black women. Perhaps more intriguing are the sites where othermothering as a system of care work in Morrison's novels serves to subvert gender and race norms. Some critics argue that Morrison's depictions of female-centric othermothering allow black men to shirk parental and communal responsibilities and assign less responsibility to black men for carrying on the traditions and culture of the African American community than black women. However, this article examines how male othermothering in Beloved, Jazz, *and* A Mercy *expands the master narrative of the ideal (black or white) mother by refuting gender roles and the naturalization of women as better suited to care giving. Morrison's depictions of masculine othermothering as a valuable source of care challenge the ideology of the nuclear family for its primacy as a family model.*

Othermothering, a concept developed primarily by feminist critic Patricia Hill Collins, is well documented in African American communities. Othermothering is linked to traditional West African cultural practices that involve mothering all of the children in a household or village by all of the adult women regardless of biological ties. Othermothering disrupts the nuclear family model of who constitutes a family and how those families operate.[1] Othermothering exemplifies Sara Ruddick's concept of "maternal thinking," which consists of three principles: "preservation, growth and social acceptability" (17), or also referred to as protection, nurturance, and training. Ruddick emphasizes that "the work of mothering does not require a particular sexual commitment … Nor does mothering require a particular household arrangement…. Nor is there

any reason why mothering work should be distinctly female" (xii). Although mothering generally implies a biological tie, maternal thinking also applies to othermothering relationships of individuals who may not be biologically related to one another.

In an American context, Andrea O'Reilly powerfully argues that othermothering continued to develop from its African origin because of the necessities of slavery and in postbellum segregated communities, in order to equip African American children with the psychological and social skills needed to survive the oppressive racism and sexism of a kyriarchal culture (6). These skills and characteristics include a sense of stability, connections or feeling of kinship, sense of self-worth, and knowledge of African American culture and history. Without such skills, African American children may succumb to the constant messages of a dominant society that devalues them as human beings rather than achieving a sense of self and of their own history and culture. Although othermothering began as a system of childcare, it has taken on connotations of the care of individuals in need by other individuals within the same community. Furthermore, othermothering presents a process in which adults mentor and aid other adults who did not develop the necessary survival skills as children and require healing on their path towards self-realization. Society views children, the disabled, and the elderly as naturally in need of care work; however, as Toni Morrison's work illustrates, when adults do not receive adequate emotional support as children in order to develop into mature, self-reliant, and empowered individuals, they may also need the care that othermothers provide.

The concept of othermothering is important in Morrison's work because her novels depict the realities of African American communities' othermothering during and after slavery. More saliently, Morrison's othermothers present a challenge to the nuclear family model as a universal constant in American culture. Morrison describes the postbellum family as "configurations and blends of families of women and children, while elsewhere, solitary, hunted and hunting for, were men, men, men" (*Beloved* 63), which resulted from the chaos of slavery and its aftermath. In these women-and-children families, Morrison's texts present myriad examples of othermothering performed by women: Nan's and Denver's care for Sethe in *Beloved*; Violet and Alice's care for each other in *Jazz*; and Lina's care for Florens in *A Mercy*. O'Reilly writes that in addition to othermothering of children in order to transmit African American values, "Morrison's focus is upon those adults who never received protection, nurturance, and cultural bearing as children and thus grew to be adults psychologically wounded by the hurts of racism and/or sexism" (29). O'Reilly bases her argument around the othermothering of adult women by other adult women.[2] Although some critics, such as Brivic, Spillers, Weinstein, and Schapiro, do make brief reference to care work undertaken by male char-

acters, most of the critical discussion of othermothering in Morrison's work seems to centre around the care work that women provide to children and to one another. O'Reilly explicitly argues that "[t]his psychic journey of return, reconnection, and reclamation [for a wounded adult] while directed to a spirit of a lost mother, is often initiated and overseen by an actual mother figure, a close female friend of the troubled woman who serves as an othermother for her" (41). This is in line with the gendered nature of care work and reification of gender roles. A crucial disruption of this gendered reification that occurs within Morrison's texts, then, is having a man assume the role and functions of an othermother as opposed to the expected paternalism of a father figure as authoritarian, disciplinary, and distant.

Although Morrison's female-centric sites of othermothering offer a plethora of material for scholarly analysis, I am much more intrigued by the sites in which othermothering, as a system of care work in Morrison's novels, serves to subvert race *and* gender norms and how Morrison expands othermothering to include men. I contend that male othermothering in Morrison's texts can also transmit African American culture and the psychological tools to withstand racism and sexism just as female-centric othermothering does. When men othermother, they disrupt the master narrative of the ideal black or white mother by refuting gender roles and the naturalization of women as better suited to care giving. This dovetails with themes in Morrison's oeuvre that disrupt Western normative concepts of the nuclear family, gender roles, and racial stereotypes.

My reading of the othermothering in Morrison's texts points out the potential for disrupting othermothering as a naturalized function of women and of the nuclear family as the only familial model. Morrison's male characters who othermother enlarge conventions of female-centric othermothering as well as disrupt normative narratives of masculinity. Similar to female-centric othermothering, male othermothering is not predicated on familial, romantic, or friendship ties. Instead, male othermothering emphasizes the othermothering of the most vulnerable in a community: former slaves and their communities, who are in need of healing.

Morrison's male characters who othermother interrogate gender norms, especially the expectation that men cannot care for and nurture others as well as women can. The male othermothers in Morrison's texts do not necessarily establish themselves as patriarchal heads of household who replicate the nuclear family and traditional gender roles; rather, they othermother adults and children out of compassion and/or necessity. Furthermore, male othermothers do so in a variety of ways, like female-centric othermothering, but with the same desired outcomes of healing, preservation, nurturance, and training, all of which psychologically equips members of the community with the resilience

to withstand systemic racism. Not all men in Morrison's texts participate in othermothering, nor do they necessarily care for the neediest individuals. But male characters who do othermother also lend nuance to black masculinity as well as disrupt traditional concepts of white masculinity and privilege.

Male-Centric Othermothering

Morrison's texts argue for recognition of black men's historical participation in othermothering and for men's greater involvement in othermothering and care work in the contemporary moment. In contrast to the stereotype of men as absentee fathers or as authority figures, Morrison depicts imaginative alternatives to the nuclear family that recognize the potential of men to contribute in new ways to their families and communities so that the burden of unpaid care work does not solely fall on women. Morrison's novels display an awareness that male othermothering has the potential to neutralize some of the gendered rhetoric surrounding othermothering and care work.

Some literary critics, such as Murray and Beavers, have identified the practice of othermothering in Morrison's work, and O'Reilly contends that these depictions of motherhood and othermothering disrupt the "master narrative of motherhood" (29) in American culture that arises from the nuclear family model. Although I agree that Morrison does challenge the "master narrative" of care work with the female-centric othermothering that occurs in her novels, I want to expand O'Reilly's argument: Morrison also challenges the detrimental societal effects of othermothering on women of colour and, by extension, on white women as well through expanding othermothering in her novels. When men othermother, they also undermine the assumptions and idealizations of care work in nuclear households through challenging not only the biological ties of mother and child and assumed quality of care but also the biological essentialism that dictates care roles for women as naturalized nurturers, which economically devalues that work in the process.

The gender of the adult caregiver is immaterial in Morrison's novels. Concomitantly, in low-income families in African American communities, sociologists Carol B. Stack and Linda M. Burton found that the "kin-work" in which these families engage does not depend on the gender of the caregiver or the cared for person when a need for othermothering presents itself (34). Furthermore, Stephanie Coontz contends that communal households with relatives beyond the nuclear family and biologically unrelated co-residents produce a "rich extended kin and community life" (241). Morrison's texts in which men assume roles as othermothers not only reflect norms in the African American community but also disrupt nuclear family narratives that place men as heads of households. For these traditional heads of household, the care work

performed by women is an entitlement rather than something that men and women render to others as beneficial to an entire community.

My approach to explore male characters who othermother in Morrison's work traces an arc, from an obvious instance of othermothering by the unnamed blacksmith in *A Mercy*, through the, perhaps, more literarily traditional narrative of male othermothering of Hunter's Hunter in *Jazz*, to the community othermothering performed by Stamp Paid in *Beloved*, and, finally, to the physical and emotional othermothering that Paul D renders to Sethe. This arc follows neither the chronological publication of the novels[3] nor the chronology of the texts' settings.[4] Rather, my reading of the othermothering in Morrison's texts follows the potential for expanding othermothering as a naturalized function of women and of the nuclear family as a singular familial model. Morrison's male othermothers expand conventions of female-centric othermothering as well as normative narratives of masculinity because their actions encompass the healing and nurturance associated with maternal thinking rather than the protective and disciplinary qualities traditionally associated with fathers.

A Mercy

Although *A Mercy* focuses on the roots of slavery and racism in colonial America, the blacksmith's role as an othermother is readily identifiable when he becomes a foster parent. However, Morrison first establishes the blacksmith as a caregiver in *A Mercy*, through "his kindness and healing powers" (154) when he cures Sorrow of her illness and later cares for Rebekka during her bout of small pox.[5] For the women, the blacksmith is "a savior" (150) who cures Sorrow's strange fever and boils with vinegar and her own blood (150) and knows how to "lessen the scarring" (155) from smallpox. The blacksmith's othermothering seamlessly unfolds when the villagers entrust him with Malaik, a black foundling child who may or may not be related to the white dead man with whom he travelled.

To the enslaved Florens's great detriment, the blacksmith, in effect, chooses his parental love for the child placed in his care over his romantic and heretofore passionate desire for her (151). The blacksmith is the "you" that Florens addresses in her first-person narrated interstices of the novel and, for her, "[t]here is only you. Nothing outside of you" (44). Yet the blacksmith calls for Malaik first when he returns from caring for Rebekka, and he assumes that Florens has hurt Malaik without actually seeing what has transpired or listening to her version of the story (165). The blacksmith's assumption seems based on deeper gender issues: he values Malaik more as his potential male heir and cannot reconcile his sexual image of Florens with his expectations of a caregiver, nor can he picture a slave as a mother. Florens, deprived of her own mother and

despite Lina's care for her, has not matured enough to mother a child effectively and certainly not when she seems sexually obsessed with the blacksmith. She is in need of effective othermothering herself. Florens has already sensed the defection of the blacksmith's affections toward Malaik, "[a]s if he is your future" (160). Florens believes her future lies with the blacksmith; however, the blacksmith realizes that the future of African Americans lies in care work for and othermothering of black children. Driven by her desire, Florens believes that for her "to have [a life]" (43) beyond slavery depends on the blacksmith loving her rather than on care work she can bestow for the benefit of others and a larger community.

Morrison's text subverts the "master narrative" of romantic love through a man's eager othermothering of a child, which leads instead to his repudiation of his love for a woman, particularly because that woman does not measure up to his expectations of a mother figure. Unlike Florens, who is so caught up in her passion that she disregards all else, the blacksmith immediately understands the importance of caring for and transmitting his values to the next generation and accepts Malaik as his child. In light of his new responsibilities as an othermother, the blacksmith's desire for Florens, an emotional connection that had previously seemed insatiable, disappears (161). Malaik's appearance and need of a parent give the blacksmith a future generation in which to invest his care and love without the entanglement of slavery that follows Florens. Furthermore, Florens's status as a slave, for the blacksmith, is two-fold: Vaark owns her outright, and she is enslaved to her passions and is lacking in reason. The blacksmith realizes that he cannot raise Malaik as a freed person, in body and mind, with Florens's slave-like influence in his household. When the blacksmith applies his healing skills to Malaik's dislocated shoulder, he knocks Florens literally out of his way, and figuratively out of his life, in his rush to care for the injured child. This depiction of the blacksmith as prioritizing care for a child over his romantic and sexual relationship with Florens not only undermines the idea of women as primary caregivers, a role for which Florens seems particularly ill-equipped, but also challenges masculine norms and the primacy of the nuclear family as a universally workable, or even desirable, family model.[6] The blacksmith is more than capable of othermothering Malaik on his own.

Jazz

Hunter's Hunter, or Henry Lestory, assumes, in some respects, an othermothering role for the orphaned Joe Trace similar to the tradition in literature of men raising others' orphaned or fatherless sons—teaching them to hunt and fish and the like as part of a rite of passage into manhood. Susan Neal Mayberry contends that "Morrison routinely uses skill in hunting—that is, tracking …

as a trope for the process of black male identity formation" (198). In addition to hunting and being able to feed himself, Joe recounts that Hunter taught him two lessons, the first of which is: "the secret of kindness from whitepeople—they had to pity a thing before they could like it" (Morrison, *Jazz* 125). This lesson exemplifies othermothering in that it helps Joe to understand his marginalized position in a complicated, racialized society.

Hunter's othermothering subverts the narrative of young men gaining mastery over nature, and women, in the process of attaining manhood through the second lesson. That Joe "forgot" this other lesson becomes evident in his murder of his lover and the harm his affair causes. Unlike other literary examples in which hunting and killing an animal assumes the status of a rite of passage into manhood through violence, Hunter's message for hunting is less one of dominance over one's prey and more a lesson in gentleness for and symbiosis with nature and people: "never kill the tender and nothing female if you can help it" (175). Although in some respects this admonishment to harm "nothing female" may seem to reproduce a narrative of masculinity that obligates men to protect women, Hunter does not appear to protect women in a physical manner at all but rather provides care when needed, especially towards Wild. His gentleness and care are more representative of mothering, particularly nurturance and healing, than paternalistic protection or discipline. Hunter discourages Joe from tracking Wild but also encourages him to show compassion for others because "[c]razy people [like Wild] got their reasons" for their actions (175). Joe fails to fully interpellate this second, forgotten lesson in light of his affair with and murder of Dorcas. Hunter's example of gentleness contradicts the traditional narrative of sons learning to hunt—to be "real men"—from fathers and surrogate father figures. Hunter's example of othermothering presents an alternative black masculinity that questions traditional literary depictions of white masculinity, often rooted in violence or other exercises of privilege or power.

Hunter's othermothering and care of Wild completely lacks mastery and seems based in compassion and respect. When Wild goes into labour, Hunter midwifes the delivery of the baby and places him with a foster family. Hunter's midwifery, a traditionally female role, also shows his tenderness undermines common ideas of masculinity that, on the one hand, fears childbirth, and on the other, devalues it. Perhaps Hunter selects Joe to othermother because he feels some obligation to help the child whom he has delivered and whose mother has summarily abandoned.

Hunter's othermothering of Wild does seem, on the surface and in his own estimation, somewhat ineffective: "If he had handled it right, maybe she would have stayed in the house, nursed her baby, learned how to dress and talk to folks" (167). I am not convinced that Hunter's othermothering of Wild is such

an abject failure. Perhaps Wild's experiences of rape and abuse left her too damaged to come to self-realization through any amount of othermothering. However, Hunter's othermothering may have been enough for Wild to claim her independence to live in the woods by herself and enough for her to survive on her own. He meets Ruddick's criteria of nurturance and training for Joe, preservation, nurturance for Wild. Perhaps Hunter also meets Morrison's additional criterion of healing for Wild, which seems more ambiguous an outcome in the text. Yet he is not able to train Wild for social acceptability other than her alluded-to relationship with Golden Gray. Hunter's othermothering of Wild supports not only the hypothesis of the need for othermothering among damaged adults, it also presents an argument that nuclear family models were not relevant to or necessarily attainable for African Americans in the pre- and post-slavery eras of U.S. history.

Beloved

In contemporary African American communities, women have become community leaders through their extensive othermothering of both biologically related children and adults and of non-related individuals in the community in need of care. Feminist scholars who study women of colour and motherhood, such as Stanlie James and Arlene E. Edwards, maintain that othermothering has given rise to "community mothering" (Edwards 87) and contend that othermothering in African American communities is a site for social transformation. Othermothering on individual and communal levels makes possible the transmission of community values from one generation to the next. Communal othermothering provides a sense of stability and belonging to many African Americans in the wake of slavery and the continued oppression that they experience through institutionalized racism.

Although Baby Suggs cares for Sethe and her grandchildren on a personal level, she performs care work for the African American community at large through her "holy" functions. Baby Suggs "loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed" (Morrison, *Beloved* 102) by helping the African Americans in Cincinnati to love themselves and, thereby, begin to heal from the physical and psychological wounds of slavery. Baby Suggs recognizes that "[y]onder they do not love your flesh" (103) and that it is incumbent upon African Americans to "foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color" (Collins 57). Baby Suggs's care work as an othermother to her community, what she feels is the only contribution she can make, is critical for the future generations of African Americans if they were to live as freed people in a society that had recently practiced slavery and in racialized systems of oppression after slavery was legally abolished. Ultimately, however, Baby Suggs

relinquishes her position as a communal othermother when she can neither condemn nor approve of Sethe's "rough choice" between the enslavement or death of her children.

Stamp Paid does not perform othermothering to the extent that other characters in Morrison's novels do, but he fulfills that role, much like Baby Suggs, in the sense that othermothers hold respected positions in their communities and have value ascribed to their opinions. Because of his aid to individuals that also builds the community, Stamp has become a venerable figure among African Americans in Cincinnati: "Once Stamp Paid brought you a coat, got the message to you, saved your life, or fixed the cistern he took the liberty of walking in your door as though it were his own. Since all his visits were beneficial, his step or holler through a doorway got a bright welcome" (Morrison, *Beloved* 205). When Stamp Paid learns that Paul D has been sleeping in the church basement, he chastises Ella, and by extension the rest of the community, for their neglect of "coloredfolk" in need and their shunning of Sethe. Although Stamp Paid cannot single-handedly bring about a reconciliation between Sethe and Paul D and the rest of the community, he endeavours to bring the inhabitants of 124 back into the community by defending Sethe's connection to Baby Suggs and by attempting to apologize to her and to Paul D for the rifts that he has directly influenced. Instead of abandoning the field to public opinion as Baby Suggs did, Stamp Paid focuses on reconciliation and making amends for his own alienating actions. His efforts serve as an endorsement to the community and to Paul D to forgive Sethe. Because Stamp Paid's brand of othermothering functions primarily at the communal level, his persistence and willingness to ensure the survival of the African American community through preservation, nurturance, and training establish him as an othermother. Stamp has aided in building the African American community in a literal sense by ferrying slaves across the river but also in a figurative sense through his continued familiarity with the community and his guidance. His attitude of service to help other slaves in their escapes and his general charitableness in the Cincinnati black community demonstrate a necessary disruption in gendered roles concerning care work. Stamp Paid's redemption is not complete, since he seems to hold "unrealistic expectations of black women," especially toward Baby Suggs and Sethe (Mayberry 187). However, his othermothering demonstrates how black men can and do participate in care work on the communal level.

Beloved also presents examples of individual othermothering that allow the interconnections of African Americans to keep afloat the community during the Jim Crow era. In the closing pages of *Beloved*, Paul D visits Sethe after she has seemingly given up on living. After years of never settling too long in one place and loving "just a little bit" (Morrison, *Beloved* 54), in the singular moment when Paul D realizes that Sethe has lain down in the keeping room

with no intention of leaving it, he commits to othermother another human being who needs him.

On an individual level, Paul D expands female-centric othermothering through his care of Sethe and disrupts the nuclear family model by abjuring the role of an authoritarian father figure. Morrison writes the character of Paul D as "the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry" (Morrison, *Beloved* 20). Morrison herself claims that men such as Paul D and Stamp Paid are "free to love" (Mayberry 8), which indicates that they have reached a certain level of personal healing. Despite his horrifying experiences both at Sweet Home witnessing the disintegration of his family and sense of identity and being imprisoned in Georgia under execrable living conditions and the threat of sexual assault, Paul D has "something blessed in his manner" (Morrison, *Beloved* 20) and retains a sense of kindness toward other human beings. Although his initial entry into Sethe's household could be categorized as an assumption of the role of male head of household, Paul D's desertion and later return subvert such a conclusion. When Paul D returns to 124, he does so strictly as a caregiver for Sethe; he has turned from viewing Sethe as an animal to seeing her as a complex, autonomous human being.

Initially, Paul D's way of dealing with his memories and feelings is repression: "the tobacco tin lodged in his chest … nothing in this world could pry it open" (133). Of course, the tobacco tin bursts open when Paul D undergoes his own experiences of healing as a wounded adult, but his sexual experiences with Beloved seem to move him towards othermothering in the sense that his repressed feelings are freed to rise to the surface. Paul D initially sees himself as a rescuer of Sethe and Denver rather than becoming an othermother when he drives out the ghost at the beginning of the narrative: "He thought he had made it safe, had gotten rid of the danger; beat the shit out of it; run it off the place and showed it and everybody else the difference between a mule and a plow. And because she had not done it before he got there her own self, he thought it was because she could not do it" (193). Paul D views Sethe's willingness to sacrifice her children as her own means to achieve safety in a hostile environment. He sees her actions as selfish, and, perhaps, he would not have made the same choice as Sethe; however, he also does not love as deeply as Sethe does because of his fear of loss. Moreover, the simple truth is that the presence of black men in African American households did not guarantee safety at all, not in the Jim Crow era and not in the 1980s in which Morrison was writing. Paul D eventually realizes that his involvement with Sethe and her family had opened him up to the possibility of feeling love—a feeling that he had stifled for many years (261). Paul D can only contain his feelings by dulling them with alcohol—yet even then, his feelings come bubbling up in his memories of trying to escape from Sweet Home and the dignity that Sethe

restored to him when he was chained in a three-pronged neck harness. When his no-longer-repressed feelings enable Paul D to remember Sethe's kindness to him in a moment when he felt the most ashamed, he is able to assume the role of othermother for Sethe and "put his story next to hers" (322).

Because of his experiences and the systematic "feminization" that black men underwent as slaves, Paul D resembles Hortense J. Spillers' assessment of how African American men can achieve wholeness and self-realization. The gesture towards becoming an othermother to Sethe at the end of *Beloved* and "saying yes to the female within" (Spillers 80) is a transformative process that Paul D undergoes throughout the narrative, even as Morrison offers glimpses into the past that shapes him. He did not face the same choices as Sethe or Halle, but Paul D seems to have more resilience in the face of what he has experienced that enables him to preserve and nurture Sethe and help her to heal. His own resilience allows Paul D to become an othermother to help others learn similar strategies for emotional survival in the face of systemic racialized oppression and the legacy of slavery.

Ultimately, Paul D wants to "put his story next to" Sethe's rather than incorporate or integrate their stories into a single narrative that he could then dominate as a romantic rescuer or a father figure. Although women become emotional in his presence and Paul D and Sethe enter into a romantic relationship at the beginning of the novel, he initially does not understand the full significance of Sethe's rape at the hands of the schoolteacher's nephews when they take her breastmilk. Paul D is more concerned with the visible scars of the lash on Sethe's back and that she underwent flogging when she was pregnant; he does not fully grasp the psychological effects of rape and the symbolic power of Sethe's breastmilk as representative of her motherhood and connection to her children. Paul D does not rescue Sethe so much as he comes to understand her and what she went through. His acceptance and understanding of Sethe lead to his emotional and physical care for her in an othermothering capacity rather than in the role of a nuclear family patriarch. As an othermother, Paul D assumes a traditionally female role of care worker.

When Paul D "says yes to the female within," he is not necessarily feminized but brings a needed masculine participation to othermothering. While Sethe's healing has begun, it is not completely facilitated through her mother-daughter relationships with Baby Suggs, Beloved, and Denver. Sethe's journey to discovering her own self-worth holds more potential through her reconciliation with Paul D and his willingness to provide the emotional support as well as the physical care that she needs to heal her wounded spirit. Paul D is instrumental in helping to restore Sethe's sense of self and her value as a human being, after her relationship with Beloved has rendered Sethe a psychological mess and completely dependent on others for her care. If Sethe's reclamation

of her selfhood is representative of a collective healing for those descended from slaves as Allison Mackey suggests (43), the participation of black men as othermothers seems just as compelling and necessary to foster healing of the African American community.

As with biological mothering and nurturance, othermothering is not necessarily an instinctive process for men or women. More generally, emotional resilience in the face of trauma is a quality that produces othermothers and their commitment to othermothering. Paul D is far from a perfect human being and has his own emotional issues with which to deal, including an enduring bitterness over his enslavement and his later imprisonment. However, Paul D's suffering at the hands of white society has not entirely eroded his sense of empathy and compassion towards others or his sense of self. His emotional perseverance enables him to develop the capacity to othermother and challenges the idea of men as unemotional and/or incapable of care work that includes the psychological components of nurture and healing.

Stamp Paid's communal othermothering in an African American community and Paul D's othermothering of Sethe disrupt the gendered narrative of idealized motherhood. Morrison's men who othermother disprove the essentialized assumption that to think and act maternally, one must be female, which expands the edifice of female-centric othermothering, especially for African American women, and offers up Morrison's vision of how black men should and do contribute to their communities.

Conclusion

Through these characters and their othermothering of children and other damaged individuals in their communities, Morrison disrupts not only gendered literary narratives of masculinity but also the primacy of the nuclear family as a universal familial model. Morrison's male othermothers challenge the concept that women are naturally inclined to provide care as mothers and othermothers by showing men who engage in the maternal characteristics of preservation, nurturance, training, and healing. Her literary depictions may more accurately reflect othermothering in African American communities than the nuclear family model, and demonstrate alternative familial models that give African Americans the tools they need to survive and realize their potential as human beings in a racist society that marginalizes them.

Families as the seat of cultural reproduction inculcate a sense of self among members that can be empowering or disempowering for individuals. If the community, even with women as the "heads," produces families that follow the Eurocentric head of household model that is hierarchical and authoritarian, then it is problematic in terms of gender and reproduces paternalistic expec-

tations of governance. Such families resemble neither the realities of African American communities nor allow for care work through othermothering, based on the needs of the cared for and the predisposition of the caregiver, regardless of gender. As a result, women are far too often cast as naturalized caregivers and men are excluded from full participation as othermothers, both to the detriment of the individuals involved and the larger community's needs.

However, othermothering by women and men that fosters a fluid family dynamic is a better family model for the present and the future, not only in African American communities but in American society in general. Rather than depicting othermothering as a utopian ideal or solely empowering for African American women, Morrison disrupts the narrative around othermothering and the latent reification of gender roles in care work in order to free black women from gendered expectations of care and to integrate black men into systems of care work as well as to recognize the care work that many black men already contribute. The men who othermother in Morrison's novels demonstrate not only the crucial need for men to engage in othermothering but also the responsibilities of African American communities to support othermothers, male and female. Othermothers engage in collective healing, transmission of African American cultural values and in the ability to withstand and actively change the dominant racialized, heteronormative rhetoric about what constitutes a family.

Endnotes

[1]The "nuclear family model" indicates a male head of household whose work outside the home is the main source of family income, a female caregiver who works primarily inside the home, and any children in the household. Although in many ways the nuclear family is not the dominant family model in the US as far as number of families who represent it, it is still the dominant model in discourses and narratives about the family, particularly in discussions about welfare reform and parental rights (Smith 51).

[2]Examples of these relationships include Sethe and Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, Violet and Alice in *Jazz*, as identified by O'Reilly. I would also include the women at the Convent in *Paradise*, Lina and Rebekka in *A Mercy*, and the women of Lotus and Miss Ethel's care for Cee in *Home*.

[3]*A Mercy* (2008), *Jazz* (1992), *Beloved* (1987).

[4]*A Mercy* is set in the colonial period; *Jazz* takes place roughly from the 1870s through the 1920s; events in *Beloved* happen prior to and after the Civil War.

[5]I would also argue that Will and Scully, indentured servants whom Vaark occasionally hires from their owner in *A Mercy*, display some othermothering inclinations when they midwife the birth of Sorrow's child, but then they

abandon her and the baby on the shoreline while praising each other. However, in this scene when Sorrow becomes "Complete," it is perhaps more striking and salient that Sorrow "was convinced that this time she had done something, something important, by herself" (Morrison, *A Mercy* 157). Her mothering of herself through the process of giving birth to a child is Sorrow's path to mental wholeness and self-empowerment rather than resulting from the brief assistance of two white men.

[6]Admittedly, although the blacksmith may well be an effective othermother for Malaik, he also causes collateral damage by disrupting the women's community of Florens, Lina, Rebekka, and Sorrow (Morrison, *A Mercy* 71).

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Disruptive Speech

A Discursive Analysis of Single Mother Memoirs and the Challenge to Compulsory Heterosexuality

This article examines the discursive construction of single motherhood in contemporary creative non-fiction. Specifically, I analyze the way single motherhood is imagined in Robin Silbergleid's Texas Girl, *Casey Goldberg, Beth Jones, and Pamela Ferdinand's* Three Wishes, *and Andrea Askowitz's* My Miserable Lonely Lesbian Pregnancy. *My analysis focuses particularly on the ways that these authors use the discourse of maternity to comment on their experience of compulsory heterosexuality.*

In 2013, acclaimed filmmaker Nina Davenport, promoting her autobiographical documentary *First Comes Love* at the Sarasota Film Festival, reflected on the response that she has received to her film. Davenport said that women would stop her in the street to applaud the courage with which she told her own story of deciding to become a single mother by choice (SMC): "People come up to me crying … there was a 25-year-old woman who said 'I know I want a kid and I just feel like I'm never gonna meet a guy and you made me feel better about it.' I mean don't ask me why she thinks that, she's *gorgeous*, but whatever" (McFadden, emphasis mine). In one fleeting comment, Davenport cut to the heart of a discursive tension that structures almost every narrative of single motherhood by choice: the construction of the choice to single parent as evidence of failed mating. By failed mating, I am referring to the ways that motherhood is cast, culturally, as a temporal narrative that requires participation in a heterosexual marriage as a precondition for maternal subjectivity. By entering into maternity without a partner, SMCs are often cast as having "given up" on the quest to find a mate to facilitate the transition to parenthood, as if there is not just a biological clock but a romantic one as well. This logic extends as a verdict on a woman's ability to attract a partner, which

enables Davenport to express skepticism when approached by a "gorgeous" twenty-five-year-old woman. In other words, hetero-femininity is imagined to be a necessary asset that can be leveraged to acquire a male partner, which is the entrance fee to normative mothering. Acquiring a male partner, while still fertile, is essential within heteronormative logic. This way of thinking encourages women to prioritize dating when young in order to enter into long-term monogamous relationships "in time" for childrearing. The choice to mother without a partner is cast as an unfortunate but necessary "Plan B" for women nearing the end of their years of reproductive fertility. Pursuing single motherhood because "reproductive time" is elapsing is the premise for Hollywood depictions of single motherhood in films such as *The Next Best Thing* (2000), *The Switch* (2010), and *The Backup Plan* (2010). Even their titles imply a temporal logic—reinforcing the notion that "the best thing" or "the first plan" would have necessarily involved a conventional heterosexual marriage followed by a planned pregnancy. The premise of these films reinforces the notion that "choosing" single motherhood is the kind of decision that can be morally redeemed in the face of a compelling biological deadline under which to have children.

Choosing to mother while unpartnered is a choice that goes directly against the idealized heterosexual nuclear family model. For this reason, the criteria used to decide whether and/or how to pursue single motherhood are important to examine. These criteria can reflect the terms in which a woman understands her relationship to maternity, sexuality, and agency. Although single mothers have been studied as a sociological phenomenon, the study of self-representations of single mothers by choice has been limited. This article contributes to the study of autobiographical narratives by SMCs. I am particularly interested in how SMCs narrate their decision-making process, and what the process can reveal about gender relations and sexual autonomy in the context of choosing to parent. In this article, I explore three memoirs written by women who consider and pursue single motherhood by choice: *Three Wishes* by Carey Goldberg, Beth Jones, and Pamela Ferdinand, *Texas Girl* by Robin Silbergleid, and *My Miserable, Lonely, Lesbian Pregnancy* by Andrea Askowitz. I argue that these texts rely on maternity as a narrative tool to frame larger conversations about compulsory heterosexuality, reproductive time, and self-actualization. These narratives demonstrate the liberatory potential of queered conception narratives that divorce sexuality from maternity in order to push for broader frameworks with which to imagine maternal subjectivity, agency, and sexuality.

Who's Single Motherhood? Who's Choice?

The term "single mother by choice" was coined in 1981 by Jane Mattes,

founder of the international Single Mothers by Choice network and author of the book by the same name. Single Mothers by Choice boasts over thirty thousand members who identify either as "thinking," "trying," or "mothering" ("About"). Local chapters of Single Mothers by Choice host social events, support group meetings, and share resources about fertility, sperm donation, adoption, legal issues, and parenting philosophies. Similarly, Mikki Morrissette, author of *Choosing Single Motherhood: The Thinking Woman's Guide*, coined the term "choice mom" to emphasize the choice to mother rather than marital status. The website *Choice Moms* hosts a message board, podcast, e-guides and resources for women choosing "choice motherhood."

Both Single Mothers by Choice and Choice Moms define their membership through a discourse of agency and choice. Single Mothers by Choice defines SMCs as "[women] *willing to take the initiative*. Her child might have been conceived or adopted. What we all have in common is that we are *willing to take on the responsibility* of raising our children knowing that, at least at the outset, we will be parenting alone" ("Philosophy", emphasis in original). Similarly, Choice Moms defines a "choice mom" as a "single woman who *proactively* decides to become the best mother she can, through adoption or conception. Sometimes she finds a partner after she marches toward her goal of building a family; sometimes she doesn't" ("About Choice Moms", emphasis in original). What distinguishes SMCs from the generalized title of "single mothers" is the notion of *choice*. SMCs are understood to be active agents in the formation of their lives rather than passive actors. The way this distinction plays out is in terms of social class, and its intersecting axes of power relations, such as race, ability, and sexuality. Labelling upper-middle-class single motherhood based on the way it is chosen implicitly sets up SMCs as morally sound neoliberal subjects, as opposed to victims of circumstance. Furthermore, the distinction risks implying that single women who choose to carry unplanned pregnancies have not chosen parenthood. By way of example, both the Single Mothers by Choice and Choice Moms networks identify women over thirty-five with high levels of postsecondary education as a core demographic. As Mikki Morrisette writes,

> Self-involved, immature or depressed parents, wracked by emotional issues and financial worries, tend to neglect their kids. That's the basic explanation for [statistics that suggest children of single mothers are at risk of dropping out of high school or becoming engaged in criminalized activity] … the typical Choice Mom—who tends to be older, more well-educated, and more well-paid than many unprepared single mothers—are quite focused on the needs of their children. ("About Choice Moms")

"Single Mothers by Choice" is a term that comes from the organization, but it has been adopted as a category in social research as well. In both cultural representations and sociological studies of single motherhood, "single mothers by choice" are set up as a contrast to the "single mother by circumstance." SMCs are cast as examples of women pursuing their biological destiny in the face of romantic disappointment, as opposed to the tropes of paternal abandonment and poverty that characterize depictions of single mothers broadly defined. In both representational models of single motherhood, the heterosexual nuclear family remains anchored as a standardizing ideal against which other family models are judged.

Hayford and Guzzo's statistical analysis demonstrates that contrary to the proliferation of narratives both in self-help literature and in Hollywood, SMCs are not the social trend such a rise in visibility would otherwise suggest. Despite the rise in media visibility, Hayford and Guzzo estimate that less than 3 percent of college-educated women became single mothers in the early 2000s. Rather than serving as evidence of a new social trend, Hayford and Guzzo interpret the rise in visibility of SMCs in Hollywood as a corrective commentary on single motherhood generally. They write,

> "By focusing on the (very few) affluent, older single mothers by choice, media narratives at best ignore and at worst disparage other single parents. Most importantly, the focus on SMCs takes attention away from the high levels of single motherhood, often *not* by choice, that have existed for decades among the disadvantaged and are linked to structural social and economic conditions." (72)

Similarly, Davies and Rains argue that media depictions of SMCs "over-simplify the real-life experiences of many women by ignoring the gender relations within which single motherhood occurs" (550). Davies and Rains in particular highlight the *Murphy Brown* storyline from the early 1990s, in which the lead character, a middle-aged professional woman, becomes a single mother. The plot was criticized at the time by former American Vice President Dan Quayle as "mocking the importance of fathers" (544). Murphy Brown is often invoked as the prototypical SMC: white, of advanced maternal age, careerist, and financially established. However, as Davies and Rain make clear, the cultural debates about the *Murphy Brown* storyline that took place in the 1990s conveniently failed to remember the circumstances around the character's pregnancy: Murphy Brown became pregnant by accident in the context of a relationship. The character chooses to carry the pregnancy to term, and the narrative arc could even be read as an anti-abortion storyline. Furthermore, her choice to carry the pregnancy to term ends her relationship

with her partner, who refused to co-parent the child as she had invited him to do. Murphy Brown is certainly a popular representation of an independent single mother, but the character's foray into single motherhood is mitigated by heartbreak and her partner's refusal to co-parent. For Davies and Rains, media portrayals of single mothers decontextualize the gendered context in which the "choice" to parent is made. They argue for deeper examinations of how SMCs make their decision to solo parent.

This article is a response to their invitation. By examining the self-representations of SMCs, my study focuses on how SMCs articulate the ways in which the choice to parent solo was made. Specifically, I am interested in the role of gender expectations in shaping the choice to parent, and how maternal subjectivity is imagined as the decision is made. As I will argue, the discourses that SMC memoirists rely on in order to frame their decision to single parent include a relief at having distance from the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality. Parenting outside a nuclear heterosexual family model offers opportunities for the authors to establish a relationship with their own sense of agency and sexuality, which they speculate may not have happened in a traditional family model. In this way, SMC autobiographies can be read as narratives that imagine a life course model disentangled from compulsory heterosexuality.

Three Wishes

Three Wishes, a memoir written by Carey Goldberg, Beth Jones, and Pamela Ferdinand, follows three friends through their mid-late thirties as they each consider pursuing single motherhood by choice. At the age of thirty-nine, Carey decides to buy donor sperm because, as she writes, "It was biological midnight, time to give up on romantic love, and become a single mother. I was not desired. Not loved" (5). Carey frames her choice as a biological necessity, driven by the urgency that she was undesirable as a partner. The twinning of undesirability with maternity invokes the Madonna-whore paradigm. Carey's decision to become a single mother is made in tandem with the decision to "give up on romantic love." In order to plan to parent solo, she would need to reconceive of her ideas about her own sexuality and its role in the timeline of her life.

On the eve of attempting to conceive a child using donor sperm, Carey meets Sprax, a love interest, whom she pursues despite the anxieties that he is "too attractive for her." She writes, "The new power of having vials lessened the sting of rejection. I did not need him" (13). Making the decision to pursue donor sperm disentangled Carey's sexuality from reproduction, which allows her to pursue relationships with men with less pressure. After a brief romance, she and Sprax separate, but he agrees to be her known donor, and she conceives

and delivers a child as a single mother. No longer requiring her anonymous donor sperm, Carey gifts her vials to her friend Beth, whose marriage ended spontaneously at the age of thirty-five when she had expected to begin trying to conceive. After four years, Beth considers using the donor sperm that Carey purchased to become a single mother by choice, in tandem with exploring other ways "to redefine herself" (85). Beth writes:

> I'd missed my projected motherhood deadline and, at thirty-nine, was barreling toward that scary marker for women: forty. I'd become careless with birth control, even with completely inappropriate partners. And that was a wake-up call, a milestone, a clear indication that I should stop being dismissive of my motives. I needed to be proactive, and that meant not using contraceptive failure as the means for constructing the future. (92)

As she considers becoming inseminated with donor sperm, she muses that it resembles a "post-modern arranged marriage. Not perfect, but what is? …The searching inspired a blend of exhilaration and depression" (94). Beth's choice is framed as a choice between having a child and giving up on love. Before using the donor sperm, Beth meets and partners with Phil, and together they have a child. At which point, Beth passes the donor vials to her friend Pam, who claims that "At 37 years old, I confronted myself. I considered what I could not live without and immediately knew it was a child" (108). Almost as soon as she accepts the vials, she enters into a known donor agreement with a friend. As she contemplates the merits of a known versus unknown donor, she falls in love with a partner and, eventually, conceives a child with him.

Three Wishes offers a contradictory meditation on single motherhood by choice. In the memoir, single motherhood by choice is presented as an underestimated "Plan B," which the narrators enter into tentatively, and although Carey is the first to pursue the decision, Pamela and Beth offer relief that they do not, in the end, need to. Heterosexual marriage, as the container for family life, remains in place as a preferred "Plan A."

Perhaps the most compelling contribution from *Three Wishes* is the insight that the willingness to pursue single motherhood by choice offers the narrators. Carey explains:

> For twenty-five-odd years, romance had been the central focus of my life … the deep-down priority had been … men. Now, to my own shock and gigantic relief, those days were over. And they were over because … I had finally convinced myself life without a man could be just as fulfilling as life with one… To a few friends who were

> parents, I expressed my dismay: why didn't you tell me that my love for a child could be so amazing and satisfying? Why didn't anyone push me harder to do this, and tell me more emphatically that really, Carey, if you possibly can, you should make sure to become a mother? It seemed no accident that "fulfilled" has the word "filled" in it. My life felt full, rich, centered. (116)

On dating, Carey continues, "I had quit. It felt subversive and liberating, like a bra burning. Enormous swaths of our culture concerned self-improvement for the purposes of romance, movies and books whose only real arc followed romance, endless girl talk revolving only around romance. I would henceforth be happily immune" (9). Pam expresses similar surprise at how fulfilling she found her sense of her own life's trajectory once she imagined herself outside of a heterosexual love script. She writes, "In accepting donor sperm, I also accepted that I could script my own life and not wait for it to happen to me. I could follow an untraditional route and still be happy" (273).

In *Three Wishes*, the decision to single parent for each of the narrators involves a reassessment of their relationship to heterosexual dating conventions. In the process of imagining themselves situated outside of normative family and dating models, the authors express relief, satisfaction, and surprise at how liberated they felt. Importantly, it is not simply distance from heteronormative dating conventions but rather distance from the temporal construction of them. By pursuing single motherhood by choice, the authors disrupt the heteronormative order of things.

Texas Girl

Relief at the distance that maternity offers from heterosexual romance is also expressed in Robin Silbergleid's memoir *Texas Girl*. Silbergleid began planning to conceive a child on her own, by choice, at twenty-seven. She reflects on her experience with heterosexual dating:

> I'd realized sometime in those long months of thinking about getting pregnant and trying to get pregnant that the whole reason I'd dated men was because everyone knew that dating was the first step toward having a baby, which was the only thing I really ever wanted. Now I could be done with all that. Thank goodness. (154)

Silbergleid's reflections construct heterosexual dating as a goal-oriented activity, required to access pregnancy and motherhood. Indeed, even as she begins to pursue single motherhood by choice she is constantly cautioned that

such a choice is not yet necessary given her age. She writes:

> "I just want you to understand what you're getting into. You're so young." That was what everyone said when I told them I was thinking about having a baby. Some variation on you're so young, what if you meet a great guy? Or why now? Or why don't you wait until you have tenure? All these questions told me was how little my desires resembled those of other women my age, or how frightened most single women were of not finding a partner and how culturally expected marriage was. Even women I'd chatted with online, women who were also thinking about becoming single moms, encouraged me to wait, date a little, keep single motherhood in mind as a backup plan; how could it possibly be my first choice? (66)

Yet it was her first choice. Silbergleid's narrative consistently places her outside a heterosexual life course model. When her best friend, Aimee, marries a man, Silbergleid reflects on the consequences it has for their friendship and laments that she feels like a "jilted lover." After having a child and co-parenting with her husband, Aimee "seemed like she lived in another galaxy, hetero world" (14). Silbergleid's language is significant and points to the ways that her choice to single mother challenges the traditional family model. Silbergleid does not overtly identify as a queer author in the text, but her distance from heteronormative ideals is clear. She becomes alienated not only from the two-parent norm, but from the ways that heterosexual families reposition her friendships with women parenting with male partners. One of the most interesting ways in which she narrates her distance from heteronormativity is by framing it as a script that she has deviated from. She writes:

> In my introductory literature classes I talk to my students about what makes a good story or, really, they talk to me about it. Plot, they shout … The girl wants the guy; the girl can't have the guy; of course in the end the girl ends up with the guy. It makes for lovely fiction. But what happens when the story isn't true? What happens when the heroine decides at 27 that she wants to be a single mom and she finally gets pregnant and then she has a long drawn out miscarriage and spends a couple months being depressed? What kind of story is that? (136)

Silbergleid positions her choice as off-script and, in so doing, narrates her conception story according to a different set of milestones. She begins her memoir by telling the story of conceiving her daughter, saying the moment of conception was not the bio-medical transaction that inserted sperm into

her uterus, but rather, the moment she decided not to co-parent with her on-again, off-again lover. By deciding not to co-parent with her lover, she realized she effectively was deciding to pursue single motherhood. Upon making that decision, Silbergleid adds that "something in me shivered and burst open, something beyond narrative, beyond the predictable life story of man plus woman equals baby, and in the words that travelled across the phone lines, something marvelous began to take shape" (3-4).

As Silbergleid describes the progression of her pregnancy, she considers ways that her daughter lived inside her body, in the "pocket of an ovary" while Silbergleid attends her grandmother's funeral (6). Pursuing intrauterine insemination with anonymous donor sperm, Silbergleid muses that her doctor "knew my body better than anyone else in the world. We were two women who had created a child together." (111-2) In this way, Silbergleid's narrative queers normative conception stories by positioning her pregnancy as the result of the labour of two women.

Similarly, Carey from *Three Wishes* also articulates her choice to single parent as an opportunity to go "beyond narrative." While attending a friend's wedding with her young child, Carey listens as the bride refers to the event as the "most beautiful night of my life." Carey continues, "I told her how happy I was for her, but deep down, for myself, I felt an ugly surge of cynicism and disbelief. Brides follow a script and so do their emotions, I thought; you have to drink the Kool-Aid to hit those highs, and I don't anymore" (123). Both *Texas Girl* and *Three Wishes* situate the choice to single parent as a choice made by resisting a heteronormative life course model. Both texts make reference to how the narrative unfolding of one's life shifts when the decision to parent outside of a heterosexual love story is made.

My Miserable, Lonely, Lesbian Pregnancy

Andrea Askowitz similarly positions her pregnancy as decidedly oppositional to heteronormative conception narratives. In *My Miserable, Lonely, Lesbian Pregnancy*, Askowitz reflects on her decision to become a mother at thirty-five. She writes:

> Pregnancy and motherhood are experiences I crave. I want to connect myself to generations before and after me. I want to belong to the society of mothers. I want to recognize myself in another person. I want to create. And I'm almost 35; time is running out. (9)

Significantly, the biological "clock" informs Askowitz's decision to conceive, but her anxiety about family structure is less central to the narrative that she

presents. Askowitz's pregnancy is not framed as evidence that she could not achieve a fulfilling relationship with a man. Instead, as a lesbian, her path to maternity was always expected to be a medically supervised and carefully planned endeavour. She writes:

> I got pregnant after five years of planning, because, for a lesbian, there are no accidents. It didn't actually take me five years to conceive; I just talked about it and thought about it and took my temperature every morning for a very long time…. A lot of people ask me why I want children, and anyone entering parenthood should have to answer this question. But when I asked my straight, married friends why they wanted children, three of them said, "No one ever asked me that. People just ask when." (8)

Askowitz frames her relationship to maternity as the consequence of deliberation and planning, which invites oppositional examinations of heteronormative pregnancy as accidental and inevitable. However, it is in Askowitz's commentary about being single that she offers the most disruption to heteronormative familial codes. Throughout her memoir, Askowitz describes her pregnancy as lonely and miserable because she spends almost the entire pregnancy lamenting her recent breakup with her former partner, Kate. Although she grieves the end of the relationship, she confronts the fact that her hopes for her relationship with Kate were based on fantasy. Once she delivers her daughter, Tashi, Askowitz reflects on the ways that fantasy can inform an idealized notion of family life. She writes:

> The moment Tashi was born, I was different. I was calm and confident and completely content—the best me I've ever been. My anxiety faded, and for the first time that I can remember, I wasn't hoping for an imaginary future when life would be better. I was happy right where I was. I was proud of my decision to have a baby alone and felt strong and bold and special being a single, lesbian mom. (236)

For Askowitz, Tashi's arrival marks a shift into self-actualized time. Rather than position her maternity as a signal that her sexuality has ended, Askowitz gains perspective on her former relationship. Askowitz, like Silbergleid and the *Three Wishes* authors, experiences a sense of relief and liberation from a preordained narrative structure that her life was expected to take. By no longer "hoping for an imaginary future," Askowitz can strengthen her sense of agency as a single mother. In this way, Askowitz, too, is resisting the heteronormative model of a two-parent family. The nuclear family structure is premised on a

social model of economic dependency and the separation of spheres. As Robin Silbergleid argues in an academic essay about single motherhood:

> the stories that we tell about SMCs … demonstrate continued cultural anxiety about the changing nature of the American family…. In a culture without the gendered separation of public and private spheres, in which women do not need to rely on men for their financial well-being, the ideological force of narrative works even harder to create a cultural and psychological need for Plan A; much as the romance narrative emerged with the rise of capitalism in order to make desirable a gendered division of labor, the contemporary heteronarrative continues to police changing economic realities. Economically and biologically, heterosexual coupling no longer needs to be a woman's only choice for maternity. (Silbergleid, "Oh Baby!")

Silbergleid argues for recognition of the social forces that conspire to discursively construct a normative life course for women according to a trajectory that requires motherhood to be born out of a romance myth. As an alternative, she proposes, "a narrative model that allows us to take … the SMC on her own terms, to give value to her vision of reproduction instead of reproducing traditional narratives of family values" (Silbergleid, "Oh Baby!").

When Askowitz articulates that her desire to be a mother comes from her desire to be connected to the generations that came before her in her family, as well as to the "society of mothers," she is articulating her vision of reproduction on her own terms. She is not voicing a desire to join two families through the reproduction of biological kin, nor is she positioning her single-parent family as a symbol of lack. Rather, she frames her choice as "strong and bold and special." Like Askowitz, Silbergleid reflects on the stresses of single parenting in *Texas Girl* and notes that "I couldn't envision myself rolling over in bed to share my fears with a partner … I felt grounded, connected to my friends and the world" (194). As the narrators of *Three Wishes* conclude their memoir, they write, "We do believe there is magic in the moment when a woman becomes convinced she can reach her single-minded goal, to bear a child, by herself" (278).

Three Wishes, *Texas Girl*, and *My Miserable, Lonely, Lesbian Pregnancy* offer a celebration of single motherhood by choice as model for family planning that invites deeper reflections into how motherhood is framed in relation to time, compulsory heterosexuality, and self-actualization. These first person accounts contribute to a reimagining of the temporal construction of maternity as an antecedent to a romance narrative and offer alternative narratives for conception and family planning. In this way, these memoirs come closer

to Silbergleid's invitation to move "beyond narrative" and to take the single mother on her own terms.

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ANDREA O'REILLY

We Need to Talk about Patriarchal Motherhood

Essentialization, Naturalization, and Idealization in Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

This chapter considers how We Need to Talk about Kevin *disturbs and deconstructs the patriarchal mandates of essentialization, naturalization, and idealization. In patriarchal motherhood, it is assumed (and expected) that all women want to be mothers (essentialization), that maternal ability and motherlove are innate to all mothers (naturalization), and that all mothers find joy and purpose in motherhood (idealization). Although feminist criticism of the novel has examined various motherhood themes—including mother blame (Cusk), ideologies of good-bad mothering (Murphy; Muller; Robbins), maternal subjectivity and practice (Messer), and maternal ambivalence (Almond)—my reading of Kevin will seek to uncover "what lies beneath" the maternal angst discussed in the above criticism. I argue that the mother blame, "bad" mothering, and maternal ambivalence so evident in the novel and so central to discussions on the novel are the symptomatic manifestations of the essentialized, naturalized and idealized mandates and expectations of patriarchal motherhood. Eva is blamed and regarded as an ambivalent or bad mother precisely because she is seen as lacking the assumed innate desire and ability to mother as well as the happiness expected of women in and through motherhood. Kevin, thus, not only compellingly and convincingly conveys the discontents of patriarchal motherhood but, more importantly, it uncovers the cause of and reason for this maternal discontent: namely, the essentialization, naturalization and idealization of patriarchal motherhood. In moving beyond the representation of the symptoms of women's oppression in motherhood—ambivalence, blame, guilt, judgement—to an understanding of their cause, the novel opens up the possibility for change in the novel itself and, hopefully, in the lives of the mothers reading it.*

For the past twenty-five years, I have taught a women's studies course on

mothering and motherhood that examines how patriarchal motherhood is oppressive to women and how women may resist it through empowered mothering. The course opens with a discussion on how normative motherhood is informed and maintained by ten ideological assumptions that cause mothering to be oppressive to women, which I have termed essentialization, privatization, individualization, naturalization, normalization, idealization, biologicalization, expertization, intensification, and depoliticalization of motherhood. Essentialization positions maternity as basic to and the basis of female identity, whereas privatization locates mother work solely in the reproductive realm of the home. Similarly, individualization causes such mothering to be the work and responsibility of one person, whereas naturalization assumes that maternity is natural to women (i.e., all women naturally know how to mother) and that the work of mothering is driven by instinct rather than intelligence and developed by habit rather than skill. In turn, normalization limits and restricts maternal identity and practice to one specific mode: nuclear family. Wherein, the mother is a wife to a husband, and she assumes the role of the nurturer, whereas the husband assumes that of the provider. The expertization and intensification of motherhood—particularly as they are conveyed in what Hays has termed "intensive mothering," and what Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels call "the new momism"—cause childrearing to be all consuming and expert driven. Idealization sets unattainable expectations of and for mothers, and depolicialization characterizes childrearing solely as a private and non-political undertaking, with no social or political import. Finally, biologicalization, in its emphasis on blood ties, positions the birth mother as the "real" and authentic mother. The students then go on to explore these normative mandates of patriarchal motherhood in various maternal theories as well as in selected women's novels. One of the novels read by the students is Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*.

In this chapter, I will consider how *We Need to Talk about Kevin* disturbs and deconstructs the patriarchal mandates of essentialization, naturalization, and idealization. Again, in patriarchal motherhood it is assumed (and expected) that all women want to be mothers (essentialization), that maternal ability and motherlove are innate to all mothers (naturalization), and that all mothers find joy and purpose in motherhood (idealization). Although feminist criticism of the novel has examined various motherhood themes—including, mother blame (Cusk), ideologies of good-bad mothering (Murphy; Muller; Robbins), maternal subjectivity and practice (Messer), and maternal ambivalence (Almond)—my reading of *Kevin* will seek to uncover "what lies beneath" the maternal angst discussed in the above criticism. As Eva herself comments: "I feared what lay beneath. I feared at the bottom I hated my life and hated being a mother" (188). I will argue that the mother blame, "bad"

mothering, and maternal ambivalence so evident in the novel and so central to discussions on the novel are the symptomatic manifestations of the essentialized, naturalized, and idealized mandates and expectations of patriarchal motherhood. In other words, the maternal ambivalence Eva experiences as well as the blame and judgement that she (and many readers) assign to her mothering are created and maintained by these three ideological imperatives of normative motherhood. Eva is blamed and regarded as an ambivalent or bad mother precisely because she is seen as lacking the assumed innate desire and ability to mother as well as the happiness expected of women in and through motherhood). And that is why, in my view, the book disturbs so many readers: it shows that the sacred truths of motherhood —mothers love their children unconditionally, women are happy in motherhood, and women naturally know how to mother—are fictive or, perhaps more accurately, ideological constructions. But this is always why *Kevin* is such an important novel and required reading for those committed to challenging and changing patriarchal motherhood. *Kevin* not only compellingly and convincingly conveys the discontents of patriarchal motherhood but, more importantly, it uncovers the cause of and reason for this maternal discontent: namely, the essentialization, naturalization, and idealization of patriarchal motherhood. In moving beyond the representation of the symptoms of women's oppression in motherhood—ambivalence, blame, guilt, judgement—to an understanding of their cause, the novel, I believe, opens up the possibility for change in the novel itself and, hopefully, in the lives of the mothers reading it.

For those who have read *We Need to Talk Kevin*, "possibility," "change," and "hope" are not the words typically used to describe this novel about a mother whose sixteen-year-old son kills his high school classmates and, it is later revealed, his own sister and father. But I would suggest that it is precisely Eva's candid, retrospective meditations on her mothering that allow for an authentic critique of patriarchal motherhood. Indeed, as Eva writes to Franklin (her husband): "It's far less important to me to be liked these days than understood" (4). Jane Messer explains: "that part of Eva's maternal work … is her privatized maternal thinking while mothering Kevin and which she later engages in to produce the narrative" (16). However, as Messer goes on to argue

> these later letters of *uncensored protest*, argument, critical reflection come only after fifteen years of mothering Kevin. During which time she attempts to perform the social script of motherhood. Until *that Thursday*, she performs the tasks of maternal care with reservations, anger, mistrust and persistent ambivalence and even violence, but she always makes the attempt, and mutes and hides her 'real' feelings from Kevin and Franklin. (emphasis in original, 16)

Indeed, as Eva explains to Franklin, "I'd become accustomed to concealing things from you, but mostly thought crimes" (203). Attentive readers realize that what is at issue in the novel is not whether Eva fails at mothering but rather how patriarchal motherhood—in its mandates of essentialization, naturalization and idealization—cause all mothers to feel and experience maternal ambivalence, guilt, and blame. In making this argument, I am drawing on Adrienne Rich's crucial distinction "between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential* relationship of any women to her powers of reproduction—and children and the *institution*—which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (emphasis in original, 14). I argue that the novel, through Eva's retrospective uncensored protest, demarcates and distinguishes, as Rich theorized, the reality of patriarchal motherhood from the possibility and potentiality of mothering. Thus *Kevin,* to paraphrase Rich "is an attack on mothering as *it is defined and restricted under patriarchy* (emphasis in original, 14). The aim of this chapter is to explore the novel's critique of patriarchal motherhood under its three mandates of essentialization, naturalization, and idealization. The conclusion will consider how the novel in its critique opens up the possibility for empowered mothering.

Essentialization: "There Was Something Wrong with Me, Something Missing"

With the patriarchal mandate of essentialization, it is assumed and expected that all women want to become mothers and that maternal desire is innate to all women. Since Eva is happily married, in her mid-thirties, and has a successful career, the time and circumstances are certainly ideal for her to become a mother. However, as Eva relates many times throughout the novel, she has never experienced the assumed natural feminine longing to bear and raise children. She writes:

> For years I'd been awaiting that overriding urge I'd always heard about, the narcotic pining that draws women ineluctably to stranger's strollers in parks. I wanted to be drowned by the hormonal imperative to wake one day and throw my arms around your neck, reach down for you and pray that while that black flower bloomed behind my eyes you had just left me with child. (27)

However, as she goes on to explain:

> Whatever the trigger, it never entered my system, and that made me feel cheated. When I hadn't gone into maternal heat by mid-thirties, I

> worried that *there was something wrong with me, something missing*. By the time I gave birth to Kevin at thirty-seven, I had begun to anguish over whether, by not simply accepting this defect, I had amplified an incidental, perhaps chemical *deficiency* into a *flaw* of Shakespearean proportions. (emphasis added, 27)

The phrases "something was wrong with me" and "something missing" as well as the words "flaw" and "deficiency" signal Eva's awareness that she lacks the maternal desire expected of women. In an earlier letter to Franklin, she writes that she "root[ed] around in [her] mental attic for [her] original reservations about motherhood" (25). In response to this questioning, she compiles a list of what she calls the "the ten downsides of parenthood," including "unnatural altruism," "dementing boredom," "worthless social life," and "social demotion" (25-26). Reflecting on what she terms her misgivings," Eva comments: "They were selfish and mean and small minded, so that anyone compiling such a catalogue who chose to retain her tidy, airless, static dead-end desiccated family tree was not only short-sighted but a terrible person" (26). Yet later as she contemplates the list, she writes: "[I]t strikes me that, however damning, the conventional reservations about parenthood are practical. After all, now that children don't till your fields or take you in when you're incontinent there is no sensible reason to have them and it's amazing that with the advent of effective contraception anyone chooses to reproduce at all" (26-27). Eva does not reject children per se, as is argued in most readings of the novel, but, more specifically, the essentialist mandate that assumes that Eva, as a woman, should *want* to have children. Although there are moments in the novel—as seen above—that Eva judges and defends herself for lacking the maternal desire expected of her, she continues to regard maternity as alien to her sense of self and being in the world. Indeed, as she explains to Franklin: "Motherhood, now that is a foreign country" (19). And later she writes: "My visions of childrearing ... all seemed like pictures of someone else" (32).

Significantly informing Eva's denunciation of the essentialist mandate is a larger critique of the patriarchal role of mothers. In a letter, she explains to Franklin: "[I] was always horrified by the prospect of turning out like my mother" (30). In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich defines such a sentiment as "matraphobia": "the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother* (emphasis in original; 236). Matraphobia, Rich continues,

> can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree

> woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers, and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (236)

Eva's mother was agoraphobic and as a child Eva, in her words, "was always running errands for which I was too young and that therefore daunted me" (31). But Eva goes on to say: "But let me be candid. I *am* much like my mother…. [I]n pushing me to be her emissary … my mother managed to reproduce in me the same disproportionate anguish about minor interactions with the outside world (emphasis in original, 31). As she explains further in relation to her frequent travels for work: "I can't recall a single trip abroad that, up against it, I have truly wanted to take, that I haven't in some way dreaded and wanted desperately to get out of…. [The proposed trip] was a gauntlet I'd thrown down and compelled myself to pick up. If I was ever glad to have gone, I was never glad to go" (31). And later she writes: "Once I had habituated to rising to my own challenges—to proving repeatedly that I was independent, competent, mobile, and grown up—gradually the fear inverted: The one thing I dreaded more than another trip to Malaysia was staying home" (31). Significantly, she comments:

> So I wasn't afraid of becoming my mother, but *a* mother. I was afraid of being the steadfast, stationary anchor who provides a jumping off place for another young adventurer whose travels I might envy and whose future is till unmoored and unmapped. I was afraid of being that archetypal figure in the doorway—frowzy, a little plump—who waves good-bye as a backpack is stashed in the trunk; who dabs her eyes and blows kisses as a backpack is stashed in the trunk, who dabs her eyes with an apron ruffle in the fumes of departing exhaust; who turns forlornly to twist the latch and wash the too-few dishes by the sink as the silence in the room presses down like a dropped ceiling, More than leaving, I had developed a horror of being left. (emphasis in original, 31-32)

In this passage, in its repeated tropes of conventional motherhood, there is not a rejection of mothering per se but of the patriarchal institution of motherhood, which denies mothers a selfhood and life outside of their identity and work as mothers and demands of them selflessness, constancy, and sacrifice in motherhood. Indeed, as Eva explains further: "I was mortified by the prospect of becoming hopelessly trapped in someone else's story" (32). She was, as she explains to Franklin "*absolutely terrified of having a child*" and that "this terror is what must have snagged me, the way a ledge will tempt one to jump off.

The very insurmountability of the task, its very unattractiveness, was in the end what attracted me to it" (emphasis in original, 32).

The question that remains and that will be considered in the conclusion of the chapter is whether or not the absence of maternal desire is caused by the expectations of patriarchal motherhood. Does Eva fear and reject becoming a mother or being the "archetypal figure in the doorway" of patriarchal motherhood? Whatever the cause of her apprehensions about and aversion to maternity, it is clear that Eva does not possess the maternal desire that is assumed to be innate to women and that is required under the patriarchal mandate of essentialization.

Naturalization: "I Was Playing My Part"

In *The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood*, Barbara Almond writes that the *Kevin* "(r)aises especially difficult questions: What is a mother to do with a child she *cannot* love, a child she fears and hates? What is a child to do who cannot love his mother and knows she cannot love him? Can such a situation ever be resolved or remedied?" (emphasis in original, 112). Almond locates her discussion of *We Need to Talk about Kevin* in the context of her book's larger thematic and theoretical interest in maternal ambivalence; what she terms the "monster within" and "the hidden side of motherhood." Ambivalence, Almond explains in her introduction, "refers to a conflicted mental state, in which one has both loving and hating feelings for the same person. It characterizes all human relationships, not just that of mothers and child. Being able to tolerate both kinds of feelings, at different times, without having one feeling destroy the other, is a sign of good mental health" (8). Writing specifically on maternal ambivalence, author and psychotherapist, Roszika Parker defines it as "a complex and contradictory state of mind, shared by all mothers, in which loving and hating feelings exist side by side" (18). Almond argues "that ambivalence *itself* is not the problem but rather the guilt and anxiety that ambivalence provokes" (emphasis in original, 24). Mothers fear, in the words of Adrienne Rich, "that hate will overwhelm love" (81). In *Of Woman Born,* Rich relates that her children cause her great suffering: "It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alteration between bitter resentment and raw edged nerves and blissful gratification" (81). Maternal ambivalence, as Rosika Parker elaborates: "is well established in psychoanalytic literature but because cultural expectations and assumptions presume and demand that a mother love her children unconditionally and selflessly the mother who exhibits or admits maternal ambivalence is judged harshly and is the object of shame and disbelief" (18). "That mothers have mixed feelings about their children," Almond contends, "should come as no surprise to anybody; but it is amazing

how much of a taboo the negative side of maternal ambivalence carries in our culture, especially at this time" (xiii). Moreover, as Almond explains further, "today's expectations for good mothering have become so hard to live with, the standards so draconian, that maternal ambivalence has increased and at the same time become more unacceptable" (xiii). Indeed, hating someone solely based on her religion, ethnicity, sex or nationality, may be seen, in Almond's words, as "being unreasonable or bigoted, but if you hate your children, you are considered monstrous—immoral, unnatural, evil" (2).

In its first person account of maternal regret, anxiety, doubt, and guilt, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* is a novel about maternal ambivalence and its mother-narrator, Eva, is viewed by many readers and critics as a bad, if not a "monstrous" and "unnatural" mother. Nike Bourke, for example, in his review of the novel describes it as "a tale of excessively cruel mothering" (qtd. in Muller 39). For many readers there is a clear cause and effect relationship at work in the novel: Kevin is a bad person because of bad mothering, which is the result of Eva's maternal ambivalence. In her discussion of the novel, Almond reflects: "How does a child get to be this way (malevolent, resentful and vengeful)? Is initial ambivalence that destructive?" (124). Or, as critic Vivienne Muller wonders, "Is Kevin's killing spree revenge for bad mothering" (38)? Lionel Shriver herself asks a similar question in one article: "Whether [Kevin] is hopelessly mangled by his mother's coldness or is innately disagreeable in a way that fosters her dislike is a question the novel tackles but never quite resolves" ("Separation from Birth"). She elaborates further in another article, "This is the question with which the novel struggles, but which it ultimately fails to answer. That verdict is the reader's job" ("Why Ruin Your Life"). And in the novel, Eva likewise comments: "I worry ... that I may too be laying the groundwork for claiming that Kevin is all my fault. I do indulge that sometimes ... gulping down blame with a powerful thirst.... But for me this greedy gorging on fault never works. I am never able to get the full story inside of me" (65-66). Significantly, in her many interviews and articles on the novel, Shriver discusses her own ambivalence about becoming a mother, explaining that she was "petrified of having children" and "foreswore motherhood" at the age of eight ("Separation from Birth"). In one interview, she associates becoming a mother with "the relegation of one's own ambitions" and "a precipitous social demotion ("Separation from Birth"). Her greatest fear though, Shriver says, was the ambivalence itself: "I hadn't wanted to be a mother since I was eight. What if I bit the reproductive bullet, and the queasiness failed to abate? What if even, it got worse? Imagine bearing a child and then realizing with the helpless irrevocable little person squalling in its crib that you'd made a mistake. Who really, in that instance, would pay the price?" ("Separation from Birth"). Significantly, as she explains further, she began writing the novel *Kevin* at the age of forty-two—"the imminent closure

of the reproductive window"—and while, in her words, "a series of barely pubescent boys had started shooting their classmates" ("Separation from Birth"). "Out of this intersection of private and public angst," she continues, "I wrote my seventh novel in which a woman—a woman like me—overcomes grave misgivings about motherhood to take the plunge. Yet once her baby born, those misgivings burgeon to full-blown lament" ("Separation from Birth").

But I would suggest that this book is, ultimately, not about maternal ambivalence per se but about a mother for whom the ability to mother does not come naturally; thus, her mothering fails to adhere to the patriarchal mandate of naturalization. Just as the mandate of essentialization assumes that the desire to become and to be a mother is innate to women, the patriarchal mandate of naturalization assumes that maternal ability is likewise innate to women: mothers naturally love their children and know how to mother. Drawing on the work of socio-biologist and primatologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Almond argues that "loving motherhood is not automatically programmed into the female of species" (7). "The guilt produced by the pressure on women to be all-loving and all-giving toward their offspring," Almond continues, "takes a powerful toll on both mothers and their children … as women fail in their attempts to fulfill impossible standards of mothering, [t]hey feel angry and disappointed with themselves and, in turn, angry and disappointed with their children" (11). "Too many women" Almond goes on to explain, "suffer as they attempt to be perfect mothers, an effort driven in part to cover over their ambivalence. Modern 'maternally correct' mothers are literally driving themselves and their offspring crazy in their quest for maternal perfection, which can only be proven by the perfection of their offspring" (7-8).

However, I argue that it is not "the contradictory state of mind" (Parker) of maternal ambivalence that drives Eva's quest for maternal perfection but, more specifically, the absence of a maternal desire that she and society at large expects of mothers in motherhood. In the novel, Eva comments: "I think that ambivalence didn't go away because it wasn't what it seemed. It is *not* true that I was 'ambivalent' about motherhood. You wanted to have a child. On balance, I did not. Added together, that seemed like ambivalence" (emphasis added, 55). The novel, in the words of reviewer Amanda Craig, "is an account of what it must be like to become a mother while having no talent for motherhood." As Eva comments, "I felt absent. I kept scrabbling around in myself for this new *indescribable* emotion, like stirring in a crowded silverware drawer for the potato peeler, but no matter how I rattled around, no matter what I moved out of the way, it wasn't there" (emphasis in original, 81). And later in the text, she admits: "I was confident that he (Kevin) could infer a subtly exasperated quality in my voice, when I burbled and cooed that burbling and cooing did not come *naturally* to me and that his precocious ear could isolate in the end-

less stream of placating blather an insidious, compulsive sarcasm" (emphasis added, 87). As Eva emphasizes: "the whole thing was going wrong from the start … I was not following the program … I had dismally failed us and our newborn baby. That I was, frankly, a freak" (83). Lacking what she believes (and society believes) is natural to mothers, she must, in Susan Maushart's words "fake motherhood" (463).

For Eva, motherhood is, thus, a performance. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender, I argue that maternity in the novel is similarly performed. Gender, according to Butler, is performed rather than biologically inhabited and, as she explains, such "performativity is not a singular act but always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (12). Throughout the novel Eva's mothering is continually described as performance. Reflecting upon the day she learned that she was pregnant, Eva writes: "I had the afternoon to assemble myself in the glowing mother-to-be…. I tried on different approaches to a shopworn scene: coy, delayed, bemused, artificially offhand: gushing—oh darling! None of them seemed to suit" (53). And when she is about to tell Franklin of her pregnancy, she says "I kept my back turned and arranged my face" (51). Later during the trial, the lawyer accuses Eva of "acting a part … going through the motions" (39). Eva comments later: "There may indeed be an element of theatre in these visits [to the prison]. But they continue when no one is watching, because if I am trying to prove that I am a good mother, I am proving this, dismally, as it happens, to myself" (40). And in prison Kevin says to his mother: "You may be fooling the neighbours and the guards and Jesus and your gaga mother with these goody-goody visits of yours, but you're not fooling me. Keep it up if you want a gold star" (43). The words and phrases used here—"assemble," "arranged," theatre," "acting a part," "trying to prove" and "fooling"—position Eva's mothering not as natural ability but as cultivated performance. As she writes to Franklin, "I have no end of failings as a mother, but I have always followed the rules" (39). Remembering her attempts to smile at Kevin as the parenting books advised, Eva writes:

> I smiled and smiled, I smiled until my face hurt, but when my face did hurt, I was sure he could tell. Every time I forced myself to smile, he clearly knew that I didn't feel like smiling, because he never smiled back. He hadn't seen many smiles in his lifetime but he had seen yours, enough to recognize that in comparison there was something wrong with Mother's. It curled up falsely; it evaporated with revelatory rapidity when I turned from his curb. Is that where Kevin got it? In prison, that marionette smile, as if pulled up by strings. (87)

But, as she says later: "The harder I tried the more aware I became that my very effort was an abomination … I was guilty of emotional malfeasance" (87). The word "malfeasance" is particularly revealing in understanding Eva's mothering as performance. It refers to "wrong doing (illegal or dishonest behaviour) by a public official (a person holding public office or having official duties, especially as a representative of an organization or government department)" (*Oxford Dictionaries*). This reference to a public official, used in the context of Eva's mothering, foregrounds, as Adrienne Rich argues in *Of Woman Born*, that motherhood is a public, and, more specifically, a patriarchal institution. The term emotional malfeasance, thus, signifies that Eva's inability to mother is more than just a personal failure; it is, according to the laws of patriarchal motherhood, illegal behaviour. Lacking both the maternal ability and mother love that is assumed to be innate to all mothers, Eva must perform mothering and fake motherhood. Indeed, as Eva writes to Franklin: "I beg you to understand just how hard I'd been *trying* to be a good mother. But trying to be a good mother may be as distant from being a good mother as trying to have a good time is from truly having one" (emphasis added, 195).

Idealization: "Childbirth Had Left Me Unmoved"

Susan Maushart opens her book *The Mask of Motherhood* with a quotation from Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*: "There is a strange discrepancy", writes Friedan, "between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we are trying to conform" (qtd. in Maushart xi). This problem, Maushart contends, remains "in most cases, precisely the same today" (xi). She explains:

> The content of women's daily realities has changed enormously, as has the natures of the images to which we seek to confirm. But the identity crisis—the mismatch between expectations and experience, between what we ought to be feeling and how we do feel, between how we ought to be managing and how we do manage—remains as painful as other and as intractable as ever. (xi)

Looking specifically at women's experiences of motherhood, Maushart examines the contrast and the contradictions between women's expectations of motherhood and their experiences of it. She argues that mothers today "increasingly bring to the experience expectations that are not simply inaccurate, or ill-informed, but downright disabling. Maybe even delusional" (xiii). The mask of motherhood, Maushart explains, is an "assemblage of fronts—mostly brave, serene, and all knowing—that we use to disguise the chaos and com-

plexity of our lived experience" (2) To be masked, Maushart continues is "to deny and repress what we experience, to misrepresent it, even to ourselves" (1-2). A woman, as Shelia Kitzinger notes, "who catches sight of herself in the mirror—as it were, unmasked—sees a very different picture. And the message is clear: she is a failure" (qtd. in Maushart 8).

In the above sections on essentialization and naturalization, it was shown how the novel unmasked motherhood by showing that maternal desire and ability—assumed to be innate to women—are, in reality, culturally constructed and performed. In this section, I will look at how the novel unmasks the idealization of motherhood in contemporary culture to explore what Maushart calls "the mismatch between expectation and the experience" (xi) or what may be termed the cognitive dissonance between the reality and image of motherhood. Shriver's narrative, as Muller explains, "constantly needles the mis-fit between Eva's individual experiences of motherhood and the social discourses of mothering which relentlessly seek to claim her, and to cause her to dissemble" (43). The novel, I argue, examines how the mask of motherhood confers an idealized and, hence, unattainable image of motherhood that causes women, such as Eva, to feel guilt, resentment, and anxiety about their own messy and muddled experiences of motherhood. In her article on *Kevin*, Ruth Robbins references Wordsworth's birth myth in his "Imitations" ode to explore "the many gaps between the ideal of maternity as it is represented in our culture, and the actual experience of the maternal as a process and as a series of relationships engaged in by real women and their real children" (172). She argues that absent in Wordsworth's idealized and transcendent male view of birth are "the often gory details—the trails of blood of mucous and other matter, and the physical pain- which accompany … 'real' birth, and the mess of any child's early years" (173). *Kevin* provides, to use Robbins' words, "a corrective vision that modifies the cultural ideal [of motherhood]" (160). In so doing, the novel, again to borrow from Robbins' "breaks the frame, crosses generic boundaries; it messes with genre, with mess… being the operative word" (177). In this, *Kevin* performs what I have called elsewhere "an archaeology of maternity" to unearth and excavate the truths of motherhood hidden beneath its mask (*Mother Matters*).

Significantly Maushart devotes three of her chapters to the specific masks of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. "Our society," Maushart writes, "propagates a myth of pregnancy that is almost preposterously positive" (88). She elaborates: "For every woman who revels, goddess-like, in her pregnant body, there is another who feels downright grotesque. The prevailing Mask of Expectant Motherhood suggests there is something aberrant about such women, as if the failure to bloom hints at some intrinsic perversity of spirit". (90). Describing her own pregnancy, Eva comments: "Any woman whose teeth have rotted, whose bones have thinned, whose skin has stretched knows the

humbling price of a nine-month freeloader…. The whole time I was pregnant with Kevin I was battling the idea of Kevin, the notion I had demoted myself from driver to vehicle, from householder to house" (58). In a letter to Franklin, she confides:

> There is no use pretending now, [childbirth] was awful…. In fact I never told you this before, but the emotion on which I fastened to push was loathing…. I despised being spread out like some farm exhibit with strangers gawking between my canted knees … I hated myself for ever having agreed to this humiliating theater.… And yes, I even hated the baby which had brought me unwieldiness and embarrassment and a rumbling subterranean tremor quaking through the very ocean floor of of who I thought I was. In the very instant of his birth, I associated Kevin with my own limitations –not only with suffering but defeat. (emphasis in original 75-76)

Maushart writes:

> Where previous generations of women approached childbirth expecting the worst—and usually getting it, today's generation suffers from an even crueler indignity. Having been led to expect the best, the disjuncture between anticipation and experience is a yawning psychic chasm from which we emerge not only battle-scarred but angry. For many women, that anger is self-directed: it is experienced as guilt, a sense of shame that we have failed to perform to standard. (114-115)

For Eva, childbirth was "nothing like books" (Maushart 115), and she experiences neither joy nor accomplishment in birthing her son, as the idealization of birth promulgates, but rather a sense of "loathing" and "defeat."

As Eva's experiences of pregnancy and childbirth unmask motherhood so, too, does her experience of breastfeeding. Writing on this, Eva discloses

> At first I thought I was doing something wrong … But no; I would place the nipple between his lips … He had sucked a time or two, but turned away, the bluish milk running down his chin. He'd cough, and perhaps I imagined it, he even seemed to gag…. He wouldn't even take my milk from a bottle, writhing from it without a sip. He could smell it, He could smell me. (86).

"Mothers today," Maushart explains, "have been given a hopelessly sanitized version of the physical travails involved in normal breastfeeding" (212). Maushart

argues that most mothers "perceive themselves as 'failures' at breastfeeding—with predictably disastrous results for their self-esteem. They have been brainwashed to believe that breastfeeding will come naturally, even effortlessly, that as nursing mothers they will experience profound physical and emotional satisfaction; that their 'perfect' milk will produce 'perfect' babies" (202). Believing in and seeking to conform to the mask of effortless breastfeeding, Eva construes the normal challenges of nursing Kevin as indication of her own personal failings, not only as a nursing mother but as a mother herself: "I shouldn't have taken it personally but how could I not? It wasn't mother's milk he didn't want, it was Mother" (86).

Throughout the novel, Eva perceptively and profoundly unmasks motherhood as they are enacted in the idealizations of pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding: She writes to Franklin:

> All very easy for you to want to be *Daddy*, to buy into all the stuffed-bunny schlock, when I was the one who had to blow up like a sow, I was the one who had to turn into a goody-two-shoes teetotaler sucking down vitamins. I was the one who had to watch her breasts get puffy and bloated and sore when they used to be so neat and close, and I was the one who would be ripped to ribbons ramming a watermelon through a passage the size of a garden hose. (emphasis in original, 75-76)

In this passage, Eva potently counters the sentimentalization of patriarchal motherhood, which disguises and denies the lived embodiment of reproductive labour. In her article "Why Ruin Your Life?" Shriver elaborates,

> Eva experiences pregnancy as an invasion. When her newborn son is first set on her breast, she is not overwhelmed with unconditional love; to her horror, she feels nothing. She imputes to her perpetually screaming infant a devious intention to divide and conquer her marriage. She finds caring for a toddler dull…. And worst of all she detects in Kevin a malign streak that moves her to dislike him.

Speaking truthfully and authentically about the messy and muddled realities of mothering, particularly as they are experienced in pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding, the novel challenges and corrects the patriarchal mandate of idealization, which expects and requires mothers to find joy and purpose in motherhood. Indeed, with the novel *Kevin*, to borrow from Rich in *Of Woman Born,* "the words are being spoken now, are being written down; the taboos are being broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking through" (25).

Conclusion: "Don't You Let Them Saddle You with All That Killing": Beyond Mother Blame and Towards Authentic Mothering

At the end of one of Eva's visits to Kevin in prison, he says to her, as she is leaving: "Don't be dragging your ass back here on my account. Because I hate you" (43). Upon hearing his remark, Eva reflects:

> I had some idea of what I was suppose to say back: *Now I know you don't mean that*, when I knew that he did. Or, *I love you anyway, young man, like it or not*. But I had an inkling that it was following just these pat scripts that helped land me [in prison visiting her son]. So I said instead, in the same informational tone. "I often hate you too Kevin." (emphasis in original, 43-44)

Within this passage, Eva realizes that it is the dictates of patriarchal motherhood and *not* her mothering that are to blame, as well as her refusal to "follow the pat scripts" and say what she is "suppose to say." I argue that Eva, to use Rich's terminology, is moving from the institution of motherhood to the potentially of mothering; to become, again in Rich's words, a "mother outlaw." More specifically, this passage marks the achievement of what I have termed "empowered mothering" (*Rocking the Cradle)*. In the first instance, empowered mothering functions as an oppositional discourse of motherhood; more specifically, it signifies a theory and practice of mothering that seeks to challenge the dominant discourse of motherhood and change the various ways that the lived experience of patriarchal motherhood is limiting or oppressive to women. Most pointedly, as I have argued, the overarching aim of empowered mothering is to confer to mothers the agency, authority, authenticity, autonomy, and advocacy-activism denied to them in patriarchal motherhood (*Rocking the Cradle*). In this moment, Eva speaks truthfully and refuses to follow the "pat scripts" of patriarchal motherhood. She has, in other words, achieved the maternal authenticity of empowered mothering. Authenticity, as Elizabeth Butterfield explains, "is an ethical term that denotes being true to oneself, as in making decisions that are consistent with one's own beliefs and values. In contrast, inauthenticity is generally understood to be an abdication of one's own authority and a loss of integrity" (700). In the context of empowered mothering, maternal authenticity draws on Ruddick's concept of the "conscientious mother," and my model of the "authentic feminist mother" (*Maternal Thinking*), and refers to "independence of mind and the courage to stand up to dominant values" and to "being truthful about motherhood and remaining true to oneself in motherhood" (Butterfield 701; O'Reilly, *Maternal Thinking*). It is only after *that Thursday* when Eva stops "following the rules" (39)

of patriarchal motherhood that she can act and speak truthfully as a mother and become authentic in her mothering.

It is also during one of Eva's visits to the prison when the mother blame of patriarchal motherhood is similarly recognized and challenged. When asked by one of the mothers "What drove Kevin to do it?" Eva confesses: "I expect it's my fault. I wasn't a very good mother—cold, judgmental, selfish. Though you can't say I haven't paid the price" (165). In response, the mother remarks:

> It's always the mother's fault, ain't it? That boy turns out bad cause his mama a drunk, or she a junkie. She let him run wild, she don't teach him right from wrong. She never home when he back from school. Nobody ever say his daddy's a drunk, or his daddy not home after school. And nobody ever say they some kids just damned mean. Don't you believe that old guff. Don't you let the saddle you with all the killing. (165)

The mother, Lorretta Greenleaf, goes on to say: "It's hard to be a momma. Nobody ever pass a law and say 'fore you get pregnant you gotta be perfect. I'm sure you try the best you could. You here, in this dump, on a nice Saturday afternoon. *You still trying* … And you don't be talking any more a that nonsense" (emphasis added, 166). Eva's relief at her empathy and words is so intense that she squeezes Lorretta's hand back "so hard and so long that she must have feared I might never let go" (166). With Lorretta and others at the detention centre, as Messer writes, "Eva feels she no longer has to translate her thoughts into the language of the suburban mundane that she can speak without having to explain" (18). Lorretta's denouncement of the concept of mother blame along with Eva's enactment of authenticity in her prison visits with her son provide a powerful challenge to and critique of patriarchal motherhood and, thus, makes possible a change to this institution. And in so doing, allows for a counter-practice and identity of empowered mothering. To paraphrase Rich's words, Eva now refuses to be a victim and has gone on from there.

In her article "Why Ruin Your Life?" Shriver writes:

> I think *Kevin* has attracted an audience because my narrator, Eva, allows herself to say all those things that mothers are not suppose to say…. Though some readers have been put off by my narrator's unattractive confessions, a remarkable number of people have expressed to me their gratitude that someone in modern literature has put motherhood hitherto off-limits emotions into print.

She goes on to say that "While we may have taken the lid off sex, it is still out of bounds to say that you do not like your own kids, that the sacrifices they have demanded of you are unbearable, or perish the thought, you wish you never had them" ("Why Ruin Your Life?"). Indeed, in contesting, countering, and correcting patriarchal motherhood, in particular its mandates of essentialization, naturalization, and idealization, the novel moves beyond critique to the possibility for change. In so doing, the novel affirms that what we need to talk about is not Kevin but rather the patriarchal institution of motherhood.

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FLORENCE PASCHE GUIGNARD

Lessons in Life on the Verge of Death

Spiritual Mothering in *Ai Laṛkī* by Hindi Author Krishna Sobti

Spiritual mothering and the mother-daughter relationship are two important and intertwined themes in Ai Laṛkī, *a short novel written by Krishna Sobti, a major author of Hindi literature. This article offers a reading of this late twentieth century literary work through the lenses of maternal theory, examining how an ill, old, and dying mother attempts to pass on maternal wisdom to her unmarried daughter who will never become a mother. Several of the basic tenets of maternal theory are useful to read literary works of fiction produced in contexts where apprehensions of religion, spirituality, motherhood and the mother-daughter relationship differ from those of the contexts where the body of knowledge known as maternal theory first emerged.*

Ai Laṛkī is a short but extremely dense and rich work of fiction in Hindi, which consists of a series of dialogues between an old and terminally ill mother and her grown-up daughter, who cares for her on her deathbed. Krishna Sobti[1] (born in 1925), a prominent novelist and essayist writing in Hindi, published *Ai Laṛkī* in 1991. It has been translated into English, under the title *Listen Girl!*,[2] as well as in other languages. In the following, I read this work through the lenses of maternal theory and address, primarily, scholars in motherhood studies and in the study of religions, without the pretence of offering a full-scope literary analysis aimed at specialists in Hindi literature or in South Asian studies. In addition to summarizing key elements of the plot and to analyzing two recurring maternal themes in this work, I engage with the following theoretical questions: are the basic tenets of what is known as maternal theory[3] relevant to an analysis of literary works of fiction with mothers as central characters and produced in contexts that, though patriarchal, are not Euro-American? Which aspects of maternal theory could be useful to read an already much commented[4] late

twentieth-century work of Hindi literature produced in a context different from where maternal theory and motherhood studies first emerged?

To answer these questions, I highlight the connections between two intertwined maternal themes in *Ai Laṛkī*: the first is spiritual mothering, and the other is the mother-daughter relationship. The latter seems to "have gained new currency in contemporary fiction" (Raja 860) at the turn of the twenty-first century, whereas there were only marginal references to these in oral and folk literatures of South Asia (Raja 860) and even fewer in mythological "grand narratives" (Lyotard), such as the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. This and other aspects of motherhood in South Asian contexts have been studied in a variety of disciplines. From a motherhood studies perspective, two recent edited volumes that focus not only on womanhood or femininity but on motherhood and mothering are important to mention here: *Motherhood in India: Glorification without Empowerment* (Krishnaraj) and *South Asian Mothering: Negotiating Culture, Family and Selfhood* (Sangha and Gonsalves). I draw from these collections for a more general framework. Readers unfamiliar with the specificities of mothering in South Asia (and in communities of the South Asian diaspora) can refer to these volumes for other examples of studies focusing on motherhood and mothering, some of which are also based on literary materials.

Additionally, in an article on "intergenerational connectedness in recent Indian fiction" (853), where she analyzes *Ai Laṛkī* with a focus on intergenerational conflict, Ira Raja offers an extensive and critical literature review on the specific topic of mothers and daughters in India. Raja notes that *Ai Laṛkī* provides material for an exploration of the mother-daughter relationship around the themes of matrophobia and mother-quest (Raja 855-858), both of which are relevant to motherhood studies scholars. Her perspective places a strong emphasis on the psychoanalytic theories on the mother-daughter relationships and their (feminist) critiques, including in South Asia. Just like Raja, I am aware of the restrictions that arise from focusing on a "comparatively small selection of texts" (862). A thematically focused analysis on *one* literary work of fiction published over twenty-five years ago does not allow for a general argument about South Asian mothering past or present, or across languages, cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds. However, a reading of *Ai Laṛkī* through the lenses of maternal theory is sufficient to gain insights into rarely studied literary expressions of "spiritual mothering," as expressed in a work of fiction written in Hindi. My disciplinary standpoint and my intention with this contribution are, thus, different from Raja's, as I purposefully leave aside the rich feminist psychoanalytic readings of this short novel in order to focus instead on the "spiritual mothering" that provides a framework in which this mother-daughter relationship unfolds.

As a historian of religions, I am aware that my use of the term "spiritual mothering" may be unconventional, in reference to a form of spiritual mothering that is mostly independent from institutional religious practice. Women's religious and spiritual knowledge, and frequently their ritual expertise as well, constitute a negotiation with or even a challenge to understandings of notions of the self, of life and death, of connections to others, and of one's proper place and role in society, which are rooted in religious traditions, contested or reclaimed. Providing a contextual definition will, thus, be useful: I understand spiritual mothering as a transmission of a maternal wisdom acquired through personal experience and aimed at reaching fulfillment and happiness in life. My understanding of spiritual mothering is not limited to its traditional Christian sense of guiding, nurturing, or being a role model to "children" (practitioners less advanced or experienced in their path, whether or not they are biologically related) by assuming the position of a "mother" who protects life, fosters (spiritual) growth and shapes social acceptability among one's (religious) peer group.[5] Spiritual mothering is a non-biologically dependent maternal practice, one specific aspect of which scholars of South Asia have studied rather extensively: women gurus who are often called by maternal titles, such as Amma, Ma, and Mataji, to name only a few. In India, and nowadays also abroad, women hold public leadership roles as gurus in various strands of Hinduism. In contrast, the spiritual mothering in *Ai Laṛkī* takes place between two biologically related grown-up women, a dying mother and her unmarried and childless daughter, in their private and domestic sphere. *Ai Laṛkī* could hardly be classified as religious or spiritual literature. Nevertheless, religious themes surface regularly in the story. Moreover, Krishna Sobti underlines how, for the mother, these maternal kinship ties are not only biological and embodied but also spiritual.

How does this mother-daughter relationship unfold in the framework of a spiritual mothering process throughout (and perhaps also beyond) *Ai Laṛkī*? To answer this question, after contextualizing this text and its author, I highlight how the mother and the daughter in the story deal with disruptions of traditional expectations shaped by religious and cultural imperatives. Afterwards, I focus on excerpts that present mothering one's own children as a positive, empowering, and spiritual experience, despite the patriarchal institution of motherhood, with references to religious expressions and practices that are valued in this particular context. I also make explicit how this spiritual mothering concretely takes place through the dialogues. I explain how the mother in the story becomes a spiritual teacher to her daughter by offering her an opportunity to temporarily take on a maternal role and, thus, learn some spiritual insights through the notion of disinterested service. In conclusion, I point out some of the key tenets of maternal theory that are useful—despite their limitations—to read works of fiction on mothers written in Hindi and referring to religious frameworks that are clearly

different from those contexts in which most of the maternal theory read and published today emerge (in North America and in English for the most part).

Krishna Sobti and *Ai Laṛkī*

At the international level, in contrast with their colleagues who write in English, Indian authors who write in Hindi tend to see their "regional" or "vernacular" status emphasized by both Indian and non-Indian commentators. They, sometimes, are even "looked on with a mixture of condescension, surprise and disdain," as recently described by Hindi literature scholar Annie Montaut (333). Montaut goes on to explain that

> one of the reasons why the so-called "regional" masterpieces are largely ignored as such … in postcolonial literary studies, and in world literature, is that they are generally so poorly translated, if at all, that their literary quality is hardly visible. A case in point is the translation of Krishna Sobati's which she herself used to oppose, and which, once they became available, were several criticized. (336)

Even though she writes in Hindi (rather than in English), lives in India, and is a "woman author," Krishna Sobti is widely recognized as a major contributor to Hindi literature. She is no marginal figure in South Asia, and her works (dozens of short stories, essays, and many novels, sometimes published under the pen name Hashmat) have been republished several times and translated. She also has received many awards.[6]

Sobti's work features many female characters, including mothers, who "often are common women who lead usual, everyday lives" (Strelkova 73). "The bliss of life" (Verma 58) rather than considerations focused on death and the after-life is a central theme in her work, even if Sobti has also written about violence and destruction, as in her works on the Partition of India (e.g. the short story entitled *Merī māṃ kahāṃ?* [*Where Is my Mother?*]). As noted by Ashok Verma,

> all Sobti's works stand testimony to her fascination with this world as the characters go on celebrating their worldly existence and exhibit an intense desire to enjoy these pleasures and joys of life with their five senses…. She is simply overwhelmed by the myriad games of life and thus wishes to participate actively in them. (59)

This is the case in *Ai Laṛkī*, too, where an old lady is on the verge of death but remembers and still enjoys the delectable pleasures in life, such as drinking freshly brewed tea.

The *kahānī* (short story) is a popular genre in Hindi literature. *Ai Laṛkī* is of a hybrid genre: it is a *laṃbī kahānī*, or a "long short story" (K. B. Vaid qtd. in Strelkova 79), of 119 pages in the original Hindi work. *Ai Laṛkī* consists of a series of dialogues, interrupted only by minimal contextual indications, between a daughter and her mother during the last days of her life. Except for one scene, all conversations take place in the room of the mother, who is old and terminally ill. The dialogues also feature a maid and personal support worker named Susan, as well as a doctor who is called in at the end of the story. Other characters, mostly deceased or absent relatives, are mentioned. The story reads almost like a theater play, with all the focus on the contents of the dialogues. Sobti gives very little details about the settings and the appearance of the characters.

It soon becomes evident to the reader that the mother leads the conversation, both thematically and quantitatively. The fact that both women speak in the narrative contrasts with another bestselling Hindi novel written by a woman author, Geetanjali Shree, and published just two years after *Ai Laṛkī*. In Shree's novel, the narrator is a daughter whose old mother is facing serious health issues. The story is told from the grown-up daughter's perspective. There is comparatively little direct speech from the mother herself, who nevertheless gives her name to the book: *Māī* ("Mother").

In contrast, Sobti's book opens with the words, *ai laṛkī* ("hey, girl!"), that give it its title. In *Listen Girl!*, the translated work, Krishna Sobti herself—the author, and not the unnamed narrator in the story—explains why she wrote this book. This foreword, titled "On Writing *Ai Ladki*" (included in *Listen Girl!* 7-12), was first published in the Literary Review section of *The Hindu*, an English-language Indian newspaper. It was "slightly modified" (*Listen Girl!* 12) and then integrated at the beginning of *Listen Girl!* Before writing the short story, Krishna Sobti recently experienced the death of her own mother:

> Ai ladki…
> Instinctively I knew: Here were the key words. They came quietly into my fingers. I did not have the slightest idea I was going to create a symbol of deep personal value with those very ordinary words, Ai Ladki. As I wrote I knew with ever growing confidence that I could provide the spiritual framework to accommodate the deep intimacy of those words, their comforting presence inside every bit of me. I know I would create an abiding togetherness between a dying woman and her daughter, the fading and failing interior, the unsaid words, the silences that record more than words that last her statement, a text of the undying human spirit. (*On Writing Ai Ladki* 11)

Hindi, like English, distinguishes between the words "daughter," *beṭī*, and "girl," *laṛkī*, a distinction which is not marked in all languages; in French, for instance, *fille* is the word for indicating both gender (girl) and filiation (daughter). With very few exceptions, the mother addresses her daughter throughout the dialogues as "*ai laṛkī*" ("hey, girl"). Through these words, the adult woman remains a never grown up *laṛkī*. She is not a complete and fulfilled woman. When the old mother expresses regrets about her past choices and about never pursuing her own interests, then the word "*beṭī*" is used in the Hindi text. Sobti writes: "After this she would not call me by my name, she simply said Ai Ladki, Hey girl. Was she creating a distance between the dying and the living?" (*On Writing Ai Ladki* 10).

The daughter intimately but respectfully calls her mother *ammū* or *ammī*, and not *māī* or *mātā,* other Hindi words for "mother" that are more formal. Kinship and filiation would better be emphasized through the word *beṭī*, but *laṛkī* is used. *Laṛkī* could be just any girl; however, Sobti's piece relates the idea that kinship relations are constructed not only through blood or milk but also through the mind and the transmission of a spiritual heritage.

Many themes emerge from reading *Ai Laṛkī*, most of which are linked to marriage, motherhood, and family life, and a few pertain to worldviews about one's proper rank and place in society. Just by reading the preface, the reader knows that the story ultimately will be about the mother's death, but the dialogues are not at all gloomy. The mother reflects on her own past and mostly contented life, on the current and unconventional lifestyle of her unmarried daughter, and on their past and present relationship. She also expresses a few regrets about what her fulfilling family life prevented her from doing or achieving. The characters discuss the potential for an ordinary woman to have "her own life" or other important aspects to her identity (e.g., professional, political, or intellectual) aside from being a mother. However, this notion is difficult to apply as such in this context. Spiritual life is, in this sense, relevant: even within a context with many social and ritual obligations for women and mothers, they can find ways to cultivate their own spiritual path, though with certain restrictions. Even while the mother is awaiting the end of her worldly existence, which marks the end of the story, she rarely engages in lengthy reflections about the afterlife or about God. Strelkova notes that "for her, the existence of Hindu gods is just a fact of reality and she abandons life contentedly" (74). The focus really lies on "the bliss of life," as often is the case in Sobti's work (Verma). I argue that the mother in *Ai Laṛkī* has built for herself such a spiritual practice—one of contentment, measure and happiness—and that she desires to transmit it, in turn, to her daughter. The mother's identity (and her discourse about it at the end of her life) is centred on her experience being a mother, a wife, and a daughter-in-law in a joint family household. The

daughter's life, in contrast, has many aspects (such as intellectual and artistic work), but she is not a mother. Emphasis *from a maternal perspective* on the woman's role as a mother *and only as a mother*—a theme dear to contemporary motherhood studies scholars—is difficult to find in Hindi literature. As Sangha and Gonsalves point out in their introduction to *South Asian Mothering*, "South Asian women are often socialized to perform motherhood in a way that neglects their selfhood," (3) and this may relegate other components of their identity to the background. Even in *Ai Laṛkī*, details about the significance of the maternal role *in isolation from* a woman's other social functions are rare. In this article, I focus on such expressions.

In the following excerpt in her foreword, Sobti writes (in English) about her feelings just a few days after her mother's funeral and explains how she was prompted into writing *Ai Laṛkī* after visiting a Sikh[7] place of worship:

> I spotted a high yellow flag fluttering in the air, a gurudwara, a shrine of my mother's faith. I decided to go in. A turbaned priest was reciting verses from the Adi Granth, the scripture of my mother's faith. I quietly sat in a corner, my eyes closed. When I at last opened them, it felt as if I had had a final message from my mother…. My death is not the end of the world for you. Little did I know this was something I could not shake off easily. I was bound so intensely to that past that I just had to touch it again. Me, my mother's daughter. And she her daughter's mother. (*On Writing Ai Ladki* 10)

The novel features a few other elements of Sikhism and of Hinduism as a spiritual (and sometimes ritual) framework for the dialogue between the two main characters. Interestingly, Sobti identifies Sikhism as her mother's faith but not as her own. Although she is not actively rejecting this or any religious tradition, she is not either giving it a prominent place in the novel, even when, in face of death, spiritual questions arise or intensify for many people. The form of spiritual mothering that emerges through the dialogues between mother and daughter transcend any formal religious affiliation because it focuses on concrete and practical life lessons rather than on speculations about God or the afterlife. Care work is a practical matter often alluded to, in particular maternal and domestic care work that teaches measure, patience, contentment, and self-control.

Lessons in Care and Freedom: Dealing with Disruptions of Traditional Expectations

Throughout the dialogues, the mother reminds her daughter that she is not following what she and most of society in this context consider as a woman's

proper path or *strī-dharma*, that is wifehood followed by motherhood, as well as following specific rules that are appropriate for one's age, gender, and rank. Readers understand that, instead, the unmarried daughter is pursuing a career in literature or perhaps in music. (Her specific artistic path is never clearly defined.) This is the principal point of contention between them: the mother views her daughter as having failed at engaging[8] in what society views as a traditional and proper path. The daughter is no longer a young woman, and this situation is no longer temporary. She is now too old to change her status.

Ai Laṛkī explores how the old lady deals with the disruption of traditional expectations, which consist of raising a daughter for a "life of service" (*Listen Girl!* 83) in another household, that of her in-laws, and of preparing herself emotionally and financially to separate from her daughter when she moves out after marriage. Sons, along with the daughters-in-law who join the multigenerational household, usually take care of the aging parents, not daughters. The intensive and extended presence of the daughter during the ultimate period of her mother's physical (and mental) decline is significant. Her care and presence are possible precisely because the daughter is free from the burden of caring for her own husband and family, in contrast with her sisters who were married off.

In the following excerpt, the mother identifies what she views as the principal failure of her daughter, as she compares her to dried vegetation:

> I know exactly what you are waiting for these days. That your mother be gone and you at leisure [*phurasat*]. And then, tell me, whom will you go to once you are independent? There is nobody in the queue behind you. You are neither a mother nor a grandmother to anyone! Girl, you are but vegetation, reed, grass, straw! Do you understand what I am saying? (*Ai Laṛkī* 27, my translation)

This failure to conform is repeatedly highlighted in the conversation, which, sometimes, prompts the daughter to leave the room. Moreover, nothing in the dialogues suggests a reason that would have made it objectively difficult for the daughter to find a spouse through the predominant custom of arranged (or at least approved) marriage in this context (e.g., a physical deformity or a disability). Homosexuality also is never alluded to in the dialogues as a potential reason for refusing to marry. Moreover, the mother or other family members have not coerced the daughter into marriage, and she has not entered a marriage of convenience to alleviate her family's pressures. This is a family with a comfortable socio-economic status (they used to travel, and they can afford to pay a maid and a doctor, for example), although they are not extremely wealthy. The children, including daughters, have received an education. As such, the daughter's situation is the choice of a woman with education and agency, who

is exercising her free will and refusing what Adrienne Rich calls the institution of "compulsory heterosexuality" (219) and one of its consequences—the institution of motherhood. However, in *Ai Laṛkī*, the daughter never defends her choices and adopts a rather passive attitude (remaining silent or leaving the room). Furthermore, the daughter's lack of potential for being a mother, besides the social fact that she is not married,[9] also remains largely unexplored in *Ai Laṛkī*. Being "caring" is an expected quality of a mother in this context as well. The daughter is portrayed as "caring" for her elderly mother, but nothing is explicitly said about her capacity to care for children (her own or someone else's).

The mother rarely engages in self-blame about her daughter's non-conformity. She does not view it as her own failure to meet the third demand of maternal thinking as defined by Ruddick (17, 21-23), who understands this demand as the shaping of social acceptability through training, which means, in this case, preparing a daughter for marriage, for living with her in-laws, and for motherhood. The mother considers this as her daughter's failure, not as her own failing in caring for her. Mother-blame is thus not a central theme in *Ai Laṛkī*, and the text does not hint at how others talk about the unmarried grown-up daughter (for instance the deceased husband, distant relatives, or neighbours). Sobti focuses the dialogues on this bubble of the mother-daughter relationship and does not explore what would otherwise be a prominent theme, that of blaming the mother for a non-conforming daughter.

Ironically, the mother is blaming her daughter for her lack of understanding of the implications of care work at the time when she engages in it the most. Although their maid takes care of many practical tasks, such as preparing and bringing food or changing the bed's sheets, the daughter is the one who provides emotional support to her mother who has also started to lose some of her mental capabilities. The daughter is the one who has to listen to her mother's mostly happy memories, but also to painful or regret-laden ones.

Lessons in Family Life: Mothering and Nurturing as Positive Experiences in spite of Patriarchal Motherhood

In the contrasted memories of the mother in *Ai Laṛkī*, motherhood studies scholars can clearly distinguish the "two meanings of motherhood, one 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," in Adrienne Rich's famous terms (13, emphasis in original). For instance, the mother evokes the capacity to endure the pain and the empowerment that childbirth gives a woman, and she regrets that her daughter will never be able to know this experience (*Listen Girl!* 55-56, quoted below). She also recalls

breastfeeding her children as pleasant moments of nurturing intimacy and not as drudgery or a discomfort to her body (18-19, see below). With a child at the breast, "all the three worlds," the entire universe according to the prevailing Hindu cosmogony, "seem steeped in the sweetest, most heavenly syrup!" (*Listen Girl!* 20). Breast milk is not an impure bodily fluid, but it is viewed as a sacred substance. With her use of such positive metaphors, the mother situates her experience as *mothering*. Nevertheless, and despite having been married off into a rather liberal family that did not "discriminate between boys and girls" (83; also see 56), the old lady remains aware of how patriarchy has rendered the institution of *motherhood* oppressive to her. For instance, when she says:

> The mother produces. Nurtures with love and care. Then why is she alone sacrificed? The family divides her into fragments and scatters her to the four winds. Why? So that she may not remain whole, may not stand up in her own authority. A mother is kept either like a cow or a nursemaid. She should keep working, catering to the comforts of its members; that is all she is good for. She can conjure any image she wants of herself, but for her children she is no more than a housekeeper. (*Listen Girl!* 91)

The hard motherwork is performed at the in-laws' house, under permanent scrutiny. With time, this environment may become familiar, but it will never feel like a family home. The mother in *Ai Laṛkī* speaks to her daughter of her deceased spouse and in-laws as "*your* family," (my emphasis, *Listen Girl!* 89), not "my family" or "my new family." She remains alienated and feels that the maternal link derived from her position as mother is rendered fragile. However, she recognizes the potential authority of the mother, which is undermined by the pressures and demands of a family. What may remain solid at the very end of her life is her mothering experience, in particular nurturing acts done "with love and care" (91), such as breastfeeding. The reader can wonder if the mother is "no more than a housekeeper" to the children only, or rather to her husband and other members of the multigenerational household that she is married into. This is what other works written by Indian women authors (writing in Hindi, but also in English) suggest, as is the case in *Māī* by Geetanjali Shree, where the grown-up children are shown trying to save their mother from the domination of other relatives in the joint household.

In *Ai Laṛkī,* traditional roles determined by generation (parent-child) and gender (woman-man and daughter-son) are reversed.[10] Both main protagonists are aware of this, as in this passage where the mother evokes her daughter's care work to her benefit in her old age and, immediately afterwards, recalls their happy breastfeeding relationship:

> Ladki. You've looked after me in my last days, made it comfortable. As your mother, I suckled you and you, my own little one, you delighted in my milk. But our relationship isn't just one of flesh and blood, is it? It's of the soul, right? Isn't it, all connected, intertwined… Arri? I don't know why your life's turned out to be so different. Why… Where are you going? Why have you got up? Sit with me for a while. Don't go, ri. (*Listen Girl!* 18-19)

In this passage, the mother is aware that the "roles have been reversed" (*Listen Girl!* 65). As she is dying, the face of her daughter reminds her of her own mother (65). Previously, the mother evoked a memory of when she was a little girl, and her own mother was breastfeeding her baby sister. Her mother rejected her request to suckle "just once more" (20) and explained: "once you stop drinking your mother's milk, you stop. Can't turn that clock back. Now it's your little sister's turn. Don't be greedy. That's the first law of nature. You'll understand it all by and by…" (*Listen Girl!* 20). This idea that one cannot return to a previous state of development or to one's younger self is related through an expression that is difficult to translate, literally, "you may never as much again get it" (*dubārā muṃh nahīṃ lagtā*) (*Ai Laṛkī* 11).

At the very end of her life, this woman is attempting to, indeed, "turn the clock back" through evoking the many memories of her life. She rapidly shifts from the present to the past, and then to the future, to after her own death. She says "all things from the past and future mesh and meld before my eyes" (*Listen Girl!* 25). She also feels that motherhood inscribes the birth-giver into the future or even in eternity, in a cultural context with a marked preference for sons: "by giving birth to a daughter, a mother is made immortal [*māṃ sādājīvī ho jātī hai*]. She never dies" (*Ai Laṛkī* 56).

The dialogue suggests that the daughter sometimes is upset by her mother's discourse. She leaves the room while the mother starts dozing. At other times, rather than recalling her daughter, the mother expresses her understanding of how much of a burden she might be:

> Listen girl. In the beginning parents hold infant fists and teach their children to walk. Then they grow old and become children of their children. I understand your burden. I must have tired you out. Why don't you go away for a few days? (*Listen Girl!* 22)

If the daughter goes away, though, the mother will be left alone. No one else is there to emotionally care for her. Her other daughters are married, and the status of her (apparently only) son remains unclear. The mother worries that this son, whom she calls for repeatedly, may not arrive on time to perform the

funeral rites. The son, in fact, never comes—the reader may even suspect that the son is only a living memory in the mother's mind (*Ai Laṛkī* 41-43) and that, in reality, he is dead. His absence contrasts with his sister's constant presence.

The mother worries about her daughter's loneliness, as a woman who is not even partnered. At the same time, she realizes that she, too, feels alone on her deathbed, despite the presence of her daughter. Being a mother and having raised a family are no guarantee against loneliness in old age and at the time of death:

> See, I have a son and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, a whole family and yet I'm alone. And you? You're outside that timeworn tale in which there is a husband, children and family. You don't have the hassles of a family life, you are you, full [*puram*] in yourself. Ladki, to be yourself is the ultimate, the best. If you too had to run a family, you would've realized by now that all the glory of a family life lies in the superficials—as someone's wife, daughter-in-law, mother, nani, or dadi.[11] And again the same everydayness of food, clothes, jewellery. Ladki, a woman is queen only in name. Sheltered and ensconced, she is wiped out of individuality. (*Listen Girl!* 72)

This type of discourse participates in the moral or spiritual lesson that the mother is trying to impart to her daughter, which I will now detail below.

Lessons in Life through Spiritual Mothering

Regarding her daughter as deprived from the opportunity to learn through her own experience in motherhood, the old lady tries to give her a spiritual lesson. The mother advises through her own memories. This is more than just a legacy; it is an interactive and repetitive process between the two protagonists. Even if she recurrently underlines her daughter's failing at becoming a mother (and more than merely just a wife), she suggests that this socially unconventional status (that of unmarried woman) could be made acceptable—or could even be enviable—under certain conditions. If her daughter used the freedom afforded by the absence of family responsibilities to get rid of her ego, she may achieve some sort of mental or spiritual perfection by just being herself and fulfilled.

The mother also appreciates the value of her daughter's situation when she tells her "to be yourself is the ultimate, the best" (72). However, some sense of jealousy on the part of the mother can be felt: she clearly sees that her daughter is having opportunities that she, enmeshed in family life, did not have. The mother does not consider writing or intellectual work (spending "her time with

books" [37]) as a valid path. In her view, books cannot teach the empowerment that she felt going through the pain of childbirth (see below) or her positive feelings about breastfeeding a child (mentioned above): "Books can't tell the first thing about it" (20). Her daughter's intellectual or artistic approach to life is viewed as insufficient, and the old mother does not view herself as deficient in knowledge. She says: "Girl, your mother has not read Patanjali,[12] and so what? Knowledge (*vidhyā*) lets itself be heard, seen and lived" (*Ai Laṛkī* 57, my translation).

This lesson about the value of opportunities will be the only heritage that the daughter will get, as there is no significant amount of wealth or material possessions to inherit (except the apartment in which the dialogues take place, which the mother owns). Moreover, in contrast with the personal support worker, Susan, who gets paid a salary, the daughter performs her care work out of filial piety and without expecting any immediate or later reward (except that of again having more time for herself). The feelings of the daughter towards her mother are never clearly outlined by Sobti. They may even be ambivalent, but respect for her mother is certainly present, along with some irritation. Through her intensive and disinterested care work, the daughter is, indeed, threading a path towards self-perfection, and she is leaving aside her ego by focusing on her mother's memories, always shifting the conversation away from herself. Even if the word *sevā* appears only twice in the Hindi text,[13] this form of care work could be read against the concept of *sevā* or disinterested service, which fits well with the Sikh religious framework alluded to by the author in the foreword. *Sevā*, generally understood as the performance of community service, is valued in both Hinduism and Sikhism and is understood by some as a way to set aside ego and pride.

The mother becomes a spiritual teacher for her daughter through offering her an individual opportunity for such service and the spiritual benefits it produces. Moreover, she offers her childless daughter the possibility to take on a maternal role, which might be why the reversal of generational roles in care work is underlined several times in the dialogues. That which life will not teach her, through personal experience, the mother will teach through recounting her memories and the lessons that she has learned first-hand. She makes explicit what being a mother, managing a household, and being "enmeshed in family responsibilities" (*Listen Girl!* 91) teach an individual about "the virtue of measure" (37), self-control, and, in particular, being content with life's simple pleasures.

Even while valuing them as transformative practices or experiences, the mother is not downplaying the pain of the physical experience of childbirth, or the difficulties of motherhood more generally. This is the case in the following excerpt:

> – Ammu, you have tremendous control over yourself. I couldn't have borne so much suffering. – Ladki, giving birth to a child alone makes one familiar with the finer shades of pain. – Ammu, why such hurtful words? – Pain too comes in many shapes and forms. Slight pains, sharp pains, piercing pains. Ladki, the game of life is contained in it. *Seeing the daughter smile.* – Once a woman's body passes through the storm of childbirth, her nerves and muscles get toughened. But how could you have acquired this capacity to endure such pain. – Leave me out, Ammu, tell me when you conceived your first baby… *Ammu with enthusiasm.* – I was alert. I did my daily chores with the usual attention. Ladki, making a baby is like performing a yagna. During those days, a woman draws energy from the whole cosmos to recharge herself. She feels that special kind of existence that is hers. (Italics in the original, *Listen Girl!* 55-56)

The mother compares making a baby to the practice of *yajña*, the ritual sacrificial offering to divinities. *Yajña* is not associated with the practices of women's domestic or folk traditions but rather with those of the male ritual elite. She, thus, likens pregnancy and the act of giving birth to something sacred, important, and valued. The mother also explains how making a baby is not only a work of the body but one of the mind: "The father stands outside even as the mother gives birth to their child. That's why the mother is called Janani, lifegiver [*jananī*]. It is she who makes the baby's body grow *with her mind* and in her body [*tan-man meṃ*]" (my emphasis, *Listen Girl!* 57). Through recurring, though not central, allusions to religious themes, expressions and ideas, Krishna Sobti suggests that mothers can use religious frameworks to make sense of life paths that some of them have little control over.

If, as Miller contends, "motherhood is a spiritual practice. It is a crash course in wisdom" (6), then the mother in *Ai Laṛkī* does not want to let the wisdom that she got from being a mother and raising a family go to waste. This is why she insists on teaching these lessons in life, on the verge of her own death, to her own daughter, even if she hurts her feelings by repeatedly outlining what she is missing out on by foregoing motherhood and, more poignantly, mothering.

Reading *Ai Laṛkī* through the Lenses of Maternal Theory

This reading of *Ai Laṛkī* hrough the lenses of maternal theory will be of interest to motherhood studies scholars in general and in particular to those who work on literary materials from contexts that are not those from where maternal theory emerged in the first place. In *Ai Laṛkī*, Sobti focuses on the relationship between a mother on the verge of death and her daughter who

follows a path alternative to marriage and motherhood, an unconventional choice in this context. Sobti effectively conveys how motherhood—and not only wifehood—is central to the older character's identity.

My analysis of *Ai Laṛkī* has focused on elements of spiritual mothering that consist in teaching lessons in life through recounting personal experiences in motherhood and mothering. The mother is at the centre of the action and of the attention of others in the dialogues. She is in the position of a teacher, both nurturing and tough, even as she is rendered vulnerable through illness and the failing of her body and her mind. This mother is literally dying to transmit these life lessons to her daughter, who will never marry, give birth, and raise her own family. She identifies as her daughter's challenge the fact that she is deprived of the possibility to learn through these experiences. To remediate this, she actively transmits such maternal knowledge and points to other paths through which her unmarried daughter could also achieve similar spiritual goals (such as getting rid of the ego through service), a process that I read as a form of spiritual mothering.

The tensions between tradition and modernity, at work in South Asian society at large, are played out within (extended) family relationships in *Ai Laṛkī,* even if the dialogues only allow the reader to see a fragment of them. In spite of "the lasting nature of cultural practices [that] continue to hold meaning for mothers" (Sangha and Gonsalves 10), the story is set in a context in which the status of women and the expectations about marriage and motherhood have evolved considerably and continue to do so. As Raja correctly points out, "[o]pportunities and choices of lifestyles beyond marriage and motherhood have increased significantly in the last quarter of the twentieth century, widening the gap between maternal expectations (that the daughter follow the mother's own life) and daughterly desires" (862). The conflict between mother and daughter is not just a personal one but a generational and social one as well. In addition, social norms and expectations differ for women of different socio-economic backgrounds. What was once unacceptable, such as for a daughter to refuse marriage, has become more common, but it still does not signal a "large-scale reconfiguration of cultural priorities" (Raja 862) and is still far from the norm. Worry about social acceptability, however, is not the core of the mother's message to her daughter: neither of them seems to care about what people will say. Notions that are central for women characters in other works by Hindi writers—such as *izzat* and *lāj* (notions of honour and shame)—are not at the core of *Ai Laṛkī*.

Maternal theory and the academic field of motherhood studies were developed mostly by women scholars and activists in the North American context in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Despite cultural distance, central theoretical inputs in motherhood studies— such as the distinction between

motherhood and mothering (Rich) and the concept of maternal thinking with its three demands and its practices (Ruddick)—can, nevertheless, shed new light on literature produced in contexts in which motherhood, wifehood, and womanhood in general are conceived differently, in spite of shared dominant patriarchal ideas. *Ai Laṛkī* has been generally analyzed either through a psychoanalytic lens or through the more general concept of "gender" and women's role and rank in Indian society and in the family. I found some elements of maternal theory useful to read anew this significant work of Hindi literature.

Furthermore, I argue that an inclusive and extended notion of "spiritual mothering" is useful to avoid too quickly dismissing religion as "oppressive" (according to *some* Western feminist terms). I suggest that scholars of motherhood could look into other works of Hindi literature to see how mothers, sometimes, turn selected aspects of patriarchal religious traditions into socially respected paths for self-transformation and spiritual achievement, for instance by inscribing the embodied practices of making and feeding a baby into religious frameworks or by comparing maternal acts to sacrificial ones. Finally, even if "mother" is a socially desirable status in this context, in *Ai Laṛkī,* the reader clearly sees through the distinction between motherhood, an institution oppressive to women that is not context specific to North America or to Christianity, and mothering, the relationship of women with their own powers of reproduction and with their children. In *Ai Laṛkī*, and in her other novels and short stories, Krishna Sobti positions such relationships as part of the "bliss of life" (Verma), which is central in her work. She depicts the sweetness and positive aspects of these maternal relationships, which are "not just of flesh and blood" but "of the soul … all connected, intertwined" (*Listen Girl!* 19).[14]

Endnotes

[1]In this article, I use anglicised names for Indian authors (except while quoting other references). My transliteration of Hindi words follows oral pronunciation.
[2]In this article, *Listen Girl!* refers to the English translation by Shivanath, which I quote from except when indicated otherwise. Acknowledging that translation does not always accurately reflect nuances and style specificities, in some instances, I provide my own translation of the original Hindi work, referring to the pages in *Ai Laṛkī*. I also quote key terms in Hindi from the original work.
[3]By "maternal theory," I mean several key reflections on motherhood, mothering, and mothers, in a variety of contexts but principally in Western ones and in particular in North America in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. *Maternal Theory. Essential Readings* (O'Reilly) is an example of collection of maternal theory, or rather theories, by authors who have become

central to this field.

[4]Krishna Sobti's short stories have been the topic of many works of literary criticism (see for instance Raja; Śrīvāstava; Sārasara; Verma; Strelkova). In this article, I am less concerned about the literary quality of her work than about her treatment of motherhood and mothering in *Ai Laṛkī*.

[5]I draw from Ruddick's identification of the three demands of maternal thinking (17) to read spiritual mothering as a distinctive maternal practice that satisfies these demands.

[6] In 1980, Sobti received the Sahitya Akademi Award (award from the academy of literature) for *Zindagīnāmā* (The Name of Freedom), one of her most famous novels. Sobti has also received the Shiromani Award in 1981, the Hindi Academy Award in 1982, and, in 1996, she was granted the Sahitya Akademi fellowship, the highest distinction. In 2010, she declined the Padma Bhushan, a civilian award that she was to receive from the Indian government, because she wished to keep a distance from the establishment.

[7]Sikhism, a religious tradition distinct from Hindu and Muslim (especially Sufi) spiritual paths in South Asia, emerged in the late fifteenth century. Guru Nanak (1469-1539) is considered its founder.

[8]The situation would be different, but probably no less difficult, if the daughter had at least married and remained childless, or if she had divorced. She would be, at least, a wife, and would get companionship and social insertion, even without progeny.

[9]In this context, it would predominantly be seen as socially unacceptable for a woman to have a child "on her own," without being married to a male partner. Whether the father is present at home or not (e.g., because of business or military obligations) and forges emotional bonds with the child is not the question. Only the marital status of the mother is regarded as important: the mother must be married before—and preferably also after—she gives birth to a child.

[10]For a deeper analysis of this generational reversal, see Raja, who focuses on cross-generational relations throughout her article. In particular, she writes that Sobti offers "the deathbed as a site for the production of new meaning between the generations" (869).

[11]*Nānī* designates the maternal grandmother and *dādī* the paternal grandmother. To Hindi speakers, specific terms for each family relative give clear indications about filiation and generation as well as maternal and paternal lines.

[12]Patanjali is the name of several important Sanskrit authors. The mother may be referring here either to a grammarian or to a compiler of knowledge on yoga. Both are major historical figures. This name here stands for the idea of textual knowledge and formal education and scholarship, in contrast with the feminine embodied maternal pedagogy and epistemology alluded to in this story.

[13]The first time, the mother is telling the nursemaid, Susan, that she is serving

her well (*Ai Laṛkī* 13). The word *sevā* is used a second time when the mother refers to how her own mother served her husband (65).

[14]This article was prepared during an advanced postdoctoral mobility fellowship funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. I thank the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto for hosting me during my postdoctoral research stay. I am very grateful to Nadia Cattoni (Université de Lausanne) for sharing with me her translation and interpretation of some of the most intricate passages of *Laṛkī.*

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RACHEL O'DONNELL

"This Is How to Make a Good Medicine to Throw Away a Child before It Even Becomes a Child"

The Maternal Voice in Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" and the Politics of Nature and Knowing in the Caribbean

This article argues that Jamaica Kinkaid's short prose piece "Girl" (1978)—sometimes referred to as a poem, sometimes a short story—merits a rereading based on the politics of contraception and natural knowledge in the Caribbean. In sparse and delicate prose, Kincaid manages to reflect on the historical ability of women to be both creative and practical in managing the relationship between their bodies and the natural world. A central theme of the story is the often-overlooked disappearance of particular forms of knowledge in particular places. The story is also about how human knowledge can arise from necessity and can provide individuals and communities with both power and agency. One of the key lessons in the story links Kincaid's characters to the Caribbean practice of resisting gender norms and colonialism through the use of plant-based abortifacients.

In Jamaica Kinkaid's short prose piece "Girl" (1978)—sometimes referred to as a poem, sometimes a short story—a mother in Antigua gives advice to her daughter in a string of straightforward lessons. One of the key lessons in the story links Kincaid's characters to the Caribbean practice of resisting gender norms and colonialism through the use of plant-based abortifacients. In the story, these instructions are given sharply and hastily, and the mother allows the child, the unnamed girl, only two brief responses throughout her long monologue. These responses are noted in italics to denote the girl's interjections, but it is the mother who steadfastly proceeds. Much of the advice given reflects the mother's particular knowledge of women's daily labours and clear conception of gender roles: she explains to her daughter how to wash clothes and menstrual rags, how to hem a dress, and how to behave with men and manipulate them. Kincaid begins her story as if in the middle of the speech in the mother's voice:

> Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off. (Kincaid 37)

Much of the literature about this very popular story and often-anthologized short piece considers the character of the mother and her distinctive voice. Still, the title itself allows the reader to understand that the mother is not the main character, but the maternal voice is only filtered through the listener, her daughter. Yet who is this mother? Literary critic Justin Edwards contrasts the mother's reference to the girl child as "the slut you are bent on becoming" with the line referring to the plant-based ways to "throw away a child," and cites this as a contradiction in Kincaid's work (19). However, it is not the maternal voice that "disrupts clear communication on gender and sexuality" (19) but the characters' social positioning and the knowledge that they possess of the postcolonial racialized and gendered locations. Kincaid's "Girl" merits a rereading based on our understanding of contraceptive politics and the history of natural knowing in the Caribbean.

The mother in the story clearly communicates gender roles and sexuality, and maintains her agency within the oppressive society that she manages daily. Instead of seeing the girl as "trapped," as Edwards argues, in a "world dominated by the all-powerful voice of the mother" (19), it is the mother who vies the all-powerful colonial powers and her daughter's place in it. It is, likewise, untrue that the mother's voice is at any point contradictory; rather, she clearly understands the role of her growing daughter in Antiguan society and demonstrates her own resistance to colonialism. Notably, the mother has also stepped outside of prescribed gender roles and urges her daughter to do so when she tells her, "this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so that it doesn't fall on you" (Kincaid 37). She is also straightforward about sexuality and again urges her daughter to think outside of the world that she knows: "this is how to love a man; and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up" (Kincaid 37).[1]

Still, the most important lines of this short work are evoked in the recipes for food and medicine that the mother provides towards the end of the work. In a *New Yorker* essay, Kincaid reflects on the distinction between enjoyment and knowledge of the natural world and its practical application, and "Girl" is not the only place where Kincaid notes the complicated relationship between Antiguans and plants: "When they (we) were brought to this island from Africa a few hundred years ago, it was not for their pottery-making skills or for their

way with a loom; it was for the free labor they could provide in the fields" (qtd. in Stitt 150). In "Girl," her work takes a more complicated route: she shows how plants are both part of a legacy of slavery and of resistance to colonialism and highlights the feelings of Antiguan women towards the natural world.

In "Girl," each line later in the story begins with "This is how," and the reader sees represented in spare prose the wealth of knowledge that Caribbean women possess about their bodies and the natural world. The list of instructions that the mother gives come near the end of the piece and contains recipes for preparing food and medicines: "this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child" (Kincaid 37).

Jamaica Kinkaid was born in Antigua, where the indigenous Caribs and Arawaks were among the first to be colonized by Spanish colonists in the fifteenth century. Soon after the mass slaughter of these indigenous peoples, Europeans captured slaves in Africa and transported them to the Caribbean island. In Antigua, a violent plantation society based on enslaved labour was created as well as a distinct creole culture that still preserves much of the local knowledges and medicinal plants. Obeah religion permeates much of Antiguan culture, which is a blend of diasporic religious practices and a belief system derived from West African plant-based healing (Braziel 54-59). Contraceptive plant knowledge has remained central for Caribbean women as a political practice and is often part of their everyday lives (Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire* 238-241).

Eduardo Galeano, in his work *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of the Continent*, combines fiction and political analysis to provide a more complete history of a land that he says has been "condemned to amnesia" (6). He explains how the indigenous people on Antigua took poisonous plants to engage in mass suicide shortly after the colonizers arrived and made use of other plants to poison their children rather than subject them to the massacres and enslavement of the colonists (14-16). In *A People's History of the United States*, historian Howard Zinn tells the same story of fifteenth-century Caribs and Taino using cassava, an everyday plant food staple, to engage in mass suicides shortly after Columbus arrived in 1493 (3-5). More recent scholarship has reflected on the gendered history of laborious process of preparing cassava and on the way that this demonstrates the Caribbean population's maintenance of knowledge of plant use and preparation (Schacht 17). Clearly, then, native Antiguans have knowledge of cassava's existence and food use, as well as lucid understanding of the levels of toxicity in the plant, including the fermentation process that makes it safe to eat. Historical and political knowledge of plant usage appear in select histories and anthropological accounts. Tobacco

and quinine, for example, became important monocrops in the developing world. Medicinal plants, however, and especially those used for fertility and contraception, have an important political history often forgotten in the social sciences and contemporary development literature. Kincaid's work provides a small piece of this political history in a short literary form, which is often overlooked in literary theory and discussions of her work.

To this end, healing activities remain a large part of women's daily labours, and medicinal plant treatments are well known among rural Caribbean women,[2] so much so that Kincaid includes the preparation of a contraceptive plant in her description of a woman's everyday life.[3] Kincaid includes reference to its recipe immediately after how to cook some Antiguan specialties and make a cold remedy. One of the plants Kincaid may be speaking of is called "guinea hen weed" in Antigua, and this plant has remained central to Obeah practice and rural contraception.[4]

This is not to say that the use of these plants is widespread or a frequent topic of conversation; rather, this information belongs to certain people in certain communities. It is dismissed easily in scientific circles and by some, is deemed improper or evil. However, plants are central to political history and contemporary understanding of social relations. At the same time, links made between women able to heal and women able to harm reflects the complicated position of women and the role of gender and knowledge throughout history. Work in the past few decades from historians, such as John Riddle, suggests that population statistics can be used to imagine how much control women exerted over their fertility throughout the past few centuries, even though no direct records of contraceptive practice exist (Riddle 4). In *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West*, Riddle presents an extensive catalog of the substances that were most used by women and their effects in the Western world, but it has proved difficult to offer any similar history of plants that women have used in non-Western time periods, contexts, and places.

A paradox exists in that the knowledge women once possessed still survives in pockets of mostly rural parts of the world but is not generally known in modern science, particularly among Western populations. Not only was this knowledge not passed on to European science, but it also disappeared in an ongoing imperial process beginning with the colonial period and continuing today. Further research is required on which particular plants women continue to employ in their reproductive labour, and Kincaid's narrator does not give us the name of the contraceptive plant that she imparts to her daughter. Indeed, little place exists in Western contexts for women's knowledge that is not profitable in an increasingly global information age. The goal here, then, is to avoid reducing individuals and their many varied contexts to female identity and "Third World" geographical location (Mohanty 59)[5] and to understand

how plant knowledges can have palpable effects on the lives of contemporary women that differ according to location and position. Kincaid's twentieth-century story effectively provides a way into considering both cultural colonialism and everyday botanical practice.

Reproductive Control in the Caribbean

Women's control of their own reproductive capacities has been an important contemporary political issue, especially for feminism. Yet women's reproductive capacity has historically held particular political purpose, apart from contemporary battles over state-granted access to contraception and abortion, and childbearing itself can hold specific political purpose, the same way a refusal to bear children can as well. Barbara Bush cites a number of methods of contraception used by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century enslaved Caribbean women to knowingly refuse to provide more slaves for the violent plantation system, which means that enough reproductive control was exerted so that Caribbean slave populations did not naturally reproduce themselves (Bush 122). Women used the late weaning of infants, self-induced sterility through mechanical or medicinal means, infanticide, and the ingestion of a variety of abortifacient plants, such as yam, papaya, lime and the roots and barks of cotton trees (Bush 124-142). In the early seventeenth century, German naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian recorded how African and indigenous women in Surinam used the seeds of *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* to induce abortion because they did not want their children to grown up as slaves as they did. Apart from the harsh living conditions, the frequent use of herbal abortifacients was the reason for the reduced fertility of female slaves, which created the need for the continuing import of new workforce from Africa (Bush 90).

Londa Schiebinger has done much to advance the study of the expropriation of botanical knowledge, including questions about how gender relations have guided European naturalists and how enslaved women and Caribbean populations used abortifacient plants (Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire;* Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial Botany).* The most important theoretical question addressed in her work is how to account for the knowledge that women once had of contraception that does not exist in a present Western worldview. Schiebinger addresses historical questions as well: why did the Caribbean abortifacient, the peacock flower known as *flos pavonis*, not enter the pharmacopoeia of doctors in Europe? Though well known among women in the Caribbean and though identified by various visitors, the peacock flower was disregarded by conventional medicine in Europe. She describes how this elegant plant made its way to Europe, where it was highly prized as an ornamental and grew to a great height in well-tended greenhouses (Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire* 151). It was

also used there for medicinal purposes but only for curing fever and stomach pains, never for its contraceptive properties. Her historical work, however, only suggests the ways that contemporary biopiracy remains the connection between colonialism in history and the contemporary knowledge base. Still, colonized peoples, especially women, are treated as nature itself. Eurocentric notions of property continue to take hold, defining medical knowledge as natural and genetic engineering as its improvement. As Vandana Shiva writes, this results in a world in which "the cultural and intellectual contributions of non-Western knowledge systems are being systematically erased" (Shiva, "Bioprospecting" 5). Certainly, contemporary women, such as the women in Kincaid's story, maintain this knowledge and make use of it when necessary. Historically, also, there has been little to no difference between an abortion and a contraceptive. Enslaved African American women in the Southern United States used cotton root to restore their menses, and once it had been restored, they reported that they were never pregnant to begin with (Bush 12). A young woman in Guatemala who made use of *emmenagogues* that a midwife had given her told me that if she had really been pregnant, God would have made it so (Personal interview). Since the herb functioned to restore her menses, she said, she had never been pregnant. Only in certain parts of the world do women take pregnancy tests and use doctor-mandated ultrasounds to date their pregnancies; in other places, women's knowledge of their own bodies and pregnancies is honored and respected and left alone.

Throughout early modern history, women have served as vessels for reproduction, especially enslaved women, whose breeding expectations intensified when the slave trade ended in the 1790s. Physician and naturalist Sir Hans Sloane wrote of enslaved Caribbean women in the early eighteenth century: "They are fruitful and go after the birth of their children to work in the fields, with the little ones tied to their backs"[6] (qtd. in Bush 121), which reinforces the idea that only white European women were subject to pain in childbirth and that African women could produce an endless number of children. Bush, in this work on the system of Caribbean slavery, tracks the low rate of natural increase of the Caribbean slave population, often assumed to be a result of poor living conditions. Her work broadens the question the impact that attitudes to childbearing and resulting contraceptive practices in slave society had on fertility rates (Bush 121-132). Often resistant to serving the slave system in their reproductive capacity, enslaved women in Jamaica resisted the creation of weaning houses, aimed at separating mothers from young babies to restore their fertility soon after giving birth. This understanding suggests that slave women understood that later weaning would reduce their fertility, so much so that one planter in Jamaica at the turn of the nineteenth century could not get women to accept two dollars to wean their infants in the first twelve months

of life (Bush 127). Angela Davis writes that black women have been aborting themselves since the earlier days of slavery. This, she argues, had nothing to do with current discussion of freedom but was an act of desperation motivated by the oppressive conditions of slavery (205).[7] Other scholars have cited this anti-motherhood attitude as a form of resistance. In the Caribbean, a "birth strike" was spoken of until the mid-nineteenth century, when women were more often forced to reproduce. It has been documented that they used "bitter herbs" to produce abortions (Mies 91).

Early Spanish sources also refer to the use of abortion and infanticide by indigenous peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean as a form of resistance to colonial oppression (de las Casas 70-72; Gage 18-25), which suggests that abortion needs to be studied more carefully as a contraceptive practice. Women in slavery voiced an especially strong protest against reproduction: abortifacients used by African women included manioc, yam, and the guinea pepper.[8] Abortifacient plants are still the method of birth control most in demand among rural Caribbean women (Bush 141) and can be easier to obtain and hide from male partners than other contraceptive methods. In "Girl," information about such a plant is passed to the central character from her mother when she is still a young girl and unmarried. In contemporary development literature, feminist scholars have argued that it remains a myth that women, especially in the developing world, do not regulate their number of births (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 9).

The colonial violence of Cortés and the Spanish conquistadors was recorded by Friar Bartolome de las Casas in 1540, when he wrote that the Caribbean islands "where there were once about five hundred thousand souls, today there is not a living creature" (de Las Casas 7). More closely tied to European apprehension about contraception and population control is his recording of events like these: "They [the Spanish] hung any doctor or female sorcerer who gave potions to expel infants from the womb, and they did the same to pregnant women who took something to achieve the same end" (de Las Casas 17).[9] Sixteenth-century Spanish historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo describes indigenous women using abortifacients in his *Historia general y natural de las indias* in 1535. This account suggests that from the point of colonial contact, pregnancy and reproduction were politically charged issues for Europeans: "They are so friendly with lust that if they become pregnant they take a certain herb, that later stirs up and casts out the pregnancy" (Oviedo 7).[10]

Many ethnobotanists and historians continued to treat many herbal remedies as magical throughout the twentieth century. Walter Hodge's 1957 recording of *Petiveria* in *The Ethnobotany of the Caribs* includes his interpretation of their plant usage as enchanted, not natural knowledge: "The Indians consider *kud-*

juruk to be both a charm and a medicine as it used in a ritual bath for the new moon and rubbed on the body to protect against evil spells" (556). Prepared as a tea, he writes, it is considered an "antidote to poisoning as well as an aid to women in parturition" (556). In botany, plants used by locals are almost always considered in terms of magic and their medicinal usage secondary.

In Trinidadian writer M. Nourbese Phillip's work, *Looking for Livingstone—an Odyssey of Silence*, a woman travels alone through unnamed lands and searches for David Livingstone, celebrated by the West as a "discoverer" of Africa. Throughout her quest for knowledge and for Livingstone, the traveler visits many peoples, listens to their stories and their silences, and learns about their many silences, including their lost knowledge of the natural world. In "Stop Frame," Phillip's character also remembers her mother's use of herbal remedies to cure her aching tooth: "And my mother packing the rotting hole with cloves that smelling sweet and sharp at the same time" (Phillip 19).

Kincaid's "Girl" merits a rereading based on the politics of contraception and natural knowledge in the Caribbean. In sparse and delicate prose, Kincaid manages to reflect on the historical ability of women to be both creative and practical in managing the relationship between their bodies and the natural world. A central theme of the story is the often-overlooked disappearance of particular forms of knowledge in particular places. The story is also about how human knowledge can arise from necessity and can provide individuals and communities with both power and agency. In their continuing efforts to maintain control over their fertility and sexuality, and through time and across geographical space and cultures, women, such as Kincaid's characters, have managed to direct their futures within a variety of limitations. They have made use of nature to enhance or reduce their fertility and childbearing, and pushed against a wide variety of constraints to do so, and they have managed to maintain access to contraception and abortion. They have negotiated understandings of pregnancy and reimagined them for their own benefit. In a globalizing world, where plant life is disappearing and corporations are attempting to circumvent those with natural knowledge in order to patent it and profit from it, women have continued to maintain this knowledge and pass it on to future generations.

Endnotes

[1]Kincaid scholars too often theorize the mother-daughter relationship as small, private, individualized, and apart from larger themes of colonial education and governing. This is a larger question, of course, of where "the political" is placed, and Jocelyn Stitt develops this more fully in her 2006 work, "Producing the Colonial Subject."

[2]In *Plants and Empire* (2004), Londa Schiebinger describes contemporary uses of plant contraceptives in the Caribbean and argues that knowledge of abortifacients did not move to Europe but remained in the Caribbean (239-241). In *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650–1838*, Barbara Bush cites an array of contraceptive and abortifacient plants that enslaved women employed to control their reproduction (120-149).

[3]Guinea hen weed is the local name for *Petiveria alliacea*, an abortifacient plant common in Jamaica and other parts of the Americas. A study in Jamaica in 2010 resulted in an international patent for Petiveria as an effective treatment of some kinds of cancer and is now undergoing clinical trials. The raw herb is used in the trials with a warning to pregnant women that its strong sulfur compounds can stimulate miscarriage (Tenney 2).

[4]Recent scholarships calls for the study of precolonial and postcolonial Obeah as located in between the written and unwritten history of the Caribbean plantation system (Sharpe 3-4), what Mary Louise Pratt calls "contact zones," which are social spaces where cultures meet "in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt 4).

[5]Here, the concept of gender is central, but since this story is one of women's knowledge of their own bodies, "women" as a category remains a legitimate and central point of analysis.

[6]Indeed, it has also been shown that many physician-botanists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries promoted the ideas that medicines derived from certain areas were only appropriate for the bodies that came from those parts of the world. They argued that certain peoples were more connected to the natural objects themselves.

[7]As Davis points out, any feminist movement for reproductive rights needs to be clear in dissociating itself from racist notions of "population control" and eugenics movements, and make opposition to involuntary sterilization an integral part of its politics (206).

[8]In the same time period, white women in the Caribbean had high fertility rates, which suggests that there was limited sharing of knowledge about contraception between enslaved black women and white European women (Behar 34-36).

[9]De Las Casas also writes of the ease indigenous women experienced in childbirth and in fertility "because of the nature of some secret remedy" (22), but interestingly offers a cultural explanation that their work patterns and diets led to ease of birth and early fertility.

[10]In this quote, Oviedo ties knowledge of contraceptive plants with representations of indigenous women as sexualized and available, a common depiction in the writings of early modern explorers and fully theorized in works such as McClintock's *Imperial Leather* and Mohanty's *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*.

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AURÉLIE LACASSAGNE

Othermothering and Othermothers in the *Harry Potter* Series

The Harry Potter *series quickly became a classic of children's literature and remains to date the most read work in the history of literature. That is certainly a good reason to examine more closely its representations of mothers and motherhood. In this paper, I argue that maternal practices and representations, particularly of othermother figures and othermothering practices, are central to the* Harry Potter *series and that they have specific psychological and social functions. I propose a typology of othermothers portrayed in this literary work. I then explore the psychological functions of other-mothers for readers. Lastly, I show the paramount role played by othermothers in social and political mobilization.*

The world of Harry Potter is replete with othermothers and othermothering practices. Cast in overtly sacrificial terms, Harry's story begins with the death of his mother, who sacrifices herself in order to save her infant son's life. Despite the death of his biological mother, Harry grows up surrounded by numerous othermother figures: his aunt Petunia, Professor McGonagall, and Molly Weasley. Othermothering is still a largely underresearched area of exploration. It has mainly been used in the literature dealing with Black mothering (Collins). Stanlie James traces the othermothering practice from West Africa where communities were interrelated and communal life pivotal in people's lives (144-154). Njoki Nathani Wane defines othermothers in the following way:

> othermothers look after children to whom they have no blood relations or legal obligation. There is usually a mutual agreement between mothers, aunts, uncles, or fathers who play the role of othermothers

> in a given community. A woman elder who mothers both adult and children assumes community mothering on the other hands. She assumes leadership roles and she becomes a consultant for her community. (230)

Othermothers play a very important social role and a specific role for the whole community. Their motherwork focuses a lot on socialization, empowerment and, building children's selves. And in these respects, othermothers appear as definite political actors. More specifically, they also act as cultural bearers and transmitters. In her examination of Toni Morrison's oeuvre, Andrea O'Reilly explains that

> In Morrison, surrogate mothers or a community of women mother the child in the event of the mother's death or abandonment, psychological or otherwise. These mothers are also, as with Pilate in *Song*, the singing teachers or story tellers who tell the orphaned or neglected child the stories and provide them with nurturance not made available by the biological mother. (*Rocking* 137)

This article proposes a psychological and social analysis of othermothering in the *Harry Potter* series as it considers that othermothers are central to the plot. It is grounded into two bodies of work: the literature on mothering, particularly on othermothering, and the research literature on fairy tales. Firstly, I intend to characterize the othermother ideal-types portrayed in this story. Then, looking at the series as a modern fairy tale, I explore the psychological functions of othermothers for preadolescent readers. The last part is informed by the social and political mobilization of othermothers to Harry, which underlines the importance of love and unity in the battle to overcome the forces of evil. In this sense, the maternal patterns in *Harry Potter* can be seen as analogous to the othermothering practices of discriminated groups, such as African Americans (Collins). The *Harry Potter* series demonstrates that love and care can produce social change, as well as teaches us how to surmount daily social battles.

Othermother Ideal-Types in Harry Potter

The *Harry Potter* series offers an impressive account of motherhood, mothering practices, and maternal thinking. The figure of Harry's mother, Lily, is the thread that connects the whole story, which begins with her sacrifice. This ultimate maternal sacrifice is reminiscent of an established myth that can be found in several civilizations as well as in classical literature. There exists what

has been called the maternal "sacrifice paradigm" (Kaplan 76). Lily's final action invokes an old magic that gives Harry protection, as Dumbledore explains:

> Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realise that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. (*Philosopher's Stone* [*PS*] 216)

Furthermore, the physical absence of Lily, coupled with a strong spiritual presence, reinforces the role of othermothers in the series. Indeed, as Riegle points, out one of the functions of othermothers is to provide "releasing spillways to the power of *the* mother" (14). The weight of Lily's sacrifice is heavy on Harry's shoulders, but it is bearable, thanks to the othermothers. One could also hypothesize that the othermothers participate in a specific maternal practice that Morrison has advanced: healing (O'Reilly, *Rocking* 134). Harry, as the chosen one to defeat Voldemort, needs to be well-equipped psychologically, to be healed from his childhood suffering, and to be empowered in order to resist the racist ideology of the Death Eaters. And, indeed, this maternal sacrifice is important to understand because it creates the link to the first othermother of the story: Aunt Petunia, Lily's sister.

First Ideal-Type: Aunt Petunia, the Othermother by Moral Obligation

Aunt Petunia represents a classical ideal-type of othermother: a member of the family who takes on the role of surrogate mother. This type of othermothering is linked to the moral obligation, created by blood relation, to take care of a new orphan. This moral responsibility implies that the person is not necessarily willing to act as a loving mother, and the obligation is more material than sentimental. Aunt Petunia exemplifies this attitude: she does not demonstrate any love for Harry, as she only makes sure he survives physically. Contrary to the essentialized mother figure of Lily that portrays the mother as a caring, loving figure (the biological care ideology), Petunia shows that motherhood does not necessarily imply love. She embodies the ambivalence of mothering.

In terms of maternal practices, Petunia fulfills the bare minimum but is, nevertheless, efficient. For instance, in terms of preservative love (Ruddick 65-81), she indeed protects Harry's life by accepting him under her roof. She provides shelter, food, and clothing. But the shelter is the cupboard under the stairs; the food is scarce; and the clothing is Dudley's old, worn-out, and too big clothes. As Ruddick recalls, "What we are pleased to call 'mother-love' is intermixed with hate, sorrow, impatience, resentment, and despair; thought-provoking ambivalence is a hallmark of mothering." (68) Sometimes, Petunia has doubts,

and she is afraid as her own biological son is in danger. When Harry tells her that Voldemort is back, she is horrified. Uncle Vernon wants Harry to leave the house. Dumbledore, aware that Petunia may panic, sends her a Howler, which says in a ghostly womanly voice, "'Remember my last, Petunia'" (*Order of the Phoenix* [*OP*] 41). It is Lily's last demand to her sister to protect Harry. Petunia imposes her decision on Vernon: Harry has to stay. She shows, then, a lot of courage. But this action is not inspired by any feelings towards Harry but rather Lily is motivated by feelings for her sister and for her biological son, whom she needs to protect. It is not a maternal action but has a maternal consequence; it is a product of maternal thinking. When Dumbledore leaves Harry at Petunia's doorstep after his parents' murder, he explains in a letter what he later reveals to Harry in the following conversation:

> "But I knew too, where Voldemort was weak. And so I made my decision. You will be protected by an ancient magic…. I am speaking, of course, of the fact that your mother died to save you. She gave you a lingering protection he never expected, a protection that flows in your veins to this day. I put my trust, therefore, in your mother's blood. I delivered you to her sister, her only remaining relative."
>
> "She does not love me" said Harry at once…
>
> "But she took you" Dumbledore cut across him. "She may have taken you grudgingly, furiously, unwillingly, bitterly, yet still she took you, and in doing so, she sealed the charm I placed upon you. You mother's sacrifice made the bond of blood the strongest shield I could give you." … "While you can still call home the place where your mother's blood dwells, you cannot be touched or harmed by Voldemort…. Your aunt knows this." (*OP* 736-737; see also *Half-Blood Prince* [*HBP*] 57-58)

Petunia's character is modeled on an othermother commonly found in fairy tales: the evil stepmother. Yet there is a big difference: she does not want to kill Harry. She preserves his physical survival.

Aunt Petunia also takes responsibility for other maternal practices described by Ruddick: nurturing and socialization. She acts reluctantly, but, paradoxically, it works wonderfully. When Harry arrives at Hogwarts, he is a social being and has social skills; he shows empathy. Amusingly, Petunia's biological son, Dursley, is overprotected and overindulged by his mother, and the results are disastrous. He completely lacks any social abilities. As Dumbledore tells her: "You have never treated Harry as a son. He has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands. The best that can be said is that he has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy

sitting between you." (*HBP* 57). This paradox of mothering failure as success confirms the ideal-type: in fairy tales, the bad stepmother usually has idiotic and nasty biological daughters, whereas the "adopted" one is a beautiful and empowered person. Petunia's intensive mothering (O'Reilly, "Introduction" 8-11) of Dudley also demonstrates how much this contemporary type of mothering can have destructive effects on the child as well as the mother. Petunia is completely alienated by the motherhood model imposed on her and seems unable to resist.

Second Ideal-Type: Minerva McGonagall or the Fairy Godmother as Othermother

Professor McGonagall, the first magical female character encountered in the series, is introduced when Dumbledore leaves baby Harry on his aunt's doorstep. She immediately shows her protective nature towards Harry by trying to convince Dumbledore not to do such a thing and shows maternal thinking as she believes that in this family Harry cannot be nurtured and socialized properly. This first opening story sets the tone, and one specific description reveals a clear analogy with the classical image of the fairy godmother: "Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep" (*PS* 16). And indeed, throughout the story, McGonagall behaves as Harry's godmother. The godmother is a well-established figure in the Christian world, who is chosen to act as the child's mother should the biological mother die (i.e., a Christian godmother holds a moral responsibility before God without necessarily any blood relations with the child). But the godmother also often acts as othermother, even in the presence of the mother, as a confidante, a helper, and a supporter of the godchild.

When Harry arrives at Hogwarts, McGonagall is in charge of the sorting of the four different houses, which she describes as very important "'because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts'" (*PS* 85). The Sorting Hat decides to send Harry to Gryffindor, of which McGonagall is the head. Throughout Harry's school years, she constantly behaves as a protective othermother, more rarely as a loving one, although she does offer him a broom—and not any broom, a Nimbus 2000, the most expensive one on the market —the symbol, with the wand, of his entry in the magical world. When she decides to have Harry on the Gryffindor team, she could have ordered him to get a broom (she knows Harry's parents left him money) as a teacher would do. But she makes him a present, a very emblematical one, as a mother would do. She also refuses to grant permission to Harry to go to Hogsmeade: "'The form clearly states that the parent or guardian must give permission.' She turned to look at him, with an odd expression on her face. Was it pity? 'I'm sorry, Potter, but that's my final word'" (*PA* 113). This reaction

may appear as unmotherly, but, in fact, it is not. It is part of the socialization to rules that McGonagall teaches Harry, as a mother would do. During the eve of the final battle, McGonagall provides many examples of her protective love to Harry: protecting him in the Ravenclaw Tower against Alecto and Amycus in the hallways against Snape and taking the lead to organize the defense of the castle against Voldemort while Harry searches for the diadem (*Deathly Hallows* [*DH*] 476-484). Becoming an othermother has empowered McGonagall and has allowed her to become a leader in her community. If it were not for developing these mothering feelings, she may not have become such a strong leader.

McGonagall is different from the two other othermothers for two reasons: she is not a biological mother, and she is the only one to work outside of the domestic sphere. To use Kaplan's terminology, she is a "high-modernist" othermother, whereas Molly and Petunia are representations of "early modern" othermothers (20). They are representative of the Rousseauian split of "public/male, private/female" (21), whereas McGonagall does not need to be a mother to exist and to work with men, who respect her skills and labour. (Yet both Molly and Petunia are representative of intensive mothering, a popular motherhood ideology of contemporary society). Behind McGonagall's authoritative tone lie true motherly feelings for Harry.

Third Ideal-Type: Molly Weasley, the Archetype of the Community Othermother

Molly Weasley is the most archetypal motherly character of the series. She corresponds entirely to the constructed image of the "perfect mother" in a heteropatriarchal society. She personifies what DiQuinzio calls "essential motherhood." Essential motherhood is the idea that "mothering is a function of women's essentially female nature…. It requires women's exclusive and selfless attention to and care of children based on women's psychological and emotional capacities for empathy, awareness of the needs of others, and self-sacrifice" (xiii). There is no one single action performed by Molly that is not directed by maternal thinking. She is depicted as the sole master of the domestic sphere, as she takes care of everything, from cooking and cleaning to buying school materials. Apart from the material aspects of her mothering practices, her emotions completely conform to essentialized maternal affect. She is solely in charge of the education of her seven children and is constantly worried about the personal security of her children, as her "magical clock" in the kitchen can indicate the physical state of all of them. But she is not weak; she is a strong woman. Her involvement in the final battle again reveals her permanent maternal mode of thinking. When she starts the final duel with Bellatrix (the only scene in which she appears as a warrior), she does it to defend her daughter's life, as she screams "NOT MY DAUGHTER, YOU BITCH!" (*DH*

589). And it is the only case in which a member of the Order of the Phoenix actually uses the death spell. The mother-as-warrior is still very much present in popular culture and may describe a "much more complex relationship with violence, one that reflects our current confusion about motherhood" (Dancey 82).

Molly is overprotective towards Harry and acts as the perfect caring othermother: she feeds him, offers him shelter, washes his clothes, worries about him at school, and loves him. She offers him presents for Christmas (clothes that she knits herself) as if he were her own child. Evidence of this last statement is offered in several scenes, such as the one with the Boggart. (A Boggart represents what one most fears in her life.) When facing the Boggart, she sees her children, her husband, and Harry all dead (*OP* 159-160). During an argument between Sirius and Molly, Sirius says, "He's not your son"; to which Molly replies, "He's as good as" (*OP* 85). And Harry actually considers Molly as his othermother: "Mrs Weasley set the potion down on the bedside cabinet, bent down, and put her arms around Harry. He had no memory of ever being hugged like this, as though by a mother" (*GF* 620).

Molly also personifies the ideal-type of othermother who takes care of the children of her community. She represents what the literature terms "community mothers" (Edwards 204-205; Lawson 198-200): women who see themselves as the defendants of the whole marginalized community against the oppressors; through social and political activism, they represent and defend the community, seek emancipation, and incarnate resistance and empowerment. Molly's community, the Order of the Phoenix, is a "fictive kin," one that extends "beyond the boundaries of biologically related individuals" (Collins 193). Despite the fact that she already has seven children of her own, she behaves as a mother for Harry and Hermione. Molly's character approximates the Black othermothers depicted by Patricia Hill Collins: "because all children must be fed, clothed, and educated, if their biological parents could not discharge these obligations, then some other members of the community should accept that responsibility" (194). She is the intergenerational link—she mothers Tonks as much as Hermione—and the elder of the community, who offers the warmth of a house and a good diner to all the warriors. She makes sure everyone feels comfortable and has food. She is a "mama," who constantly worries and about the well-being of her extended family.

In conclusion, these three othermothers are ideal-types in two senses. Firstly, they are ideal-types in that they represent long-established categories in literature and especially fairy tales. Secondly, their characters underpin some of the essentialized features attributed to these categories. In that sense, one may say that they "lack of authenticity" (Kinnick 4). Although this is partly true, compared with most of the narratives of popular literature, J.K. Rowling actually offers a depiction that is much closer to the realities and experiences

of othermothers. This achievement is partly due to the well-developed psychological profile of each othermother and to the fact that motherhood issues are not personal but politicized (in contrast to most popular culture texts; for a critique see Kinnick 15-16). Thus, I argue that the level of readers' self-identification with various characters and the narrative is higher. Consequently, it is worth examining the potential psychological functions of the *Harry Potter* series for readers.

The Psychological Function of Othermothers

Harry Potter's story is a modern fairy tale. Bruno Bettelheim provides a few general characteristics of this genre: fairy stories show "an existential dilemma"; in fairy tales, "characters are typical rather than unique"; and in every fairy tale, "good and evil are given in the form of some figures" (8-9). These general characteristics can be found in *Harry Potter*, but they are more complex than traditional folk stories because the characters are more ambivalent. In particular, othermothers express in their mothering practices certain ambivalences (Ruddick): Petunia entertains a love-hate relation with Harry; McGonagall hesitates between motherly behaviour and teacher requirements in her dealings with Harry; and Molly juggles between all the mothering tasks that she performs for her many blood and community children. When she participates in the last battle, she finds it a relief to be a warrior and not any longer a stay-at-home mom. It is a kind of emancipation but, at the same time, she fights to protect all of her children. It is a fairy tale for older children who can appreciate the psychological complexities of any person in the face of an existential dilemma. But all these characters remain typical of fairy tales: Harry Potter, the hero; Voldemort, the evil villain; the elves, centaurs, and Thestrals as animal helpers or "magical auxiliaries" (Propp 100); human auxiliaries, such as the othermothers, Harry's friends, and the other members of the Order; and "magical objects" Propp 100), such as the Invisible Cloak, the Time-Turner and Gryffindor's Sword. Finally, if one looks at the structure of fairy tales as described by Propp (35-80), one sees that most structural elements are respected in the Harry Potter story (Röhrich 3).

Essentially, Harry Potter's story provides children with all the psychological tools of traditional fairy tales. But the complexity of the narrative appears to be better suited to preadolescents. According to Freud, "[I]t is during this period of total or partial latency that are built up the mental forces which are later to impede the course of the sexual instinct, and like dams, restrict its flows—disgust, feelings of shame, and the claims of aesthetic and moral ideals" (93). Freud insists that this period is paramount to the growth of a "civilized" child (93-95). This period of latency (ages nine to twelve) sees children's autono-

mization—especially from their parents—and individuation; they are also more curious. They are searching to understand the ambivalences of life, and it is usually around that time that children will seek the support of othermothers as a way to distance themselves from their parents. This "releasing function" was noticed by Riegle (13) about Black mother-daughter relationships. *Harry Potter* offers a more complex view of social life. To the image of the "wicked" stepmother of children's fairy tales, J.K. Rowling adds the image of the othermother in order to address children's intrinsic fear of losing their mothers. Such images help adolescents going through the transition from childhood to adulthood to successfully pass through the latency phase. This is achieved by locating othermothers at the centre of the plot.

The primary function of *Harry Potter* is to "provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence" (Bettelheim 11). The three most secure places for Harry are his Aunt Petunia's house, Hogwarts, especially Gryffindor's House, and the Burrow (Molly's house). Consequently, the three safest locations for Harry are associated with each of his three othermothers. Harry's confidence is built in these places, in the contact and experiences that he has with his othermothers. Marjorie Worthington rightly highlights that Walt Disney's princesses have, "with rare exceptions," no mothers (30). It is not only that their mothers are dead but that they are not part of the story at all. In the *Harry Potter* saga, Harry's mother is dead, but Harry can rely on several othermothers. The narrative offers, therefore, a powerful tool for children living in a society in which they are isolated. The family unit has been reduced to its most cellular type. Outside the family circle, strong individualism, the compression of time and space, and the structure of work prevent the development of true friendship, fraternity, and community ties. *Harry Potter* offers young readers a guide and a hope to survive in a postmodern and individualist world. It shows that an isolated, unloved young boy like Harry can find friends and othermothers to help him gain confidence and that one can recreate an extended family and a strong community. The centrality of othermothering in the story is reminiscent of Ruddick's idea: "Every infant requires *at least* one mother" (emphasis added, 211).

The *Harry Potter* series is also exceptional because—contrary to most fairy tales in which mothers are absent, women are obedient, and passive princesses share essentialized anti-feminist dreams—othermothers play a key role as helpers of the hero. Even if Aunt Petunia resembles the evil stepmother, she puts her life at risk for Harry. Hermione is depicted as the cleverest young wizard for her time. Ginny is definitively a better wizard than her brothers. This shows that the *Harry Potter* books are more feminist than traditional

fairy tales. But the *Harry Potter* books still remain typical of the genre, as the "fundamental character traits of the woman, which are often decisive for the plot of the story, are her unwavering loyalty, unflinching selflessness and self-sacrifice, her long-suffering determination" (Röhrich 111). Nevertheless, any feminist parent would prefer her daughter to be Hermione rather than Cinderella and to love Harry instead of waiting for Prince Charming. The series is a great pedagogical tool for feminist parents teaching their children about the importance of love, friendship, and othermothers.

Traditional fairy tales deal with the difficult relationships between children and parents (the Oedipus complex). The latency phase is the time for other adults to relay the parents. Indeed, of all the maternal practices, training may prove to be the most difficult: "Many mothers find that the central challenge of mothering lies in training a child to be the kind of person whom others accept and whom the mothers themselves can actively appreciate" (Ruddick 104). Othermothers enter the scene if they have not already. This period is also when children acquire new skills and cultural competencies. And probably most people have gone through such socialization and training processes with the help of othermothers. It may be one of the reasons the series is so attractive for adult readers.

Othermothers and Social and Political Mobilization

I described the Order as a "fictive kinship" earlier in the article. The members of this kinship are not linked by blood but by values. They form a united family ready to fight to defend their values: love, respect, and an inclusive morality as a cosmopolitan community of all humans (wizards and muggles). As the wizard Kingsley points out, "We're all human, aren't we? Every human life is worth the same, and worth saving" (*DH* 357). The Order opposes Voldemort and his Death Eaters, who defend a racial viewpoint of the wizardry community. For them, only the pure-blood and half-blood wizards should be allowed to handle a wand. Within this racial conception, there is an impermeable racial hierarchy: the pure-bloods, the half-bloods, and then all of the others, who should be servants and slaves. Rowling makes a clear analogy with twentieth-century European history. In times of wars and times of extreme social conflict and crisis, these fictive kinships and these othermothers play a pivotal role. It is not by chance that the concept of othermother has been much discussed in the context of Black communities. Othermothers and their practices represent sites of resistance. Without them, Harry, Hermione, Tonks, Sirius, Remus and all the others would not have the strength to fight the dark forces. The othermothers, particularly Molly as a community othermother, empower them, as Black othermothers have done throughout history, by training strong

children, by teaching them to believe in themselves, and by allowing them to develop. It is also interesting to notice that these relationships also empower these women. Molly can get away from her household duties in order to fight; Minerva can get out of her secondary role and take the lead during the final battle. Empowered mothering (O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws* 12-13) is not unidirectional but inherently relational. It empowers women who, by becoming othermothers, embody the face of resistance and represent the pillar of their communities. Empowered mothering also empowers children, who become equipped to fight racism and discrimination. I think this empowerment is the outcome of the relationship other/mothers-children.

This radical opposition between two views on the constitution of the community is coupled with a clear discourse on social class in the series. Within each "blood-defined" community, class relations are always present, even more so among the pure-bloods. This is illustrated by the disparaging remarks made by the rich Malfoys towards the poor Weasleys (both pure-blood families who are cousins). The Order, therefore, fights for not only an inclusive cosmopolitan human community but also an egalitarian community. These two opposed political narratives call for strong political mobilization in which othermothers play a key role.

Collins makes an important argument about the relationship between othermothering and political activism when she states "U.S. Black women's experiences as othermothers provide a foundation for conceptualizing Black women's political activism. Experiences both of being nurtured as children and being held responsible for siblings and fictive kin within kin networks can stimulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability among African-American women" (205-207). Harry finds in the Order multiple othermothers. He is cared for, loved and nurtured by them, and it is what gives him the strength to face the many challenges waiting for him on his quest to defeat the evil forces. The ability to rely on a "fictive kinship" and othermothers is what makes Harry able to love, contrary to Voldemort. Voldemort was raised in an orphanage and was deprived of any kinship ties or maternal love; thus he is not able to feel any love for anyone. Harry has been loved and nurtured by othermothers, which is what provides him with the strength that he needs to win. A few seconds before the final duel, Harry tells Voldemort that "I was ready to die to stop you hurting these people … that's what did it. I've done what my mother did. They're protected from you, Haven't you noticed how none the spells you put on them are binding?" (*DH* 591). Harry highlights the importance of self-sacrifice— the ultimate sign of love and gift of one's self to a higher cause. It is an important element of the Kantian discourse that is diffused throughout the series. But this self-sacrifice is understood only thanks to the original sacrifice of Harry's mother and the

will shown by Petunia, McGonagall, and Molly to sacrifice their lives in order to save Harry and other children. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series represents a very intense narrative in favour of the political power of biological mothers and community othermothers. As Collins argues, "the connectedness with others and common interest expressed by community othermothers model a very different value system, one whereby ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward" (207). J.K. Rowling defends a representation of "motherhood as a symbol of power" (Collins 209).

The question remains as to whether or not J.K. Rowling consciously developed a narrative of powerful (other)mothers. A quick look at her official biography indicates that there might have been quite a strong level of awareness, as she writes a lot about her mother and her loss:

> I think most people believe, deep down, that their mothers are indestructible; it was a terrible shock to hear that she had an incurable illness, but even then, I did not fully realise what the diagnosis might mean…. Then, on December 30th 1990, something happened that changed both my world and Harry's forever: my mother died. It was a terrible time. (Rowling, "Official Biography")

Do the political narratives of the stories inspire Rowling's readers? The *Harry Potter* series has been read throughout the world. In 2008, for example, over 400 million copies were sold, and the series was translated into more than sixty languages (Dammann). People have found in this narrative a powerful discourse of hope. The series echoes other social movements in which mothers and othermothers have played a key role in mobilizing resources, such as the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (Lacassagne) and las "locas" de la Plaza de Mayo (Arditti). The success of *Harry Potter* lets us envision mothers at the heart of social movements for peace. This discourse may sound utopian and sentimentalist, as Ruddick points out: "Peace, like mothering, is sentimentally honoured and often secretly despised." But she adds: "Just because mothering and peace have been so long and so sentimentally married, a critical understanding of mothering and maternal nonviolence will itself contribute to the reconception of 'peace'" (137; see also Swerdlow). Non-violence is different from pacifism. Harry Potter, his othermothers, and his friends fight evil forces because they have to. And it is the trio of othermothers and their maternal practices that make Harry and his companions able to defeat the dark forces. Interestingly, Rowling does not fall into the essentialist trap of liberal feminism (for a critique see Forcey 363-371). It is not about gender but about behind a mother. A striking example of this lies in the different behaviour of childless Bellatrix—who fights for the sake of fighting and killing, something she clearly enjoys—and

her sister Narcissa, Draco's mother, who does not hesitate to lie to Voldemort, wants the battle to stop to save her son's life. Mothers are also warriors who go to war, but they may go to war for different reasons and may be better at making peace (Forcey 372) because, fundamentally, at the heart of their commitment is the well-being and peaceful future of the community's children.

Conclusion

I have looked at the *Harry Potter* series as a "maternal text," as fiction "about mothering, motherhood and being mothered" (Podnieks and O'Reilly 1). Three ideal-types of othermothers were identified and each performed specific mothering practices: the othermother by moral obligation, who shows preservative love; the childless othermother, who discovers maternal love and expresses protective love; and the community mother, who embodies many mothering practices to support and help the whole community to emancipate. They share one commonality: the maternal relationship that they establish with Harry and other children empowers them, and, at the same time, it empowers the children. This mutual empowerment is what permits them to fight, win, and reach peace. In this sense, it represents a perfect illustration of the inherent relation between mothers and the politics of peace. Overall, this literary series has a lot to bring to the study of othermothers, who are often forgotten. They accompany children in their personal journey from childhood to adulthood. They offer mother-readers support in the face of the hard challenge of training children by reminding them that othermothers are here to help in this task. Othermothers are key actors of social and political mobilization. They show maternal thinking and maternal practices in every aspect of their decisions and behaviours. They offer children an extraordinary hope: that once their mothers leave them, they will not be alone. Othermothers will be there to support them. The series is exceptional in the place it gives to othermothers (Staub 2).

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LYNN GARLICK

Contemporary Australian Motherhood Memoir as Personal, Creative, and Political Narrative

In 2010, Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly published Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures, *which examines "how mothering and being a mother are political, personal, and creative narratives unfolding within both the pages of a book and the spaces of a life" (3). O'Reilly further calls on memoirs to not only challenge but to change patriarchal motherhood and to move from "rant to revolution" ("The Motherhood Memoir" 209). Drawing impetus from Podnieks and O'Reilly, I examine selected Australian contemporary motherhood memoirs published since 2010 as literary texts to show that this personal writing is flourishing in new political and creative ways. These narrative examples challenge perceived notions of motherhood and redefine maternal roles, often from a position that intersects the personal and professional. Experiments with genre and style also become political acts to rewrite mother bodies and stories.*

In 2010, Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly published *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*, which examines "how mothering and being a mother are political, personal, and creative narratives unfolding within both the pages of a book and the spaces of a life" (3). They ask of mother writers to "speak truthfully and authentically about their experiences of mothering" in order to "unmask motherhood" (3). O'Reilly further calls on mothering narratives to not only challenge but to change patriarchal motherhood to move from "rant to revolution" ("The Motherhood Memoir" 209).

Drawing impetus from Podnieks and O'Reilly, I will discuss selected Australian contemporary motherhood memoirs to show that this writing is

flourishing in new political, personal, and creative ways. I use the term "motherhood memoir" loosely in this discussion to refer to a published, book-length autobiographical and literary text written from a subjective-mother perspective, in which there is some exploration of the mothering experience. Therefore, by definition, the books chosen will inevitably grapple with the personal, political and creative elements of writing the subjective-mother experience. In this article, contemporary Australian texts mean ones published since 2010 by authors writing about mothering in Australia. The three texts to be examined in detail—*Things I Didn't Expect When I Was Expecting* (2013) by Monica Dux, *Reaching One Thousand: A Story of Love, Motherhood and Autism* (2012) by Rachel Robertson and *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body* (2015) by Quinn Eades—were chosen because they are among the few texts that meet all of the above criteria.

This contemporary writing builds from the many discourses that mothers move between in their complex lives in order to offer critiques and celebrations of mothering. They depict maternal agency to challenge dominant archetypes of mothering, such as the "good mother." I argue also that the creative approaches employed are also political acts used to challenge and change representations of mothering. At the same time, however, it is clear that these voices are not representative of the potential diversity of mothering experiences and voices in Australia.

The Personal Is Political

Transforming a personal mothering experience into a published text can be considered political for many reasons. Motherhood memoir can story "mothering as intelligent practice, deliberately reinventing and rearticulated by women … where women are agents of discourse and of cultural production" (Stitt and Powell 6). Sheena Wilson adds, "Writing and publishing motherhood memoir signals the writer's perception that her mothering experience is significant and worthy and a form of resistance to predetermined roles" (3). Given Judith Butler's position that identity is produced through the performance of cultural norms, "to vary the repetition of maternal practices is to exert maternal agency" (Jeremiah 25) and motherhood memoir has the power to show that. Joanne Frye adds that motherhood memoir can question and "resist simplistic notions of 'good' mother as selfless, 'bad' mother as selfish, and develop a fuller understanding of human mother as an active and thinking self" (191).

Heather Hewett questions whether "an exclusive focus on the personal precludes the kind of systemic analysis so crucial for feminist activism" (25). Di Quinzio argues that "feminist theory will inevitably include multiple accounts

of mothering that will contradict each other" (247). Wilson believes in the collective power of these individual stories, even when writers are not acting according to or against particular definitions of mothering. She states that "these stories complicate and break open constraining ideals of motherhood" (3). So for Wilson, even books that do not aim to challenge perceived notions of motherhood have the power to do so.

After analysing examples of the genre, Andrea O'Reilly in "The Motherhood Memoir and the 'New Momism': Biting the Hand that Feeds You" argues that "Most motherhood memoirs because of their identification with the new momism, cannot discern, let alone critique, the root causes of mothers' oppression" (212). Two recent Australian motherhood memoirs—Antonella Gambotto-Burke's, *Mama: Dispatches from the Frontline of Love* (2014) and Jacinta Tynan's, *Mother Zen* (2015)—could be seen to fit this "new momism" ideology. They promote the joy of being a mother and as such they both profess that their texts are about change or even revolution. Gambotto-Burke promotes attachment parenting as a revolutionary notion against the understanding that motherhood has been seen as a consolation prize for women, and Tynan questions why society sees parenting as a tough and unrewarding job.

In 2010, Tynan was subject to protests from mothers on social media when an article that she wrote, titled "Is Motherhood Really That Hard?" appeared in newspapers in Sydney and Melbourne and began with the following statement: "There is one thing nobody warned me about when I became a mother: what a breeze it would be." Susan Maushart responded to Tynan by publishing an article in *The Australian*, "Give Us the Bad News," which reads:

> Fifteen years ago, the "dark side" of motherhood (aka, most of it) was quite literally the love that dared not speak its name. Today we are a full ten centimetres dilated on that one. Somehow, somewhere, grizzling, farting and generally sicking-up about motherhood has become the approved discourse—the motherhood issue if you will—while enjoying the experience smacks of some dangerous new radicalism. The taboo has become the totem.

This is significant because Maushart was referring to her 1997 book titled, *The Mask of Motherhood*, in which she wrote: "The Mask of Motherhood is the semblance of serenity and control that enables women's work to pass unnoticed in the larger drama of human life. Above all, the mask keeps us quiet about what we know, to the point where we forget that we know anything at all, or anything worth telling" (25-26).

Maushart questions if what is "political" has indeed changed over the past fifteen years. Monica Dux's memoir, *Things I Didn't Expect When I Was Ex-*

pecting, however, returns to Maushart's original call to "unmask" motherhood and suggests that mothers are not yet "fully dilated" on "grizzling, farting and generally sicking-up about motherhood" because Dux's book does exactly that. She unmasks motherhood, pregnancy, miscarriage and birth by providing a truthful rendition of her experience. At the same time she extracts humour from each situation, even, ironically, self-deprecating humour, in order to empower. Dux reinforces that the "institution of motherhood" remains largely unchanged:

> One thing I know for sure: pregnancy is still pregnancy and motherhood is still motherhood. Babies still have to grow inside women's bodies and we still have to get them out at the end of the process. Newborn infants still have to be fed and cleaned and nurtured, and nine times out of ten it's women who end up doing that. So the fundamentals are unchanged. And, if you ask me, those fundamentals are, and always have been, utterly bizarre. (xiii)

Dux's title is a play on the title of Heidi Murkoff's "pregnancy bible" *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, in order to suggest that the well-read pregnancy manual has failed in its task, and that it is her book that will reveal the truth. Her flippant tone belies the impact of her considered research. Dux is not offering a pregnancy instruction manual; she is providing a feminist maternal consciousness-raising treatise that is impactful because she breaks the personal-public divide around pregnancy and women's bodies. She reclaims the colloquial language to explain how pregnant women's bodies and their bodily functions have been considered dirty, controlled, and medicalised, which makes women feel ashamed. She also exposes the falsehood that everything regarding birth is clean and without consequence, such as in this passage from chapter two, titled "Poo":

> Imagine you were required to take a poo in front of an audience. You are naked from the waist down and are expected to assume various awkward and immodest positions … you'll empathise with how I felt when I discovered the horrible truth about labour. As your baby enters the world, so too will your poo. (25)

By choosing a home birth for her second delivery, she regains agency after experiencing a disempowering first birthing experience. Her husband is actively included in the birth and ongoing care of the children; he also writes a small response in the book. So Dux offers examples of "outlaw," or empowered mothering which O'Reilly argues, help move the genre from one of "complaint to change" (212).

The Professional and the Personal Are Political

In the same year that Dux released her book, 2013, Pamela Douglas wrote an article titled "The Medicalised Mother," in which she argues that despite motherhood literature flourishing in Australia, "there are still relatively few Australian women writers who have dared to foreground the body of the reproductive female and to defy an entrenched cultural prejudice against writing frankly about maternity" (105).[1] Douglas calls for heroic stories of motherhood: "We lack a mythopoeic story for the extraordinary bodily transformation of pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding. We lack empowered and empowering narratives about this rite of passage" (110).

Douglas is a doctor and an author who shared the 2009 Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Emerging Author for her unpublished manuscript *Bone Mother: A Memoir in Milk*.[2] As a doctor, Douglas is trained in and engages in the medicalization of women's bodies, yet at the same time, she is a mother who is subject to that and can see the limitations of such an approach. She is located at the intersection of the personal and the professional; she can, therefore, offer a gendered critique of medical representations of the pregnant, birthing, and breastfeeding body. Douglas believes in the subversive potential of this gendered insider's critique. She writes: "this fertile tension between multiple and contradictory selves can be developed, not as a source of crippling anxiety, conflict and guilt, but as a richly textured, empowered, and generative complexity, offering powerful potential for the creation of a new feminine imaginary" (121). This mix of the personal and the professional is representative of the multiple discourses that many contemporary mothers move between in their complex lives; the approach may offer opportunities for the empowered motherhood memoir to move the discussion from "complaint to change" in previously unexplored directions.

Rachel Robertson is another author who combines personal experience with her professional knowledge in her memoir titled *Reaching One Thousand: A Story of Love, Motherhood and Autism*. This story is about her relationship with her autistic son, Ben (not his real name) during his first eleven years. It is written as a series of lyrical essays, which draw on extensive research into disability and autism. She juxtaposes memoir with cultural, social, and political discourses on disability and motherhood.

As the mother of a disabled son, Robertson is forced into structural relationships that do not empower, and, as such, she finds that she has to renegotiate her identity. She begins with the belief that she could remain autonomous and liberated as a mother, and she continues with her role as main breadwinner once her son is born. When Ben is diagnosed, his status changes from a boy to a "boy with autism." Her status changes from mother to "carer," and Ben

officially becomes a "care-recipient," which "marks them as different to other mothers and boys" (97). Her identity changes again when her marriage ends, from main breadwinner as an independent policy consultant, to single mother and carer. She finds that the institutions that are meant to assist instead make her feel like an outsider:

> Just as I have shifted from mother to carer, so too have I moved from consumer to client, taxpayer to recipient, citizen to outsider. Because I get a carer's allowance of fifty dollars per week and these vexed one-off bonuses, because I get letters from the government telling me that I have to inform them of any changes in my circumstances, because I am on the Centrelink database and have the feeling of being watched by government, my sense of being an autonomous, independent citizen with freedom of speech and action is unravelling. (101)

Joanne Baker explains that the increasingly punitive treatment of mothers by the state in Australia is part of the contemporary neoliberal context, which promotes the idea that choice rather than unseen structural forces govern mother's lives, and, as such, the government is able to exonerate itself from social service provision. Robertson reflects, "If I were to embrace my identity as 'carer' could I be part of a group that challenges the notion that individual families and not taxpayers must be responsible for the majority of the caring work in our society?" (103). Susan Goodwin and Kate Huppatz further outline how the "good mother" archetype developed as the result of deeply held cultural beliefs in Australia and is implemented as a set of unrealistic ideals produced and reproduced through the media, government policy, and institutions. The promotion of this archetype keeps women doing the unpaid care work and regulates family life (6).

In "Misfitting Mothers: Feminism, Disability and Motherhood," Robertson connects feminist disability theory with the experience of mothering, as both are subject to social, cultural and politically fabricated narratives of the body experienced in and through relationships (8-9). Her academic work theorizes what her memoir shows: independence can occur when interpersonal and social structural relationships empower rather than limit people (8).

Robertson ultimately resists prescribed labels and roles, and maintains her agency by also refusing to label her son or assign him a prescribed role. Her son shows her the "difference in sameness" (10), and she begins to understand her son outside of the notion of a "puzzle" that needs to be solved (63). "It wasn't until I had Ben that I realised the complexities of the relationship between mothering and autonomy. It took experience, also to teach me that the act of caring for another is a gift to oneself as much as to the other" (113).

Robertson parallels her storytelling approach with her lived experience of mothering by not writing in chronological order and mixing essay writing with personal storytelling. This is her creative way to show that mothering a child with a developmental disability means that the "typical or perhaps ideal developmental path" (90) cannot happen. The story has to represent the "continual pauses and reconfigurations" that have represented both Ben's developmental path and Robertson's mothering experiences: "In a way you live against the story told by society. There is a kind of silencing that happens when your own story (or your child's) is fragmented, disordered and out of sequence with the typical story. You can't share your stories in the same way as other parents" (90). This reinforces the idea that the motherhood memoir can be a political tool when it offers a voice to those not often heard and allows them to write their story in the way that it can best be told.

In 2008, Hewett asked, "Why are white, middle class women still dictating the terms of the discussion, and why does our culture continue to listen to these voices when it ignores so many others?" (25). This question could be aimed at the contemporary motherhood memoirs that I have reviewed because these writers are white, middle class, and educated. These writers are doctors, journalists, or academics, who live in capital cities. These stories explore a variety of family structures and experiences of mothering; however, the voices published in this form are not reflective of the potential diversity of mothers in Australia.

The Creative as Political

In terms of creative approaches, all of these texts offer a mix of genres and styles, but the most radical of these is Quinn Eades's text, which attempts a new form of writing. In *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*, Eades makes clear that moving beyond genres can be a political as well as creative agenda. Redefining male writing genres and their conventions can also be a way of redefining patriarchal mothering (Podnieks and O'Reilly 7). Eades is challenging traditional approaches to gender and mothering and achieves this by offering glimpses into everyday parenting experiences with partner Sal and their sons, Zach and Benji. The "autobiography of the body" is presented in short visceral snatches of dramatic events, such as births:

> Who surges up in my throat? What is signified when that carnal sound unfurls? Birth. All that it contains. *Birth* is not a word; it is a world. Take word and add *L*. Add language, the lolling lick as a tongue flicks and finds voice behind movement, looping meaning through love, languid days, those long nights, the laugh. When Benji

> was born, the first sound was our laugh. Four women in a kitchen, all of us laughing hello. *Take word*, and add *L*: this is the world. (176)

Eades argues that Helene Cixous's call to write bodies in a way that is free from patriarchal language and structures—an *ecriture feminine,* a feminist practice of writing—is not enough. Building from Cixous's ideas that writing from the feminine stands in opposition to masculine, Eades shows that this approach does not work in order to write a body as a "genderqueer, tattooed who has lost its womb" (1).[3] Instead, Eades has written an *ecriture matiere*—a text that matters. This is a call for bodies to write themselves in the moment, and, as such, the traditional binaries will disappear:

> *Ecriture matiere* unhides. Writing matter, writing the material, brings dark to light and light to the dark. It is possible that an autobiography of the body will always only be queer. That as soon as we say this is neither: culture nor nature, body nor mind, affect nor effect, here nor there, he nor she, them nor us; as soon as we say: integrated, embodied, we, *oui*, the queering begins (has already begun). (35)

This memoir is written in short form prose and poetry linked with quotes of literary theory, particularly from Helene Cixous. Eades direct voice and genderqueer experience challenges established concepts of mother: "I am taking this queer body that has birthed two babies, drunk ink like it's milk, fucked outrageously in the dawn, drawn scalpels and needles to its arms and wrists, and I am standing it, unapologetically, on this page" (31). Perhaps in offering a new way of writing a genderqueer mothering autobiography of the body, Eades has moved Australian mother writing away from rant and towards revolution.

Conclusion

These selected texts are "political, personal and creative narratives" as defined by Podnieks and O'Reilly. They are personal stories that challenge perceived notions of motherhood and redefine maternal roles, either as a feminist consciousness-raising text about the pregnant and birthing body (Dux), offering examples of empowered mothering gained at the intersection of mother's professional and personal lives, (Robertson and Douglas), or developing new styles of writing varied mothering experiences (Eades). Just as "good mother" archetypes have developed over time and are constantly reinforced, each new depiction of mothering that presents mothers outside of limited roles works to "change patriarchal motherhood" (O'Reilly). It is disappointing, therefore, that there is not a greater diversity of mother experiences explored in this

narrative form. Nevertheless, these authentic portrayals of experiences and reflections on mothering within contemporary Australia build on and extend the work of previous works that "unmasked" motherhood, and they add to an expanding genre and discourse.

Endnotes

[1]Douglas notes Susan Johnson's, *A Better Woman: A Memoir of Motherhood* as an exception to this criticism and, instead, sees this as a rare example of the type of book that she is proposing.
[2]As this memoir is unpublished, I have not read it.
[3]Karina Quinn's name has changed to Quinn Eades.

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NICOLE L. WILLEY

Poetry as Memoir

Toi Derricotte's *Natural Birth* and Redefining Motherhood

Toi Derricotte's Natural Birth *(1983) is a powerful narrative poem hybrid that encapsulates the experience of her pregnancy and the birth of her son, who is almost grown when she finally writes the story. Scholars may not immediately think of this work as a motherhood memoir because of its genre, but it is just that. The fact that it is poetry does not take away from its validity as motherhood memoir, and, in fact, the ambiguity of the pain and beauty of this birth is better served through her lyrical narrative. Birth shares a story with its audience, which enlarges the universality of the experience of motherhood while bringing African feminist principles to the table. This work explores both adaptation (and redefinition) and networking (through collectivism and othermothering) as potential sites for power.*

Even more than the call for collectivism, this narrative poem is engaged in the work of redefining motherhood. Although the institution of motherhood sometimes oppresses women, it is still true that women have experienced and enacted positive change through mothering outside of the institution—either by choice or necessity. Mothering is hard no matter the circumstances. Derricotte must overcome many obstacles related to her subject position of a poor, Black mother, who often makes choices and shares truths that fall outside of the accepted mainstream logic for "good" parenting. In her honest portrayal, in her ambivalence, anger and fierce love, she has created new models for every mother.

Several years ago, my co-editor and I were collecting abstracts for a book collection on motherhood memoirs that we felt needed to be written. Our project was to send the clear message that motherhood memoirs deserve diligent critical attention, and we were excited by all the great projects pouring in. Unfortunately, all of our abstracts covered white women's motherhood

experiences and memoirs. We received chapters from mothers in the U.S. and Australia on a myriad of subjects pertaining to motherhood: mothers struggling to write, middle-aged and beyond mothers, mothers of children with disabilities and disease, lesbian co-mothers, online mothering communities, adoptive mothers, and grieving mothers. We were excited about the multitude of voices but were dismayed that we did not have any voices from mothers of colour. We ended up soliciting an abstract from Deeshaw Philyaw, who wrote beautifully about the possible reasons for, and the solutions to, the small number of African American motherhood memoirs that we see in the marketplace.[1]

This experience as an editor started me down a path to find and celebrate the voices of African American mothers telling their own stories. Of course, African American women have been telling and writing their mothering stories as long as they have been mothering. It is important to uncover these stories where they are—whether that means searching for "our mothers' gardens" as Walker does in a more general attempt to uncover women's stories or through looking for stories of mothering in different genres. If the "motherline" is a type of oral literature that exists outside the master narrative, then it is both suspicious to keepers of the status quo and a possible agent of change (O'Reilly 255). These motherlines exist, and it is our job as scholars and critics to recover these maternal narratives. Searching for African American mothering stories in literature that is unquestionably memoir provides only part of the story. Those works are out there, such as asha bandele's *Something Like Beautiful: One Single Mother's Story* or Rebecca Walker's *Baby Love.* But if we broaden our lens, we find that mothering stories told by mothers themselves have been here all along under different guises. Andrea O'Reilly uncovers motherlines in the genre of fiction. I would argue that poetry is also an exceedingly rich place to find the motherline and, in particular, the mother's own voice (as opposed to her story narrated through the daughter).

Toi Derricotte's *Natural Birth* (1983) is a powerful narrative poem that encapsulates the experience of her pregnancy and the birth of her almost-grown son. Scholars may not immediately think of this work as a motherhood memoir because of its genre, but it is just that. In fact, its form allows for a clear and singular expression for the experience of birth. Leah Souffrant notes that it is her "effusion of unexplicated lyricism" that communicates the intensity of labour (34). Derricotte's hybrid genre, coupled with her powerful story, is a riveting read and an indelible entrance into the experience of mothering, which expands the readers' minds into the author's own personal experience and enlarges the universality of the experience of motherhood in the specifics of the author's life. Importantly, this work also brings African feminist principles to the table. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn identifies the "two consistent goals valued by women of African descent—developing survival strategies and encouraging

self-reliance through female networks" (218-219). Survival through networking (othermothering and collectivism) and adaptation (redefinition) are traits that are continuous within communities of enslaved and free women of African descent throughout the Diaspora and are the bedrocks of African feminist thought and action (218). *Natural Birth* is a motherhood memoir, one that is specifically engaged with the work of redefining motherhood.

Although redefinition is the stronger African feminist principle on display in this book, collectivism also exists on the periphery. Rather than show the specific community network that will help the narrator raise her child, *Natural Birth* focuses more on the idea that as readers, we can collectively work together to enact positive change for mothers, children, and families. Pinkie Gordon Lane notes that Derricotte uses her art to "sen[d] us back as witness" to the past (684). In reading Derricotte's pain and strength in mothering, readers share in and celebrate her experience, as witnesses and as comrades. Memoirs, particularly by women, are often marginalized by critics, who say that the work is nothing more than an exercise in navel gazing. Far from a singular activity, *Natural Birth* is a work in which Derricotte is mining her experiences and psyche for her own edification and the readers' benefit. Her purpose seems to be one that shows the importance of the African feminist ideal of social networks, particularly in the sharing of her life with readers through her writing.

Derricotte in *Natural Birth* joins other women who have asked their readers to be witnesses to the reality and pain of their mothering experiences, whether through a traditional memoir or not. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is written specifically to ask white women of the North to work towards abolition and aid slave women, women who are trying to create a safer world for their children. Jacobs's willingness to expose what is under the "veil" of the peculiar institution forces bystanders to choose a side. A century later, Maya Angelou recounted her life as a teen mother, who struggled to make ends meet. In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and her later memoirs, she calls on her audience to witness the degradation caused by individual and systemic racism on mothers like her and to find empathy and the will to change. Poets such as the great Gwendolyn Brooks have shared the stories of Black mothers, for instance in her work *Annie Allen* or in her poem "The Mother" published in 1945, one of the great poems of maternal ambivalence. Derricotte, then, continues the story of African American mothers through her own memoir in a hybrid form of prose poetry and lyrical narrative. As with other poet-mothers, Derricotte "write[s] through—piercing it, that maternal moment—and the poetry must adjust as the life, the home, the parent does [to the child]" (Souffrant 25). It is this joint effort of becoming a poet and a mother that leads to the experimental form and the excruciating honesty of *Natural Birth.*

In addition to sharing her story and creating bonds through that sharing, Derricotte is engaged in the work of redefining motherhood. If the institution of motherhood does not allow women of colour, then they need to rewrite motherhood in a way that will allow them to claim their place. As O'Reilly notes, "In patriarchal culture, women who mother in the institution of motherhood are regarded as 'good' mothers, while women who mother outside or against the institution of motherhood are viewed as "bad" mothers" (2). The institution of motherhood mandates a situation in which mothers cannot possibly measure up (O'Reilly 10). But women have experienced and enacted positive change through mothering outside of the institution—either by choice or necessity. O'Reilly defines empowered mothering as "affirming maternal agency, authority, autonomy, and authenticity" and notes that it creates a situation in which mothering can be "more rewarding, fulfilling and satisfying for women" (26). Mothering is hard no matter the circumstances. Derricotte must overcome many obstacles: she often makes choices and shares truths that fall outside of the accepted mainstream logic for "good" parenting. In her honest portrayal, ambivalence, anger and fierce love, she creates new models for every mother.

If the vast majority of women writers who are enjoying wider sales and name recognition in the motherhood memoir genre are white, middle-class women, it may be because the larger definitions of motherhood. African American women were kept out of membership in the "cult of true womanhood" in the nineteenth century[2] and often felt marginalized in the feminist movement of the second wave. Similarly, motherhood, as it is currently being practiced, preached, packaged, and sold—at least in the mainstream of the United States at this historical moment—is a place where African American women are once again marginalized, if not flat out rejected.

The time and attention required to mother by societal standards, Sharon Hays argues, changed dramatically after World War II. In an effort to get women back home (and satisfied with no longer being in the work force), the commercialized and patriarchal notion of the institution of motherhood began to require three things: "First, the mother is the central caregiver; mothering is regulated as more important than paid employment; and such mothering requires lavishing copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources on the child" (qtd. in O'Reilly, "Introduction" 7). O'Reilly revises Hays somewhat by noting that the post-war period brought about this notion of "custodial" mothering, but that the true period of "intensive" mothering did not happen until the 1970s ("Introduction" 7).[3] O'Reilly differentiates the two roles by noting that custodial parenting requires proximity, whereas intensive mothering requires "quality time," which puts the children's needs—physically and materially—before the mother's or, indeed, before the entire household's needs. Many African American mothers, for many cultural and economic reasons,

by choice or necessity, have not fit into this patriarchal construct of what mothering should be. As history shows, if African American women are not permitted (or choose not) to join the construct of womanhood or motherhood, their stories will be by definition subversive and not a part of the institution of motherhood and, therefore, may be taken less seriously.

Furthermore, this marginalization reflects poor outcomes for African American mothers; for example, African American infants "are more than twice as likely as other groups to die in infancy" (Dominguez 4), even though there have been major improvements in maternal and infant health over the past century in every other group. Specifically, African American mothers suffer the most incidents of preterm delivery and low birthweight babies, a group that is then at the highest risk for dying in their first year (Dominguez 4). Sadly, this reproductive disadvantage is seen across generations and is now recognized as less a function of individual factors and more a function of systemic and individual racism and the stress it causes (Dominguez 5; Nuru-Jeter et al. 29). African American mothers have the most obstacles against them in the United States. Even for middle-class African American women, preterm delivery and low birthweight outcomes do not show parity with other groups for many reasons: "poor health outcomes that are carried through from poorer childhood living conditions; higher costs for such basics as housing, food, and insurance; and [having] more people dependent on their income" (Dominguez 8). This difference in outcome has nothing to do with any type of genetic factor because African immigrant women in the U.S. "tend to exhibit significantly better pregnancy outcomes than their American counterparts" (Dominguez 6). So with these potent and deadly obstacles of individual and systemic racism working against African American mothers and their children, the act of mothering itself is more challenging for this group than any other, and doing it well becomes an act of defiance.

African American mothering is, almost by definition, subversive. As Njoki Wane discusses, "motherhood has been ideologically constructed as compulsory only for those women considered 'fit,' and not for women who have been judged 'unfit' on the bases of their social location" (235). She goes on to discuss that "unfit" mothers include "disabled women, Black women, First Nations women, immigrant women, Jewish women, lesbian women, women who are the sole-support of parents, poor women, unmarried women, young women, and others" (235). Since "mothering remains a site of struggle," a mother's admittance into the institution of motherhood indicates who in our society is able to live up to its demands and be considered worthy, African American women are, once again, placed outside of the institution (Wane 235). And as Alice Walker notes regarding the relationship between feminism and womanism,[4] being placed outside of the mainstream is not always a bad thing. Indeed,

scholars and readers should be seeking out, publishing, and buying too, African American women's stories of mothering as a model for how scholars can subvert the dominant motherhood ideology, which is isolating and crushing for so many women under its burden.

Derricotte's *Natural Birth*, then, is an important milestone in the genre of African American motherhood memoir, even though the genre itself is hard to define, as it is not clearly poetry or prose. Derricotte herself did not know what to call it, and when she tried to make it look more like a poem, she felt she had "killed the life" in the work ("Introduction" 19). She had problems getting it published. Toni Morrison, then an editor at Random House, wanted to publish it, but finally wrote, "It doesn't fit in our categories; we don't know where to put it" (qtd. in Derricotte "Introduction" 19). Luckily, Crossing Press published it, and it was later reissued by Firebrand Books. Although *Natural Birth* may be hard to define, it is an effective accounting of birth in language. Derricotte became pregnant shortly after finishing high school, and although she married the father of her child, they had very little money, so she decided to go to a home for unwed mothers to have her baby. She kept this story a secret from everyone, including and especially her son, until he was sixteen. As she writes in her introduction to the 2000 edition of *Natural Birth*, it was an Outward Bound trip (a survivalist expedition company for teenagers) he took that allowed her to see that he would be strong enough to handle the story, and that she would be able to write it. She writes, "Memory was there, and feeling, reawakened. These demanded language" ("Introduction" 16). She had preserved her experience in memory and challenged the notion that mothers "forget everything" (specifically, everything about the birth process): "I remembered every detail of feeling" (18). And she shares those details with her readers in active and moving passages, which are uniquely her own yet familiar. Her story helps me to remember the birth of my first son, a birth that I thought I had largely forgotten because of the magnesium sulfate that I took to control preeclampsia and the variety of other drugs that induced the labour and helped numb the pain. The pain was a freight train barreling through my body as it was wracked with contractions coming harder and faster than nature would have recommended in its own course. Reading this book, I reclaim a beautiful and painful experience. In sharing her experience and in giving pieces of herself to her readers, she also helps them access pieces of themselves.

I did not come across this book until after I was already a mother. I have come back to it several times over the past few years; I always find something new in it, and it never ceases to affect me. In connection with Derricotte, I access my own birth stories—necessary and unnecessary interventions by doctors and the wonder of seeing my sons for the first time. She writes, "he

is not i/i am not him/he is not i/ … the stranger … but i do not even know/ this man" (75). The strangeness of this new person, who is part of her but separate from her, becomes real in these lines. But I also learn from her and see the crucial differences in our experiences. I am in awe of the strength that this young mother is able to show. When she gives birth, she is far from home and is surrounded by strangers, who become, after a time, her sisters. She does laundry, plays games, and watches television. She knows that she is strong and that she will keep her baby; she knows that even though "the people in my family knew! Nobody died/of grief and shame!" (38). She knows that she will be able to mother this child and be strong in his birth. She pictures beauty in a sterile place surrounded by strangers. She is hurt and surprised by the medicalization of her birth, by her doctor's insistence on (though she declined) drugs to ease the pain, and by his (seeming) sadism:

> he must be happy to make me feel such pain. he must be happy because he is a man and in control of me and i cannot move away from him while he takes me on this bed of pain and he tells me it is for my own good when i tell him how i hurt, he tells me it is almost over, but the clock is stuck on pain, stuck on forever, and i know that he is lying. (47)

The doctor might or might not have been intentionally cruel in his examinations, but whether intended or not, this paragraph aptly describes the control that birthing women are forced to give up in a medicalized setting. As a young Black woman she is not in control of her birth, and he does not allow her to be in control of her pain. Her description delivers me to my own, often sharp, birth memories, specifically the moments when the nurses refused to believe it was time for me to push until my husband, the only man in the room, insisted. Reading *Natural Birth* brings these indignities to my mind; it helps me remember my own history, and how important it is to stand up for and with women who know their bodies better than anyone else. Derricotte writes, "I wanted *my* natural birth to hold on to the mystery and power of that singular rite of passage, at the same time it stripped away the romantic and ideal" ("Introduction" 17). This piece preserves Derricotte's personal experience, which allows mothers to cherish their uniqueness while holding onto the power that is the universal experience of birth:

> this is static. no stop between. how can they know the mountain of pain in me? how can every woman suffer so? how can every man and woman walking on legs, the thousands you see each day, how can each have had a mother like me? how can life contain it? how can

> any woman know and let this happen? one pain like this should be enough to save the world forever. (45)

Indeed, the pain of one childbirth should be enough to save us all.

Motherhood memoir has power. Derricotte exhorts her readers to be her partners: "Perhaps art can revisit the wounds of the past and, if not heal them, at least send us back with the reader as witness" (22). Derricotte's work does not fit the traditional definition of motherhood memoir, but it works both to include readers in her collective and make them witnesses of her redefinition. She herself did not fit the "ideal" definition of mother, as she was nineteen, poor, and Black. But her story resonates. Its power is in transferring her experience to others, in allowing them to witness her birth, while reliving their own story and/or feeling empathy for an experience they may not have experienced. Derricotte's book is an important part of the tradition of motherhood memoir, and she uses it as an opportunity to redefine motherhood and who should be a mother.

In the introduction to the reissue of her book, Derricotte says that she was "too far gone" in her pregnancy to consider an abortion ("Introduction" 10). This admission of seeking an abortion is part of the language that the institution of motherhood relegates to the unspeakable. Again, the reader sees a mother tell the truth, a truth that can redefine the mainstream opinion of what makes a "good" mother. She writes, "It was a terrible thing, especially, for a black middle-class girl to come up pregnant. Part of the lifelong work of our class and gender was to prove beyond doubt that black people were civilized, not beasts…. *Woman* meant *white woman.* Black women weren't considered human. How much more impossible was our task?" ("Introduction" 11). Part of the writing of her story is a direct response to a society that assumes that Black women who had been systemically raped and degraded in slavery "deserved it, wanted it, or were used to it" ("Introduction" 10). Derricotte shows that being a strong and good mother is possible, even for a teen mother who weds the baby's father and needs to rely on a group home for care during her pregnancy. Unlike her counterparts at the home, she that knows she will keep the baby, and that she "would be a better mother than [her] mother. [She] would still be a doctor" (38). Although her life's work was not what she envisioned as a nineteen-year-old about to have a baby, she is now a successful writer and an example to any mother. Although Derricotte was deemed unfit to be a good mother because of her youth, she proved everyone wrong: she raised a boy who became a strong man on her own.

Derricotte does not discuss any kind of social network of women who will help her raise her son. She regards the other young women at the home as sisters, sisters who help her prepare for the birth of her child; however, as

soon as she has her child she is different from them and returns only when they are all doing chores to collect her belongings, perhaps in a bid not to face them one last time. Unlike the majority of her sisters, she will keep her baby. The impression that none of these relationships exist outside of the group home is clear. She writes, "where did those girls go after the births of their babies? what wind blew them away like ashes? those she loved well, without question" (81). Derricotte's account does not continue past the birth of her son and her leaving of the home; the reader does not know what networks may have helped her raise her child. In fact, although common sense would say that neighbourhood support systems would help with the low birthweight outcomes of African American babies, some evidence suggests that support in urban neighbourhoods is less helpful to African American women than previously thought (Buka 1). Her insistence on keeping her baby and raising him herself, therefore, might have helped determine his positive outcome. She also kept the entire experience of the circumstances of her son's birth a secret. Derricotte writes in her introduction that "I had told no one of the story of my son's birth in a home for unwed mothers, not even my best friend, and especially not my son" ("Introduction" 9). Perhaps the reason the friendships that started in the home did not last or did not turn into a real social network is because all of the girls were there more or less in secret. And since most of them did not return to their lives with their child, continuing contact with one another would have betrayed their secrets. When women, even young women or "unfit" mothers, allow society to dictate the terms of their suitability, harmful repression occurs. Derricotte shares her dawning understanding surrounding this issue: "I understood, a little at the time, that there was something to be said on behalf of all women, that repression had done terrible things to us, disconnecting us from feeling, from normal pleasure and its outward manifestation—from our own children" (12). In reclaiming her secret past and in making it public, Derricotte defies the stereotypes and fights back against that repression. Her collectivism is manifest in the book itself and in the sharing of her story. Her redefinition of mothering is in the details of her circumstances and her success.

The experience of reading this book gives me hope about the future of mothering, mothers, children, and families everywhere. As the founders of *Brain, Child* wrote, "every time a mother's voice is heard—*this is what* my *life is like, this is what* I *struggle with,* this *is what makes life worth living*—it is a political statement, because we've been invisible, dismissed for so long" (Niesslein and Wilkinson 74). This story, all of our stories, create a shared experience. If we can all learn to rely more on the African feminist principles of social networking—through bearing witness to one another's stories—and adaptability—in this case, through adapting definitions that do not serve us and creating definitions

that do—then we can all, I hope, come closer to valuing children everywhere while being honest and true to our own needs and experiences.

Endnotes

[1]Philyaw's article is called "Letter to a Young Black Mama on Writing Motherhood Memoir."
[2]Barbara Welter's amalgamation of works from the time period (1820-1860) and definition of "true womanhood" locate the four most important characteristics of the domestic ideology cult: "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (152). Of course, women living during the time of the cult were well aware of its pervasiveness and boundaries, although it was not studied or clearly defined.
[3]I will quibble with O'Reilly and suggest that "intensive" mothering was not on display in my own childhood (I was born in 1974) and that it really began with the materialism of the 1980s and has extended deeply into the present. Perhaps the growing popularity of the Dr. Sears "attachment parenting" model in the 1990s is also part of the pressure for increased intensity in mothering. Certainly, mothers do not have to be believers in, or even readers of, Dr. Sears to instinctively know some of the basic premises of attachment parenting (bonding, breastfeeding, babywearing, co-sleeping, etc.).
[4]Alice Walker opens her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* with definitions for womanism that highlight the word's relationship to feminists of colour, strong women, willful behaviour, and the like. She ends with the analogy: "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (xii). There is strength in being on the outside of the mainstream feminism, which Walker points out here.

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KATE GREENWAY

The Hierarchy of Motherhood in Adoption

Literary Narratives of Kinship, Maternal Desire, and Precarity

How have women's (in)ability to reproduce, (un)desire to mother, or essentialist understandings of birth mothering, biomothering, or adoptive mothering been represented in literature? Narratives of adoption and mothering can trouble the boundaries of reproduction, reveal cultural anxieties surrounding the idea of maternal desire, and, thereby, invite transgressions of the definitions and boundaries of motherhood. Investigating the portrayal of adoption and mothering in literature opens up what Denise Cuthbert, Kate Murphy and Marian Quartly consider, "a much needed critical space for thinking about the family and mothering in non-essentialist ways which challenge the dominant script of family and motherhood" (412). When examining a selection of literary works—including Jackie Kay's novella length poem "The Adoption Papers," a selection of short stories from Elyse Gasco's collection Can You Wave Bye Bye Baby, Zona Gale's story "Adoption," and the fictionalized memoir by Jennifer Gilmore, The Mothers*—which characterizations of "mother" perpetuate, and which challenge dominant normative definitions of womanhood, and bio-essentialist notions of mothering? Structures of inequality and economics, lingering binaries of who can and should mother and the construction of "good" and "bad" mother can also place adoptive and biological mothers into a position of precarity. In deconstructing all these narratives, the reader can reflect on the tensions in the perceptions of adoptive and birth mothers and question attendant notions of attachment, suitability, and authenticity: in particular, the assumption of maternal desire for all women, the places of precarity for birth mothers and adoptive mothers, and hierarchical notions of "real mother."*

Just how have women's (in)ability to reproduce, (un)desire to mother, or essentialist understandings of birth mothering, bio mothering, or adoptive

mothering been represented in literature? Many feminist considerations of motherhood in adoptive circumstances explore the ways in which heteronormative discourses of the family essentialize bio-genetic kinship as normative and position adoptive kinship as comparatively unnatural and constructed; as Marianne Novy notes, there are "dominant paradigms through which our culture has tried to imagine adoption" (*Reading Adoption* 7). Thus, investigating the portrayal of adoption and mothering in literature opens up what Denise Cuthbert, Kate Murphy, and Marian Quartly consider "a much needed critical space for thinking about the family and mothering in non-essentialist ways which challenge the dominant script of family and motherhood" (412). Such an investigation highlights tensions in the perceptions of adoptive and birth mothers and questions attendant notions of attachment, suitability, and authenticity: in particular, the assumption of maternal desire for all women, the places of precarity for birth mothers and adoptive mothers, and hierarchical notions of "real mother."

There are many real and fictional narratives about mothering and adoption. These include the coercion to relinquish in particular circumstances, with lingering genuine trauma for birth mothers, and similar trauma in relinquishing the *idea* of a biological child on an adoptive mother's part. There are also beliefs about automatic attachment between biological mother and child, who may or may not feel deep pain and loss upon separation, expectations about the birth mother's or child's need to search and to experience reunion, and even the assumption that most women will always choose to mother. However, these narratives also risk becoming inviolable assumptions—particularly of the adoption triad of the birth mother, the adoptive mother, and the child—or acceptable tropes that dictate how such losses, desires, and pain will be experienced. But more nuanced, layered, and complicated portrayals of motherhood and the relationships between adoption triad members, which counter dominant narratives, can be found, as in the literature considered here: Zona Gale's short story "Adoption" (1909), Jackie Kay's novella length poem *The Adoption Papers* (1991), Elyse Gasco's short story collection *Can You Wave Bye Bye Baby* (1999), and Jennifer Gilmore's fictionalized memoir *The Mothers* (2013). Although the works are primarily contemporary, they also reach back into the past and range from poetry, to prose, and to thinly veiled fictionalized memoir, which allows for a consideration of how mothering is depicted across genres, and whether that illuminates or obscures revelations about mothering and adoption.

These literary works shed light on many of the lingering assumptions surrounding maternal subjectivity in adoptive circumstances. Author Jennifer Gilmore, and her not too fictional counterpart Jesse in *The Mothers,* raises many ethical questions about private and open adoptions; her narrative gives

a window into an adoptive mother's problematic quest to become a suitable candidate for family building. The stories in *Can You Wave Bye Bye Baby* are an exploration of the complexity of biological mothering, birth mothering and adoptive mothering, and most of the stories contest the notion that maternal desire is universal or innate or that all women are capable mothers. Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers*—an account drawing heavily on her own experience of being a black child adopted by a white couple in Scotland of the 1960s—is a further unmasking of the cultural pressures to conform to a narrow and rigid script of the "good" mother. It examines the tensions of adoption and relinquishment, along with conflicting understandings of motherhood from all three points on the triad. Lastly, in the short story "Adoption," Zona Gale attempts to dispel hierarchical suppositions that adoptive motherhood is a kind of second-best, "non-quite" motherhood. It is important to note that all authors speak with authority: Elyse Gasco and Jackie Kay are both adoptees and mothers; Zona Gale and Jennifer Gilmore are both adoptive mothers: Zona Gale was a single mother at a time that women did not undertake this, and Jennifer Gilmore adopted after having exhausted other possibilities of natural conception and IVF treatments. The women whom these authors represent have been largely ignored by governmental directives, social workers, religious figures, policymakers, media or Hollywood, or by those who do not experience firsthand the impact of cultural beliefs and directives. These authors tell a story that rejects sensationalism, romanticism, or sanitized versions of their experience, of what it means to relinquish or adopt a child as well as what it means for the child herself.

The Body as the Site of Motherhood

As Andrea O'Reilly notes, "feminist historians agree that motherhood is primarily not a natural or biological function; rather it is specifically and fundamentally a cultural practice … [and] its meaning varies with time and place; there is no essential or universal experience of motherhood" (*Rocking the Cradle* 37). But if motherhood is still subconsciously linked in popular imagination to gestation and the ability to physically nurture, a biological mother ascends a kind of false hierarchical ladder. Any supposition that there is something more natural about a woman who is able to conceive, undergo labour and childbirth, and nurture her child through breastfeeding—a child who is expected to share a continuity of heredity and familial lineage—emphasizes the body as a source of motherhood. Jesse in *The Mothers* confesses that she had to "come to terms with not being genetically linked to our child" and that she had exhausted "all the science they could muster" (Gilmore 2-9) before she turned to the alternative option of adoption, which she felt was the inferior option. When the

maternal body is idealized as the primal form of mothering, the hegemony of the biological mother is perpetuated.

Conversely, the precarity of supposed biological primacy is made apparent when the biological mother is unable to care for her baby or is pressured into relinquishment, often because she is young, poor, single, or otherwise deemed unfit. She has often been abandoned by her partner or parents, been rejected by support systems, or been seen to transgress acceptable moral behaviour. In these circumstances a woman's procreative ability is pronounced a liability; she has dared to be a sexual being without the legal, social, or religious precepts surrounding acceptability. Birth mothers have a further stigma: they are perceived as somehow unnatural because they are, and are not, mothers. They are mothers through the physical labour of childbirth but are not mothers because they do not raise the child borne. Prior to the sexual revolution, birth mothers were treated with suspicion if they wanted to keep their babies, yet, later, that same suspicion was transferred to the idea that they may consider giving up the child for adoption, which shattered the conception of motherhood as an innate and inviolable desire for every woman. What kind of woman could give up her own flesh and blood?

Those who do give up their baby are not allowed to grieve their loss in public ways, leaving wounds that might never heal; the birth mother in *The Adoption Papers* reveals, for example, " I still have the baby photograph/ I keep it in my bottom drawer" (Kay 10). Her loss becomes a secret and lingering grief, hidden from the world. If birth mothers who relinquish through coercive practices are troublesome, then birth mothers who relinquish voluntarily are unspeakable: they fall even further outside of the normative script of the maternal as well as outside of notions of female as innate caregiver. As Frances Latchford notes, "as the stories of autonomous birth mothers are erased, so too is the political import of their decisions and experiences as sites of resistance against imperatives of naturalized motherhood and bio-essentialist notions of family" (75). In all cases, the physicality of being or not being a mother cannot help but affect the ways mothers and non-mothers perceive and are perceived.

A narrative written on the bodies of mothers is, therefore, a striking feature of many passages in the selected works: the assumed destiny and biological drive to be a mother, the need for physiological connection to a child, and lingering pro-natalist views of adoption. Although there is always a hope that mothering has been delinked from biology and that care and maternal practice are what truly count, the literary mothers depicted in these selected works do not necessarily point to this. Jesse in *The Mothers* constantly asks, "Where do I fit in here? Most women become pregnant and they carry their babies and then they breast-feed their infants, who need them to survive … really it was just this, only this: was I the mother? Wasn't I supposed to be the mother?" (Gilmore

2-47). In so revealing her inner conflict, she allows us into her deep sadness and sense of the precarity of her position. She and her husband, (fictional and real, as the avatars for Jennifer Gilmore and her husband themselves) suffered greatly through the failed IVF treatments, her miscarriage, the long wait for an available child, rejection by several birth mothers and multiple scams by birth mothers who might have been looking for money or had no intention of giving up their child. For her and her husband, "every time someone else has a child or gets pregnant …[we] die a little" (19-43).

In Elyse Gasco's short stories, biological mothers are deeply aware of the changes their bodies are undergoing, whether they wish to be or not. It seems the birth mothers in "A Well Imagined Life" have been betrayed by their bodies, first with unwanted pregnancy and then with the trauma of labour and childbirth. Their bodies are described as alien things, who act independently; there are graphic descriptions of bodily functions and "girls about to give birth [who] stagger down as though they've been shot, clutching their stomachs, water running down their thighs" (5-6). In "You Have the Body"—and note the title emphasis—the pregnant narrator remarks on the social discourses emphasizing the body. She remarks, "You are surprised at how many times the word uterus comes up in conversation. And areola" (27). In the story, there is also a contrast between what the daughter can create in her womb and what her own adoptive mother could not. This makes the daughter feel like a braggart or betrayer, and she confesses, "You are embarrassed … by something even more unexpected—your natural and painless fecundity" (40). In "The Third Person," the new mother observes that she "feel[s] motherhood coming at [her] like a subterranean mumbling ... each and every graceless action follows her.... Sometimes her breasts begin to leak, darkly seeping through her shirt like something possibly frightening: wounds, holes" (87). Bodies, whether celebrated or vilified, seem to be a primary site of motherhood, whether such maternity is desired or not.

Shelley Park suggests that

> adoptive mothers—like many other mothers—choose motherhood. However, we do so in a way that simultaneously rejects the idea that woman's anatomy is her destiny. Adoptive mothers make conscious choices whether to become a mother and how to become a mother. Motherhood does not just happen to us; no accidents befall our bodies…. Motherhood here is a story of social agency. (214)

Margaret Homans counters that "even biological parents must make an active choice to keep and bear the children the bear. There is no purely natural or physical parenthood or even maternity" (qtd. in Park 212). In Jackie Kay's *The*

Adoption Papers, the distinctions are not so clear cut, and the body is a central focus for both the birth mother and the adoptive mother and their shared child, who repeats the mantra of "the chosen child" often told to soothe adoptees: "ma mammy picked me (I wiz the best) / your mammy had to take you (she'd no choice)" (21). This mantra bears parsing. The poetic structure of the piece allows for a polyphony of voices acting in counterpoint, which lends a more comprehensive understanding of triad perspectives that may not be transmitted with as much emotional force in prose. Chapter one, "The Seed"—the title immediately points to the physical act of conception—contrasts the fecundity of the birth mother, for whom impregnation "only took a split second" (11), with the five years of fruitless attempts at becoming pregnant for the infertile adoptive mother. She longs to "stand in front of the mirror swollen bellied, so swollen bellied," "crave[s] discomfort," and wants the "tearing searing pain" (11) of childbirth: "[she wants] to push and push / and scream and scream" (12). Both women are in situations from which they cannot escape; they are both trapped in their bodies and biologies. The preface "(I Always Wanted to Give Birth)," the parenthesis adding apology and confession about a desire for physical experience, opens with the adoptive mother revealing her distress upon learning she could not do "that incredible natural thing / that women do," but how she eventually opted for adoption, a distant second best that was "something scandalous / telling the world your secret failure/ bringing up an alien child / who knew what it would turn out to be" (10). The body is further emphasized when the birth mother speaks of her "own body as a witness" to the birth and of its "leaking blood to sheets / milk to shirts (13), and when she remembers how her body revealed her shame—"[she] lived the scandal … / all but the softest whisper: / *she's lost an awful lot of weight*" (28). The adoptive mother also pictures herself as a version of a failed mother, her body betraying her like her counterpart's body; one has excess, the other an absence of physical procreative potential. Neither has the balance that the woman wants or society expects.

The Assumption of Maternal Desire

In the nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth century white, upper-class women who were married and who did not have children were regarded with pity, or more likely with condemnation, for not fulfilling their "maternal imperative." The assumption that women's mental health is determined by their wombs has been historically reflected in clinical literature on adoption. The first psycho-dynamic theories appear in the mid-1940s, such as those of Helene Deutsch, who asks in *The Psychology of Women* (1945), "above all, has the sterile woman overcome the narcissistic mortification of her inferiority as a woman

to such an extent that she is willing to give the child, as object, full maternal love?" (397). Adoptive mothers may be perceived, to varying degrees, as insecure about their role as mother or as suffering from psychological maladjustment for failing to obtain the "domesticity ideal," and for lacking the maternal bond. But do birth mothers all experience an inevitable natural bond?

Several of Elyse Gasco's short stories undermine the notion of an automatic maternal bond. In her stories, most protagonist mothers are unnamed: this suggests their own detachment and, perhaps, is also an invitation to the anonymous reader to insert herself into the story and imagine her own choices. In "A Well Imagined Life," the adolescent birth mother works through her own ambivalence about her role. She notes that "There is in the word 'mother,' the word 'other'" (15), which suggests her alienation from her fetus. She also provides another definition of mother: "a slimy film composed of bacteria and yeast cells…. You have to be clear on your terms, otherwise you'll believe anything" (16), which is a clear attempt to dissociate herself from the product of conception and the romanticized notion of innate connection. Does she feel guilt or relief for her deliberate or psychic absence? Does she make the right choice in relinquishment, if she had a choice at all, or will she forever be tormented? The only benediction or absolution given to her is "eventually you will find a story you can live with" (20). The title story of the collection "Can You Wave Bye Bye Baby" is another example that chronicles what, at first, seems to be postpartum depression, but which is more realistically a lack of any maternal feeling for a baby. The narrator, a single mother, prepares the reader for this with the devastating opening line: "It is surprisingly easy to run out of love" (119). She notes that when she looks at her newborn's face "it is though [she has] swallowed a cold, round river stone" (119), and she tells her baby, "I don't think I will ever really love you" (120). A further illustration of lack of inherent maternal desire occurs in "You Have the Body," which is centred on an unnamed pregnant protagonist. She has a partner and lives the expected script of family building, but as this biological mother prepares for birth, her growing realization is that she wants nothing to do with a child or with mothering. The narrator's tone is flinty, without pretense of second thoughts, and filled with dark humour. For example, she relates that "Your friends tell you that there is no greater gift than the gift of life…. Thinking about this gift, you wonder if a card wouldn't be just as nice, or maybe cash" (26). This would-be mother reports her growing alienation from her body and her lack of comprehension of the expected maternal desire that she is supposed to feel. She pushes against the restrictions of what others declare is normative for pregnant women: "People tell you now you will be complete. This makes you wonder what they thought of you before. Incomplete, obviously" (32). The story ends with the birth: it is clear that the depression and emptiness he

feels is not going to go away and that there will be no mother-daughter bond. Whether this inability to mother stems from her own feeling of disconnection to her adoptive and birth mothers because of her own adoption or whether this is incidental to her psychological struggle is unclear: in any case, she is resisting motherhood and has no script to follow in so doing.

Does a birth mother who relinquishes act with what Sara Ruddick labelled "preservation" in mind ("Maternal Work" 105), sacrificing her own mothering for the good of the child? Or is this a form of abandonment, a selfish act? Can such a non-mother be considered maternal? "What would make a mother give up a child" (Gilmore 5-10) asks Jesse in *The Mothers*, before considering the factors that might pressure her to do so. Is it not better for a child to be given up if the mother is unable to raise the child? Or is this the script that young women were often sold, without receiving proper information about potential support systems that might have allowed them to keep their baby? For many women, it is an agonizing decision, leaving them bereft and traumatized throughout their life. Such is the case for the birth mother in *The Adoption Papers,* but not in the prevailing trope: she is full of contradictions. The thought of her daughter searching for her when she comes of age haunts her, and she wonders how she can possibly explain her decision—"Sorry never seems large enough" (Kay 28)—yet, she wishes to decline contact. However, she is also concerned about how to reassure, on some level, the searching daughter—a kind of mothering *in absentia*. It may appear that she feels no true sense of loss or remorse in relinquishment, yet she reveals the mourning she went through, despite her decision to give up her child. She goes home from the hospital and wills herself to "put it out of [her] mind" (17), which is, of course, impossible. She digs a hole and buries "the clothes [she had] bought anyway" (18) and, later, gives her baby a kind of ritualized funeral service, the only closure that she can muster. The short story "The Third Person" also has relinquishment and repercussions at its core. Elle (her name only a non-specific pronoun, which is suggestive of her own detachment) recalls her origin story. She was told with bluntness by her adoptive mother, "When you were born you were abandoned in an alley. When they found you, you were very cold and almost dead" (80). At eighteen, Elle "received an impossible letter in the mail from her real mother," who wrote "despite what you may think, I was relieved to know you made it through that long dark night" (98), and asks for some kind of absolution, including a return address on the envelope, but would understand if there is no reply. Elle refuses to even acknowledge her as a maternal figure, however partial. In "Can You Wave Bye Bye Baby," the protagonist, whose own mother gave up her first baby for adoption and later abandoned her husband and the protagonist when she was a child, transfers some of this grief and confusion

to her own circumstance and, gradually, withdraws from her own baby. This title story of the collection shatters several notions: the supposed altruism of relinquishing a child to "better" circumstances and more deserving parents, or that all children given up for adoption are wanted by their birth mother and are subsequently forever mourned, or that most children would be better off with their original parents. Elle emotionally and physically begins to increase her distance after giving birth, first muffling the baby's cries by running the shower and hiding in the bathroom. Later, she leaves her alone in the house and returns almost hoping that the police or firefighters have broken into her home to rescue the child. She fantasizes that she will get caught for negligence and abandonment but is always surprised at the stillness and ordinariness of her house when she returns. The neglected baby is never even given a name by the woman who feels only "dark-pitted emptiness" (129). This mother is truly absent. She will give this baby up. To what degree is she worthy of condemnation? Perhaps, she should be commended.

Places of Precarity

It is hopeful to believe that maternal thinking, as Sara Ruddick wrote so many years ago, has delinked biology from "mother," which would allow "some men who engage in maternal work, as well [as] many mother-identified women who are not mothers of particular biological or adopted children" ("Thinking About Mothering" 4) to be considered maternal. Yet there remains a biological definition of motherhood that takes for granted "'woman' equals 'mother' equals 'wife' equals 'adult'" (Letherby and Williams 721). The failure to fulfill such social expectations has traditionally been regarded as a primary indicator of a woman's moral irresponsibility, immaturity, and selfishness. (Young women who become pregnant without the force of social legitimacy, however, are often not allowed to become mothers, despite this "imperative"). As the pregnant woman's friend remarks in "You Have the Body," "Before this, you were pretty childish" (Gasco 33), which perpetuates the notion that only by becoming a mother do women achieve true adulthood. If such a woman turns to adoption, she is placed under further scrutiny by state systems, as is an intended adoptive mother, who can be excluded by any number of measures of worthiness. Kerry Daly and Michael Sobol find that

> both when pressing for relinquishment and when selecting adopters, adoption professionals have been guided by a patriarchal domesticity ideal that defines "good mothering" narrowly…. Adoption workers can also still regard the adoptive mother's "resolution of infertility" as the most important precondition for readiness to adopt. (483)

The adoptive mother in *The Adoption Papers* speaks of such barriers: her politics were wrong. She "didn't live close enough to a church [and] they weren't high enough earners" (Kay 14). The specific obstacles might have shifted since the 1960s, but they are no less daunting: finding the right adoption agency, the years of waiting, filling out forms, creating profiles, the unlikelihood of finding an infant, the likeliness of having to search in other countries, the high expense, enduring trial placements before adoption is finalized (Jesse in *The Mothers* has to "put it out of her head the notion that a mother could come back and take the child away" [Gilmore 3-34]): all of this places the adoptive mother in a place of precarity. Denise Cuthbert, Kate Murphy and Marian Quartly note that

> in dominant family ideology, the birth mother, frequently unwed or deemed otherwise unfit to tend to her child, was stigmatized in favour of the "good" adoptive mother whose role was to redeem these otherwise doomed infants and secure them within the embrace of good homes … in feminist critiques of this approach to adoption, the birth mother is endowed with the virtue that accrues to victimization, and the adoptive mother, where she is registered at all, implicitly occupies a problematic position deeply implicated within dominant family ideology and conforming to regressive models of acceptable "womanhood" and "domesticity." (404)

It is comforting to think contemporary society is wise enough to reject the patriarchally narrow view of female maturity, which assumes a causal link between women's mental health, their sexual and reproductive behaviour and their capacity to mother. Yet as Katarina Wegar realizes, "feminists have so far largely failed to acknowledge the problematic social position of adoptive mothers from a gender perspective" (77). Structures of inequality and economics, and lingering binaries of good and bad mother, can also put an adoptive mother into a place of precarity, where her "inauthentic" status and lack of genetic attachment to her child renders her less feminine, less woman, less mother, and more other. Rosemary Pringle points out "the sympathy of feminism for the plight of the birth mother is at odds with the problematic endorsement of an essentialised view of motherhood and the bond between the birth mother and the relinquished child" (232). And Cuthbert, Murphy, and Quartly observe that "for many this tension was, perhaps, overlooked in favour of what may be described as a specific social justice agenda in relation to the harm done to these women, and their children. In the process, the position and experience of adoptive mothers was damagingly occluded, as much by feminists as by others" (404).

Adoption complicates motherhood when the maternal is not linked to consanguineous kinship because, as psychologist David Kirk explains, it suggests that blood ties can be superseded with artificially constructed ones, "shared fate" (1964) instead of shared biology. A social contract replaces genetics, which is seen as a "fictive" relationship given the strength of a biological one. Furthermore, advocates of adoption rights and the quest for open records have not challenged but rather reinforced the representation of adoptive motherhood as fundamentally inferior to a biological mother-child bond. But precarity also remains for birth mothers. As Cuthbert, Murphy, and Quartly consider, "Where the necessary and overdue recuperation of the figure of the adoptive mother comes at the expense of the birth mother, the job has not been done well enough" (412). Jackie Kay's birth mother—her real and fictional counterpart—as with many women, had no choice.

In the Elyse Gasco collections, another place of precarity for many of the protagonists is the notion of what it means to be, or to have, a mother. There are mothers who could not carry a baby to term but may resent their daughters who are capable of doing so or not understand their pregnancy journey. Many have absent mothers or were themselves relinquished for adoption, sometimes even abandoned. Some of these young women subsequently transfer this wound, which leads to the eventual ambivalence that they assimilate about mothering. The narrators question how they belong to their mothers, women who either relinquished them—whether well-intentioned or not—or who did not have the physical experience of pregnancy, labour, and childbirth as a mother. The narrators decry their absent or adoptive mothers' lack of help in carrying them through the experience of pregnancy and childbirth, since they never went through it themselves. From the child's perspective, as the narrator in "You Have the Body" notes, it is difficult for some adoptees to explain their feelings towards the two women who claim motherhood: birth mother and adoptive mother. This binary definition is often pressed on adoptees, consciously or not: who is your real mother is the (un)spoken question, thus, as the narrators note, "you straddle these two women, somehow trying to keep your balance" (28) or "it's like those weird science fiction stories where … every woman is every child's mother" (15). The narrator in "You Have the Body" internalizes this question to such an extent that she wonders, "When is your mother not your mother?" (40) Poet Jackie Kay recalls in similar fashion how, as with most adoptees, she "had an imaginative—and imaginary—birth mother that [she] carried around with [her]" (qtd. in Gish 171). This is a figure who haunts many adoptees' dreams, especially those who have lived under sealed records and non-disclosure laws. Fantasies, wishes, projections—all can trouble, and even consume, an adoptee. The precarity of the binary is often deeply felt; the adoptee in *The Adoption Papers*, for example, states, "I have my parents who

are not of the same tree / and you keep trying to make it matter / the blood / the tie / the passing down / of generations" (Kay 29), but she also reveals, "I confess my contradiction / I want to know my blood" (29). In the story "A Well Imagined Life," the narrator is haunted by her absent birth mother: "all I can seem to do is imagine, and imagine being imagined … she follows me like a camera" (Gasco 9). In "Elements," an illusory birth mother returns, conjured in the narrator's psyche by the death of her adoptive mother, who claims, "Finally after all these years, I am your mother" (52). The narrator rejects this, as she tries to cope with the loss of the one whom she considers mother: "of course she [the birth mother] is the ghost of the one who gave you away so many years ago" (52) she asserts, thereby rejecting the psychic substitute. This birth mother figure is not romanticized, and she has no discernable interest in her daughter; indeed, she states openly, "I don't know what to ask you" (52), and the narrator, in turn, labels her not as mother but as "the one who could not take care of you and gave you away" (60). At her adoptive mother's grave she "reassure[s] her, like a lover, that she is the only one" (61). The adoptive mother in Jackie Kay's poem, however, "want[s] her [daughter] to think of her other mother" (22) and to welcome, not fear, the sharing of the title. Conversely, describing the open adoption process conceptualized by her social workers, Jesse in *The Mothers* recounts her struggles: "the birthmother, we were told, would be like family. This became the fairy tale narrative we lived by" (Gilmore 38). Increasing openness is now the norm, and the stripping away of secrecy and shame is healthy; nonetheless, the apparent simplicity and success of open arrangements have not yet been fully scrutinized. For example, what is a child to assimilate if the birth mother who is initially present in an open adoption later recedes from her life? It can be felt as a form of second rejection. Allowing a window into contemporary adoption, Jennifer Gilmore acts as a first person participant, who can question some problematic or simplistic assumptions about best practices.

The Real Mother

Jackie Kay contends that

> There is no point in denying that it is different growing up knowing that your mother is not actually your mother, and that your father is not actually your father. Those seeming opposites—how can someone be your mother and not be your mother? How can somebody be real and not real?—are just at the heart of what it means to be adopted; you have to contain both those supposed opposites together. (qtd. in Gish 173)

The child in *The Adoption Papers* wrestles with this conundrum. She is told at six years old of her adoption; her mother uses the words that she is not the child's "real" mother, which invites an inquiry of what "real" mothering is and underscores how care and love do not only have genetic links. The adoptive mother, however, considers that "all this umbilical knot business is nonsense" (Kay 23). She pushes back ignorant comments, such as "It's not like having your own child though is it?," by responding, "Of course it is, what else is it / she's my child" (23). The goal is to take up the objective of feminist theorists who want "to recuperate the figure of the adoptive mother from a complex of associations which see her playing the bad or 'not as good as,' inauthentic, problematic 'other' to the discursive constructions of the good, whole, true birth mother whose status is elevated through suffering the loss and absence of her child" (Cuthbert, Murphy, Quartly 405). Barbara Katz Rothman also reminds us that "we can acknowledge the ongoing grief of a woman who has given up a baby without saying that makes her the real mother or more of a mother than the adoptive mother who gives ongoing care" (qtd. in Wegar 82). There seems to be an implicit struggle for the claim to authenticity.

Consider the 1909 short story "Adoption." Although it is perhaps sentimentalized, in the fashion of the period, it, nonetheless, is a poignant snapshot of the tensions of defining authentic motherhood. In the story, the adoptive mother is "simply hungering for a child whom [she] could 'take to'" (Gale 279). She announces to the narrator that she and her husband have found a baby, but says, "I don't want he should be called after his father, being he isn't ours, you might say," which acknowledges the prejudice of the time. Yet she defiantly concludes "He is ours" (279). The mother-to-be has both absorbed and rejected the rhetoric of the non-biological as second-best, just as Jackie Kay's adoptive mother recites to her child, "I'm not your real mother" (21) but also asserts, "I brought her up as my own / as I would any other child" (24). Her daughter later says that "I love ma mammy whether she's real or not" (21). The woman neighbour in the story displays all the same hopes and fears for her baby as any expectant mother. When a dispatch arrives telling her that the baby has taken ill, the neighbour's worry is clearly maternal: "Seems as if I'd ought to be there to the hospital … doing what I can…. But if I could get hold of him in my arms it seems as if I could help 'em" (Gale 283). The next day, the neighbour sadly announces that her baby died. She mourns that, "I've never held him once…. Do you s'pose anything could be worse than that?" (284). The speaker notes, "It touched me unutterably, the grief of this mother who was no mother." Yet the village women "many of [whom] had lost little children of their own … could not regard her loss as at all akin to theirs," and the speaker notes "this my neighbour felt; and perhaps she dimly felt that to me her grief, hardly less than theirs, brimmed with the tragic disaster of the

unfulfilled and bore, besides, its own peculiar bitterness" (285). Biologic or not, even an *intended* bond severed between a child and a willing mother is shown as true loss, which justifies the resulting grief and rejects adoptive motherhood as a lesser form of motherhood.

Jesse, the narrator in *The Mothers*, also struggles with competing claims of motherhood. She thinks that "Working hard to become a mother is about the imagination, an unknown future. All mothers have wondered: What will it be like? Who will I be if I become a mother? What will be gained and what will be lost? Will I be the same woman to myself? To the world?" (Gilmore 11-1). Chiefly, Jesse struggles with her would-be role and balks at the term "adoptive" in front of mother. And she is uncertain how she will negotiate or share the role of mother with a stranger in her planned open adoption. After seeing a mandatory film screening displaying happy birth mothers speaking of the utopian open arrangements they live under, Jesse thinks: "Am I allowed to ask where I fit in here? There is the woman who gives birth and that is not I. And then she is in our lives … however she chooses to be. I accept that, but I had to turn away from the screen; when do I get to be the mother? Perhaps never" (7-7). Similarly, the short story by Elyse Gasco called "Mother: Not a True Story" haunts by its very title: it questions truth and authenticity in motherhood. The story is embedded in an adoptive mother's psychological perspective, one who loves her daughter so fiercely, and, perhaps, questions her place as mother so deeply, that she is willing to make an imaginary portrait of a birth mother to permit closure for her daughter but also to ensure her own "rightful" place. Katarina Wegar notices the "normative and constrictive definitions of true womanhood and good mothering" (77), and Cuthbert, Murphy, and Quartly further recognize "in our attention to the plight of birth mothers, we have failed to recognize that these apply as invidiously to adoptive mothers as to birth mothers" (404). When stories of her "homecoming" and the circumstances surrounding her birth begin to lose their fairy-tale quality, the daughter begins the process of searching for her birth mother. Thus the adoptive mother devises an elaborate scheme that she hopes will quell her daughter's curiosity and prevent another woman from taking her place in her daughter's heart. She imagines that "[she]'ll hire someone to be her mother … [she]'ll audition women to play the hardest role they've ever played" (Gasco 238). The mother, thus, begins to lie. She suddenly "remembers" details that she "forgot" in the origin story and fabricates a birth name for her daughter and a memory box with all the treasures the birth mother purportedly left behind, which also contains a letter that the birth mother never created in which she supposedly tells her child to never search for her. Although this act is selfish, it may also elicit some empathy; ultimately, readers are left to decide the morality of her actions,

and how deeply they might condemn or forgive the adoptive mother in her deep desire for authenticity.

All people are shaped, consciously or unconsciously, as Marianne Novy explains, by "the anxieties that cultural influences instill" (*Imagining Adopting* 28). The discourses in culture and literature around adoption and motherhood that renounce bio-essentialism and maternal desire as naturalcrepudiate the absent or relinquishing mother as necessarily evil, reject oversimplification or binaries, and refuse to privilege one form of mothering or "not" mothering over others, are first steps to negotiating more comprehensive and open understanding of what it means to be a mother, or to be a "not" mother. As Cuthbert, Murphy, and Quartly plead, "We need a thorough dismantling of sex/gender/and reproduction systems to allow for all women and all reproductive statuses to be viewed and treated with equal respect" (412). In deconstructing these narratives of birth mothering, biological mothering and adoptive mothering, fictional or otherwise, perhaps we can come to a more nuanced understanding of the pressures on, and vulnerabilities of, all (m)others.

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Folio

Editor's Notes

It's a great pleasure to feature Jennifer Givhan in this issue of *Folio*. Jennifer Givhan is a Mexican-American poet from the Southwestern desert. She is the author of *Landscape with Headless Mama* (2015 Pleiades Editors' Prize) and *Protection Spell* (2016 Miller Williams Series, University of Arkansas Press). Her honours include a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a PEN/Rosenthal Emerging Voices Fellowship, the Frost Place Latin@ Scholarship, the 2015 *Lascaux Review* Editors' Choice Poetry Prize, *The Pinch* Poetry Prize, the DASH Poetry Prize, 2nd Place in *Blue Mesa Review*'s 2014 Poetry Prize, and her work has been nominated four times for a Pushcart. Her writing has appeared in *Best of the Net 2015, Best New Poets 2013*, *AGNI*, *TriQuarterly, Crazyhorse, Blackbird, The Kenyon Review, Rattle*, *Prairie Schooner, Indiana Review* (runner-up for the 2015 Poetry Prize), and *Southern Humanities Review* (finalist for the 2015 Auburn Witness Prize). She is Poetry Editor at *Tinderbox Poetry Journal* and teaches at Western New Mexico University and The Poetry Barn.

Writing about *Landscape with Headless Mama*, poet Patricia Smith praised Givhan's poems for their "restless, storm-hued stanzas, revelations of our dark cravings and hapless, woefully imperfect attempts at perfect love." In this selection, readers will encounter a profoundly lyrical poet whose syntactically rich lines render the darker truths of domestic life with an engaging frankness. Whether her gaze is trained on the maternal body or the body politic, mourning the natural end of lactation or the preternatural destruction of ecosystems due to climate change, Givhan's verse seeks to reveal the forces that divide and heal us, uncovering the strength and wisdom that help us survive.

Questions of inheritance and kinship lie at the heart of Givhan's poetic. In "Madhouse of Spirits," the speaker reflects on the ghosts of the past whose presence resonates in daily life. Memories of a mother's harsh disciplinary tactics

resurface as the daughter considers her attempts to resist becoming "the kind of parent I feel bound/to (all this screaming, this relentless/motherloving fear)." By night, her dreams become surreal storyscapes where images of trauma are reconfigured as metaphors of entrapment and escape:

> When I dream, to stop the train,
> I must split myself in two: one of me is metal-hinged &
> crushed, the other, with chest pain but living. I wake
>
> with heartburn. How does one extract the violent bone
> without mining that poor child's spine?

Elsewhere, the poet explores tensions implicit within the adoption triad with keenly observed detail. "In Jeremiah Growing," the poet expresses familiar ambivalence as her child progresses past infancy to a growing awareness of his origins. The birth mother's relinquishment of her child seals a fate that bonds two women for life. Meanwhile, the son they share struggles for autonomy, pulled toward each of these maternal figures at different times, noticing, even in childhood, the divisions of the heart.

Deeply intimate, Givhan's domestic tableaux reverberate beyond their triggering moments, achieving broad social resonance. "The Polar Bear" is one of several poems that reveal the poet's determination to confront our collective history of harms. Shielding her young black son from televised coverage of "the riot funerals riot arrests/riot nothing changes riots" in Baltimore during the spring of 2015, the speaker watches another painful narrative unfold on the Discovery Channel. A starving polar bear, victim of shrinking ice fields, must live out a dire fate: confronting a herd of walrus, he is gored as he hunts. The show provides neither aesthetic distance nor entertaining escape. Here, as in other poems, Givhan reveals the intimate connectedness of domestic and public life. Though she pays tribute to the confluence of place and history as it shapes maternal identify, Givhan's is ultimately a redemptive vision—necessary art for our times.

Reflecting on her process, Givhan notes: "I'm drawn to exploring mother/child relationships in my work and that kind of sticky love that keeps us hanging on when we've no other reason but love because they pave the way for everything else—all future memories and dreams hinged on what happens or doesn't when we're forming our personalities, our versions of the selves we can become. There's tremendous guilt and sadness surrounding this for me, but also a sense of freedom, of revising and reimagining the possibilities . . . Even in the poems that I'm not explicitly writing about motherhood tend to "mother" because they come from that place of trying to reclaim and heal—the

way I recite my mother's chant to my children when they're hurt: *sana sana colita de rana, si no sanas hoy, sanas mañana.* Translated literally it's asking a frog's tail to heal. Of course, a frog's tail, if cut off, grows anew. My poems come from that place of love asking the impossible—because poems offer a place for impossible healing to begin."

Beyond poetry, Givhan publishes critical explorations of literary mothers and curates the Mother Writers' Interview Series, an on-going series of conversations with some of today's most successful writer-mothers. Visit her online at: http://jennifergivhan.com.

—Jane Satterfield

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Chicken-Hearted

"It's time you learn to scrub a chicken."
    Mama rarely cooked after working all day—her heart
wasn't in it. But a daughter should know how to sterilize

that pink, ominous cavern before she flew
    away to salt her own kitchens: pry its legs apart
& reach inside to scoop as if the bird were pregnant.

When I moved out that winter, pregnant
    & fat like nobody's business but still too chicken
to tell Mama, I took up with a boy who tore apart

our cold piss apartment looking for the piece of his heart
    he swore I'd eaten. He claimed it flew
into my belly & before I gave it back, I'd need to sterilize

it. So I ran around that goddamn flat with wipes to sterilize
    every counter & crevice. Not only was I pregnant &
compulsive but news had spread that flu

had reached pandemic level—this time from swine not chickens.
    I'd read that pregnant women were more susceptible to heart
failure. I figured that also meant the throbbing pink part

in my belly. I never studied anatomy, apart

from an odd encounter with a college boy who tried to sterilize
my body with his tongue. It didn't work but left heart-

shaped scars along my chest & thighs, each mark pregnant
with blood, a strawberry patch or the red wattle of a chicken.
I'd begun to waddle around in baggy sweats a few

weeks since seeing Mama. She'd suspected the "more than a few
pounds" I'd gained, flinging accusations, shredding me apart
for acting the slut I was. I'd heard it before—she'd squawk chicken

shrills until I broke down. She'd peck at me to sterilize
my body like the kitchen, the chicken, my own pink pregnant
belly ache. She'd have me scoop out my own heart

to make a point. But I don't think I could live without a heart.
I'd lived without anyone but Mama since the summer we flew
over the Grand Canyon away from dad. Mama was pregnant

then. That didn't last long. I was eleven when she clawed apart
the bathroom, not the kitchen, scrubbing the tub to sterilize
it for a bath, I'd guessed. I'd have asked but was too chicken.

The trick was to keep apart from her long enough for my heart
to sterilize itself & keep that pink baby from cleansers or flu
or Mama's broken chicken heart. The trick was to stay pregnant.

Los Angeles Review, 2011

JENNIFER GIVHAN

The Polar Bear

for Baltimore

I'm just another asshole sitting behind a desk writing about this
—Facebook status update

What I'm asking is will watching The Discovery
Channel with my young black boy instead
of the news coverage of the riot funerals riot arrests
riot nothing changes riots be enough to keep him
from harm? We are on my bed crying for what we've done
to the polar bears, the male we've bonded with on-screen
whose search for seals on the melting ice has led him
to an island of walruses & he is desperate, it is late-
summer & he is starving & soon the freeze
will drive all life back into hiding, so he goes for it,
the dangerous hunt, the canine-sharp tusks
& armored hides for shields, the fused weapon
they create in mass, the whole island a system
for the elephant-large walruses who, in fear, huddle
together, who, in fear, fight back. This is not an analogy.
The polar bear is hungry. The walruses fight back.
A mother pushes her pup into the icy water,
spears the hunter through the legs, the gut,
his blood clotting his fur as he curls into the ice
only feet away from the fray—where the walruses

have gathered again, sensing the threat has passed.
My boy's holding his stuffed animal, the white body
of the bear he loves, who will die tonight (who
has already died) & my boy asks me
is this real? What I'm asking is how long will we stay
walruses, he & I?—though I know, this is not an analogy.

Rattle, Poets Respond, 2015
Lascaux Review 2015 Poetry Prize Editors' Choice Winner

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Miscarriage Interpreted through Animal Science

After mating & laying her eggs,
the octopus with a brain the size of a clementine

goes senile. She welds herself into
a cracked teapot she'd grown fond of

then dries up. Researchers find her yards from her tank
finally still after days of odd behavior.

What size was her heart?
That's not what we mean of course but the neurons

in her arms as if each had its own brain—
when cut, will regrow. When cut,

will continue searching for food then surrender
prey to mouth as if the mouth were still attached

& still I lie on my side instead of my belly, pillow
between my legs. This is more than phantom limb

as the octopus must know.
What is it like to be an octopus?

What I'm asking is how we carry on.

Sugar House Review, 2015

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Ghost Girl in the Recovery Room

I am safe I say to myself and pray for mercy.
—Ai

She points past the empty field
past the ringing of a church bell. She asks who rings

the church bell & I tell her no one now—

says the silverware needs shining
in the game she's making up. She tells me

she is an empty treehouse
and I am a moon pool—

but she's the architect of my scarred abdomen
she's set for tea. It's an ordinary weekday. The sound

of bells on rocks. Or rocks for bells. She says, No—

your mother won the heaven lottery
and had a beautiful daughter. I remember saying

something like this to her but she's internalized

and repeats back the beautiful empty of my abdomen
scarring the moon pool—

I am a church bell.

I empty past the field past the ringing of play—
I remember a table.

It's an ordinary weekday.
The silverware needs shining.

The Foundry, 2016

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Reabsorption Elegy

Daughter, I won't make milk for you anymore.
The body retreats. It reclaims

miracles. My smaller-now breasts, whitish,
shining as with sickness, the way the body

releases its heat, a light summer dress, floating
in the river while the pregnancy

strips, the twenty in Ziploc freezer bags,
their lines fading equal signs or crosses,

proof like La Virgen in her robes, stains
that didn't freeze or scrape, barnacle-

calcifying silence. Some things the body
reabsorbs—split wood, fingernails, trauma,

milk. Some things it lets go, bundles of cells
that won't grow. But not you, little girl. You clung

& I clung back. I used to trick myself
years before you, believing my breasts were sore

but not from pinching. If I squeezed long enough,
a sticky clear stream would ooze from one side.

Look what the body can do—
it can lie. I can lie, too. *I'm choosing this.*

The truth can wrap itself in cabbage leaves, or wait
for the body to reabsorb.

Glint Literary Journal, 2013

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Jeremiah Growing

My son helps heal my tattoo,
scrubs his hands & under his fingernails
with antibacterial soap he'll then rub
onto the still-raw feather pen sprouting into birds

across my shoulder blade. He cups
his bicycle-calloused hands with warm
water & splashes me, losing most of the water
to the sink. Again & again he'll do this

so I'm reminded of the hotel basin I first
bathed him in, waiting for adoption papers
in an unfamiliar city, its fireflies I'd never seen,
its late-night summer sunsets. Days ago,

before the sunburn of ink
stinging my skin, he asked to meet
his birthmama, to talk to her.
It feels like I have two mamas, he said

of his heart. I texted her for permission
& she said, *I'd never say no to you*—
He's afraid he'll wash away
my tattoo he's called beautiful, how I was afraid

as she handed him to me—*we're bound for life.*
When she called, when he saw her face
across the screen, he clutched me tighter
& asked *Mama, what should I say?*

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Prayer

When I lost you at the market, I cleared
each shelf for your folded little boy body

(what was it you loved in hide & seek?
the brief escape, the minutes you didn't belong

to me, when no one could find you until)
I found you with a muumuu'd woman

hunkered between shopping carts. You'd gifted
her your animal crackers for offering you

a prayer. My son, performing miracles
every time you wash your feet or clean your

plate of fish sticks, my heart cliff-dives
when I find you weeping for a classmate

or alone in the yard watching a cloud
rising from the river, so when I grabbed your

little body, hugged you, took in your scent
of sweat & cookies & dirt, I swore I'd

never lose you again. My cheeks hot
against yours, I wondered if you knew my

only prayer, whispered nightly: God, if you
ask me to let him go, I'll say no.

Acentos Review, 2011

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Madhouse of Spirits

& ghosts must do again / what gives them pain.
—Auden

I unwrap a bar of amaranth soap & wash my own mouth
the way Mama used to do when I'd been profane—
I'm trying not to become the kind of parent I feel bound
to (all this screaming, this relentless
motherloving fear). I think hard about Charlie Gordon
as a boy in Flowers for Algernon, how he couldn't hold
his mess & made it on the floor, how he couldn't
understand his mother's screamings & beatings
& why she sent him to the sanitarium.
The mother eye isn't all it's cracked up to be.
My own mother used to wail
as she spanked me with a wooden paddle—I still imagine
the hole where the rubber ball should go, its one blind eye
blinking. When I dream, to stop the train,
I must split myself in two: one of me is metal-hinged &
crushed, the other, with chest pain but living. I wake
with heartburn. How does one extract the violent bone
without mining that poor child's spine?

The Collagist, 2014

JENNIFER GIVHAN

I've Carried an Elephant

Last night my son said he'll run away
& find his birth mama.
What of selfishness

can I speak?—the way I wanted desperately
to become a mother & believed the burden
was mine.

There is a forest in the desert, edging
a shallow brown river. I've found
an elephant in the water where no

elephant should belong.
I've held a child
in the place of an elephant,
or the elephant became a child

& I held him for longing—

I'm sorry his father screams at him.
If I were braver
I would ashen the sky with fire.

I believed the burden
was mine & the elephant carries me
across the water

when the monsoons come & the river turns.

There is a depth in the forest,
a bank of sand in the depth.
The boy dreams

a heaven into a state
he calls another country
pinpointed on the map of his heart's bluest walls

surrounded by lakes & the greenest forests—
Can you imagine a forest greener
than your own? Does it hurt to imagine?

Once I found a house of sticks
of cottonwood velvet
stacked toward sky like a pyramid—

the smoke from the chimney never
burnt the house & inside lived a family made of mud
who never washed away

even when the rains came.

One day the house submerged but the smoke
continued.
I watched from the back
of my elephant.

Last night my son came downstairs
because he heard me crying.
He held onto me & his words held onto me.

Sometimes I carry the elephant when it grows
tired. Sometimes the smoke greys the sky for days.

Sometimes the rains leave everything unchanged,
mud grows dry, grows thick—
                                Sometimes
the elephant promises he will never leave.

Connotation Press, 2015

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Bloom

The boys next door are ignoring my son.
    He doesn't understand they're not listening
on purpose: *Mom, they just can't hear me… I'll talk*

louder. He doesn't understand why
    I'm crying: *Did I hurt your feelings, Mom?*
He's perched on the red brick wall that separates

our patches of yard, laughing at jokes he's not
    part of. Calling out punchlines no one
asked of him. I try coaxing him in. Clouds

move low in the humid summer sky. Afternoon
    monsoons. *Let's finish* Harry Potter *together*
I call, trying to remove the quaver from my voice

as he pulls greenish-black leaves from a tree
    I've kept insisting to my husband is sick &
should be dug up, something brighter planted

but he always says there's nothing wrong: *It's just*
    burning in the sun. Well, burning isn't normal, is it.
My boy brings me an impossible blossom

from his tree, for perhaps it was his all along,
    tree that didn't even bud springtime when
all the other neighborhood trees were proud, colorful

with blooms. I've carried these hurts since childhood
    like large plants in deep ceramic pots. I keep
them in the shade of a spare room that cannot get

enough light. I water them too often, & they sag.
    I search our parched corner of the backyard
but cannot see where he found it—this gift

he's still enough to accept, & he's giving me.

The Boiler Journal, 2014

Book Reviews

What We Hold in Our Hands

Kim Aubrey
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2013

REVIEWED BY JUDY BATTAGLIA

What We Hold in Our Hands is just that: a tangible, formidable, globe of possibilities that would ordinarily be described as a fleeting moment in time. A yearning for a nostalgia that is familiar yet foreign. In Aubrey's settings, we find something recognizable in the small towns she describes, even if we are from larger cities. It is her imagination and her character development that bring each story into its resonant place in the sun. In the tradition of Alice Munro, Anton Chekov, and Katherine Mansfield, Aubrey's short fiction feels impressionist in its nature.

The interiority of the story, "Eating Water," speaks to the reader and leaves an impression long after the reader finishes the piece. The author plays with notions of liminality—the space between child and adult; she also experiments with the idea of choosing to be childish in a somewhat toxic world/life environment/habitus. Instead of calling the story, "Breathing Water" or "Swallowing Water" the author christens the story, "Eating Water." Aubrey begins the piece with the speaker's mother crossing her daughter's tiny gingham print overalls twice as she dresses her for a family outing at the beach, since the speaker (the young child, now grown older and more reflective of her past) is "So small, so slight, even the breeze could have swept me away"

(21). This bit of information is enough to set a form to the story, to foreshadow what may come. The story evokes the mythic tale of Ariel, and the Tempest true, harking back not only to modern and post-modern notions of parenthood, but also making references to the mythical, evoking the collective unconscious and the primordial; tying mothers to children in a generational tapestry. In many ways, while the stories are creative and about ordinary and extraordinary things, they are also in their own ways, ideas about writing we can wrap our heads around and "hold in our hands."

In some of the stories, we get a sense of claustrophobia, a sense that words will not do, that they are highly ambiguous oracles in a culture where it is quite difficult to express emotions. Therefore, the author's language is often simple and direct, naming and labeling as if a mother to a child in the realm of the Real, before the level of the Symbolic, and before ordinary language even entered the space between mother and infant.

The title story, "What We Hold in Our Hands" is a well-written bundle of self-reflexivity. The story itself is about the art and practice of telling stories. It pulls into itself notions of juvenilia, as if the story could have been published before the speaker was a storyteller herself. It also pulls on the pathos of the inter-generational and the importance of the oral tradition as well as the written artifacts and visual documents and acumens of familial life. For instance, the speaker accuses her grandmother, "Whenever Grandpa started to tell me a story, even stories about his childhood, you'd always ask me to help with some chore. Like the laundry" (81). The story itself is the speak-act-utterance, showing without telling the reader what we should value, and that is how Aubrey works her magic.

The Goodbye Year: Wisdom and Culinary Therapy to Survive Your Child's Senior Year of High School (and Reclaim the You of You)

Toni Piccinini
Berkeley: Seal Press, 2013

REVIEWED BY MAYA E. BHAVE

Toni Piccinini is a former restaurant worker and owner turned cooking class extraordinaire, who has written an amusing self-help book about the intersection of motherhood, cooking, and the college search process for her high-school aged children. I expected I would read, and effortlessly reproduce, each

monthly recipe, savoring each morsel until I had consumed all of her wisdom on how to overcome, nay conquer, the struggles, stressors, and volatile college application process. It would be Chaucer meets Childs! I read the book in one day, but I have yet to make one of her meals and by the second month of my son's senior year I felt like a failure; frustrated with my teenage son, yet strangely loving him more intensely by the day. I went back to Piccinini's book, and realized that was what she wanted me to learn all along—I could feel lost and yet still come out learning much about myself.

Piccinini begins with the premise that for most mothers senior year is the transparent period by which we become cognizant that time and aging have indeed caught up with us. These watershed junctures leave us feeling nostalgic, and at times panicked, about what lays ahead for our kids, and most importantly, ourselves. For 20 years we mothered the ship (5) of our families and now are about to change course and we wonder about our purpose. Reassuringly she argues that as terrifying as it feels to let go, this process can be a gift, allowing new (painful) growth that results in the possibility of reclaiming a new identity as a woman (27).

I found her month-by-month analysis of the college search process valuable and the accompanying seasonal recipes laudable, but the "to do" lists seem simplistic and often out of place. The thoughtful analysis of how motherhood is tied to our broader social identities is deftly accomplished. She enables the reader to think about our future motherhood and how we might mother without our children nearby, or as she puts it, what happens when we are "no longer the most benevolent queen in the kingdom of my family?" (93). She claims that our two most common responses are keeping uber-busy and worrying. The paradox is that our children are living in a moment of now, as they can't see what is beyond the next dance, soccer game, or weekend party.

I cried a few times, yet laughed much more often whilst reading about diets, denial and menopause, kids and curfews, mother as flight attendant (putting on our own masks before helping others), and her commentary on men and their naked middle-age bodies. I felt as though Piccinini had moved into our house, and had overtaken my body! With each page, I realized I wasn't alone or crazy, and would eventually find my inner courage. She notes that as our kids need acceptance of their final year a bit at a time, we too need the same and subsequently can begin to accept who we are, buried beneath our mothering facades.

She reminisces at the end of her book at old pictures of where we (and our children) have been; eking out the memories, those warm, pivotal moments, like glancing at a dusty old yearbook. The process of looking back isn't because we are searching for something long gone, but to see that we have really survived. Ironically I learned that my son's senior year was not about him

finding courage, but about me finding mine. She taught me that I had to find my-self, before he walked out to embrace his. Piccinini showed me that in letting go of my own children's lives, I could actually take control of my life. After the last page, I set her book down, walked past my son's now-outdated junior picture on the mantle, and glanced in the hallway mirror. As I looked at the image before me, I realize I don't have wrinkles, made with worry and fear, I have wisdom lines, lines that have been etched into my face and taught me my life is just starting anew.

Motherload: Making It All Better in Insecure Times

Ana Villalobos
Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014

REVIEWED BY PAT BRETON

How do women's fears and insecurities about raising their children in a world of economic instability, terrorism and child abductions influence their motherload and mother/child relationships? In *Motherload: Making It All Better in Insecure Times* Ana Villalobos examines how American mothers navigate the precarious times revealing their parenting strategies to protect their child/ren from societal risks, both real and amplified. Providing a sociological perspective, Villalobos sheds light on how the forces of neoliberalism have shifted the public risks of raising children from society at large to individual families, privatizing the risks associated with maintaining children's security as women's "naturalized" responsibility (15-16). She identifies how the social amplification of a risk framework in the 1980s contributed to symbolic societal scapegoats, such as pedophile pre-schoolteachers, pre-teen mass murders, and homicidal au pairs that deflected contemporary society's attention from the material insecurities, such as work insecurity for younger cohorts, rising national child poverty rate, increased divorce, and the decline in community support. Referencing key works such as Hays' intensive motherhood and Bowlby's attachment theory, Villalobos concludes it is not intensive parenting, but the heavy motherload of expectations about the mother-child relationship that sustains women's fears and insecurities when raising their children.

In this qualitative research, Villalobos conducts a longitudinal study following thirty-four pregnant mothers through the first three years of their parenting, a crucial time when women generally begin to bear the brunt of increased domestic and child labour necessitating changes in women's marital

and work lives. Drawing from multiple interviews and observations, this early motherhood research offers richly intimate insights into different parenting strategies used by mothers to keep their child safe from societal risks. For example, in chapter two, so-called helicopter mothers carry a heavy motherload evidenced by shielding and antidote parenting strategies. Shielding strategies are akin to the classic over-protective parenting, where a mother acts as a barrier between her child and physical threats of a risky society; while the antidote strategy involves filling the child with love in hopes the child will be secure from emotional dangers such as terrorism and child abductions. In chapter three, mothers who see their mother-child connection as their own ultimate source of security, also carry a heavy motherload based on "self-sacrificing" parenting to compensate for the insecurities a women feels in her marriage and work life. Their parenting strategies include guarding the parenting terrain from the husband/partner to ensure the baby is bonded to mother. Contrast these connection-oriented mothers, with the "love without saving" mothers in chapter four, who carry lighter motherloads. Approaching their parenting with less anxiety that often entails disregarding the parenting experts' advice, these mothers see their child as resilient and their partners as an integral part of the parenting experience.

While Villalobos provides enlightening insights about the different motherloads and mother/child relationships of single and married mothers, stay-at-home moms, and moms juggling childcare with careers, she acknowledges the under-analysis of class, race, and ethnicity in her research. The middle-class bias identified by Villalobos in the recruitment process is evident in the last research chapter where light-motherload independence, as portrayed by the parenting experiences of two privileged women, problematically shores up the "ideal" two-parent, middle-class family. Unlike many mothers' realities, these women who perform "mothering without the ordeal" have the financial security of stable well-paying careers, supportive partners/families and social networks, and high-quality child care options, allowing for anxiety-reduced choices in their parenting and home/work lives. Villalobos does provide some important race/ethnicity insights but as she explains, the small number of racially similar informants in her sample group limited her analysis. With such pressing societal risks as increasing racialized poverty, U.S police violence against black youth and intensified anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant sentiment reproduced in a post 9/11 terrorist discourse, more attention to the marginalized contexts of racialized and low-income parenting is critical.

Motherload: Making It All Better in Insecure Times is an important contribution to parenting literature and a valuable resource for mothering/motherhood researchers and scholars. At the end of the manuscript, Villalobos

thoughtfully reflects on her researcher relationship with her mother participants as shaped by her own pregnancy and early mothering experiences during her fieldwork. Her sensitivity to mother/child relationships is evident in this study that so beautifully captures the complex parenting strategies used by American mothers to survive and manage their motherloads during these turbulent neoliberal times of heightened fears and insecurities.

Performing Motherhood: Artistic, Activist, and Everyday Enactments

Amber E. Kinser, Kryn Freehling-Burton, and Terri Hawkes, eds.
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY RACHEL EPP BULLER

In this rich and nuanced volume of essays, the phrase "performing motherhood" takes on layers meaning. Many of the essayists come from performance backgrounds—music, theater, dance, and performance art—and address maternal issues within their own fields. Performance here is broadly defined, as noted in the book's subtitle, but one consistent interpretation across the essays is the notion of maternal performance as a disruption or an interruption of the status quo. Perhaps most importantly, each essayist considers mothering as an active (and sometimes activist) endeavor: performing motherhood privileges their agency, so that the maternal experience is not simply happening to them. In the introduction the editors highlight this conscious choice, which they made "in the spirit of resisting the persistent narratives of maternal struggle and framing this volume with agency at its core" (4).

The editors worked explicitly to foreground maternal agency even through how they organized the volume. They mix disciplines and arrange the essays into the theatrical structure of Acts I-IV, an inspired reframing of the typical subsection division of edited volumes. In each Act—Performing Space/Location, Performing Intention/In Tension, Performing Identity/Relation, and Performing Presence/Visibility—authors perform political action and resistance and work to make the maternal more visible. Departing from Peggy Phelan's argument about the power of "unmarked" voices, the editors argue that performing and giving visibility to motherhood grants greater agency than does the subversive power accessible to voices hidden in the shadows.

Several essays stand out as strengths of the book. In "The Invisibility of Motherhood in Toronto Theatre," Terri Hawkes plays on the typically positive concept of "triple threat" in theatre (i.e., a person who can act, sing,

and dance) to lay out the "triple threat," or three most detrimental areas, for mother-actors: money, logistics, and body. Hawkes establishes this framing based on her own experiences and those of many fellow actors, but instead of focusing solely on the oppression of mothers, Hawkes turns instead to maternal agency and suggests a long list of possible structural changes to relieve the triple threat and change the situation for performing mothers. Addressing an altogether different type of performance, Kelly Dorgan offers a powerful example of how a mother of a special-needs child must learn to produce and perform a maternal narrative, when she as an adoptive mother is so often blamed for her son's problems, both by her son and by the many professionals involved in their lives. Dorgan's essay is a companion piece to an essay she published in Amber Kinser's earlier volume, *Mothering in the Third Wave*, in which she detailed the early behavioral challenges in her foster-to-adopt situation. Picking up the story again at this later stage, Dorgan weaves together personal narrative and feminist critical inquiry to expose "how producing and performing my special-mothering story is enabling me to learn how to control my own voice" (133).

In "Maternal Ecologies," Natalie Loveless details a three-year daily performance done in conjunction with her son and, sometimes, with other mothers and children. While Loveless' art and writing integrate her identities as mother, artist, and theorist, she beautifully acknowledges the challenges inherent in such blurred boundaries, seeing herself as "someone who can never tell when she is being an artist and when she is being a scholar and when she is being a mother, or when she is being too little or too much of each" (165).

Other highlights of the volume include Courtney Brooks' contribution on Appalachian maternalist protest songs, and Lisa Sandlos' essay on the maternal performance of competitive dance moms, not only evaluating the norm but also suggesting alternative ways forward. Although a few of the book's contributions seem unfinished simply because they are so short, overall the essays of *Performing Motherhood* offer distinctive and thought-provoking paths to maternal agency through all manner of performance.

Making Modern Mothers

Rachael Thomson, Mary Jane Kehily, Lucy Hadfield and Sue Sharpe
Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2011

REVIEWED BY PATTY DOUGLAS

Making Modern Mothers pursues a critical question with contemporary cur-

rency: What does it mean to be a mother today? Drawing on extensive ethnographic data and analysis of popular culture, the authors weave intergenerational narratives of mothering within families together with an innovative sociological and feminist frame to probe their question from a variety of angles. This is an approach concerned with the relationship between individual biography and difference, and a common culture of motherhood. What arises through the project are provocative questions about the temporality of shifting maternal identities, the key role of popular culture in identity formation, differences between mothers, and pressing questions about a new politics of motherhood.

Beginning with conception narratives, the authors work in temporal sequence through key and common issues bound up with the experience of mothering and identity formation: the embodiedness of pregnancy, changing relationships generationally within families, the shifting role of expert advice (vis-à-vis heightening marketization that demands we consume and self-fashion our identities), women's complex and classed relationship to work, the centrality of commodification in mother's lives, as well as birth stories and beyond. This organizational strategy makes for a highly readable book, as the authors share narratives that represent the diverse ways women are situated and the ways they negotiate common yet diverse terrain. Through the organizing category of age, we meet teenaged and older mothers, as well as single and coupled, lesbian and straight, middle and working class, employed and unemployed, surrounded by, as well as estranged from, family. What emerges through these stories is not only the trend toward later motherhood and the inextricable link between age, class, and gender, but also women's active and creative role in fashioning maternal identities out of diverse biographical situations and shifting relations between the family, state, and market that entail heightening responsibility for motherhood in women's lives.

Given this, a significant contribution made by this book is its creative use of a phenomenologically informed theoretical frame that links individual narratives of difference to these larger cultural configurations. This is important work. Simone de Beauvoir's notion of women as a bodily 'situation', for example, helps the authors explore individual biographies in depth as ones that are also positioned within larger cultural and institutional processes. In addition, the idea of 'configuration' highlights the ways in which relationships between individual situations and self-understandings shift and change within family configurations and in relation to larger social realities over time. Finally, the authors employ a narrative approach to explore maternal identity formation. This not only brings individual situations alive, but provides a way for the authors to link individual narratives to larger family and cultural configurations.

Making Modern Mothers is a creative work that opens the way for further elaboration of the crucial link between enduring systems of power and the making of selves in everyday life. One provocative and potentially generative finding, for example, is the "absence of stories about more difficult and embodied experiences" (270). Re/storying cultural silences around disability, illness, pregnancy, and birth may bring out other aspects of configurations along with ways that matrices of normalcy play out and are resisted in mothers' lives. Within an ever-expanding martketization and responsibilization of motherhood, including troubling and renewed figures of the good/bad mother, *Making Modern Mothers* brings to the fore and makes its own contribution to the importance of a politics of motherhood that can hold onto differences between mothers while at the same time offer alternative representations, possibilities, and identities. It is a highly thoughtful work that is a must read for those seeking theoretically innovative approaches to questions of identity and gender under late modernity.

Black Motherhood(s): Contours, Contexts, and Considerations

Craddick, Karen T.
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY TALIA ESNARD

This book is an exceptional and thought provoking collection that not only problematizes the images, stereotypes, myths, and dominant understandings of Black Motherhood across many different contexts but also renews the call for much needed rethinking, re-theorizing, and redefining of the same. To do so, the editor pulls together significant contributions that offer a range of standpoints (black feminism, African feminism, and critical theory), diverse methods (narrative writings, autobiography, document analysis, poetry, and fiction), which together, disrupt historical, socio-political, ideological, and stratified underpinnings of Black motherhood.

In so doing, several issues emerge throughout the chapters. First is the powerful yet distinct ways in which notions of womanhood intertwine with those of motherhood to frame the varied meanings of motherhood, socialization practices, subjective formations, and maternal experiences as well as the conferment of power and authority. Second is the silence on the contextual complexities that underlie Black motherhood. These include, but are not limited to, the stratifying and intersecting effects of race, gender, nationality, eth-

nicity, diasporic status, gender, and religion on definition and presentation of self, social relations, socialization of children, and inherent decision making processes. Third, is the way in which acts of resistance serve as useful coping and negotiating strategies that secure, albeit in vary degrees, the survival and empowerment of Black mothers and their children.

These issues are articulated and developed over the five sections of the book. In the first section of the book, the authors use fictional writings on Black motherhood to challenge representations of and deliberation on maternal identities. By giving voice to the experiences of Black mothers, the authors present powerful standpoints that move away from denigrating constructions of their own maternal thinking and practice. A paradigm shift, however, is not without complications. Using the lived experiences of African mothers who use migration as a way of transforming their own subjectivities outside the boundaries maternal norms, the second part of the book highlights the continuous ways in which African mothers both home and abroad struggle with issues related to the welfare of their children, work and family integration, and the impact on their relationships with loved ones overtime. In the third part of the book, the authors use progressive feminist epistemologies and protagonist representations in poetry and literature to critique and expand historical representations and interpretations of Black motherhood. The use of historical facts to highlight the politicized story of Sally Hemings and her relationship with Thomas Jefferson represents a powerful case in point. What remains clear in the fourth section of the book is that such efforts must also cross institutional boundaries. Thus, Tyralynn Frazier calls into question the disconnect between the contextualized nature of the reproductive health, the technocratic paradigm that dominates health care, and the ability of mothers to make decisions to secure their sexual and reproductive freedoms. Emilie Grant also draws on the ways in which missionaries use their intervention privileges to connect African women to Christian values and maternal practices.

In the last section of the book, the authors examine the ways in which Black mothers teach their daughters to negotiate the racialized, sexualized, gendered, and classed spaces within which women Black women exist. Thus, Tracy Nichols and Regina McCoy provide stories of Black mothers who share their insights into the racial and gendered realities of Black women with their children as a way of empowering their daughters to deal with such marginalized realities. Another is what Marva Lewis describes as the use of hair combing opportunities by mothers to create counter narratives that troubles the traumatic legacies of slavery and its negative effects of the self-esteem, body image, and relationships of young girls and by extension their own daughters.

Collectively, the book advances the self-defined standpoint of Black mothers as a useful framework for theorizing how Black mothers resist negative constructions of their maternal selves while renegotiating and redefining their maternal thinking and practice. Although such acts of resistance do not remove the embedded tensions that emerge between discourse, expectations, and choice, these acts of resistance present useful coping strategies that strengthen the resilience of Black mothers overtime and provide ways in which they can begin to re-imagine and re-shape their own maternal identities.

Got Teens? The Doctor Moms' Guide to Sexuality, Social Media and Other Adolescent Realities

Logan Levkoff and Jennifer Wider
Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2014

REVIEWED BY NANCY SIMPSON GREENWOOD

The goal of this guide is to alleviate concerns and angst by equipping parents with information. Both authors face the queries of young people professionally and are preparing to do so in the near future in their own families as they mother their own children. The audience they address in their writings are "parents, relatives, caregivers and friends" who are embarking on a journey of living with teens and want to be informed, open and positive. The authors reassure and encourage using humour and practical, non-clinical language and information. Topics explored include physical development and anatomy, sexual and mental health, eating and body image, substance use and abuse, and the omnipresent use of social media and technology.

The authors, Jennifer Wider, a physician, and Logan Levkoff, a health educator, focus on health and sexuality and are motivated by a clear goal and belief that "...when armed with up-to-date, accurate information and a few strategies for handling tough conversations, we have the opportunity and, dare we say it, responsibility to give our children the information and understanding they need to survive the precarious, precious time that is puberty" (p.7).

The format of the book is based on a range of hypothetical questions posed by parents with responses consisting of thoughtful discussion, and possible answers based on research and common sense. Examples include:

- What is sex?
- My son asked me at what age I first had sex and how I knew it was

the right time?
•My son told me that he hates his life and that no one would miss him if he were "gone." Should I take this seriously, or is he just trying to get my attention?
•My son told me that he doesn't feel comfortable in his own skin and that he feels he should have been born a girl. Help! I am at a total loss.
•I've been considering getting my child a cell phone, but she's begging me for a smartphone. Is she old enough?
•How can I explain gay marriage to my child?
•My daughter just asked me how she'll know when she's in a good relationship. What should I tell her?

The authors write using concrete examples of experiences or interactions and decisions relating to their own children and their friends to illustrate ideas. They share events that provide starting points for open discussion. For instance:

•"Jena's girlfriend once walked in on her seven year old daughter playing "doctor" with a friend…."
•"At one get-together that Jena attended with her kids, a friend's husband made an off-color remark about gay men playing football…. Jena knew she had to speak up."
•"Logan and her son, Maverick, saw a boy being chased and picked on by a group of older boys on the opposite side of the park. There were plenty of people watching but nobody did anything—except for Logan."
•"Logan loves to talk about erections in class, because there is nothing better than seeing a boy's face when he figures out that his erections are part of a natural development, rather than something that is wrong with his body."

Each of the examples introduces a concept in a casual parent-to-parent way though the expertise in the subject and presentation style is very clear. The focus is clearly on developing communication opportunities. It is easy to picture adult friends talking in a living room, at the soccer field, or on a hike, about the adolescents in their world and that is exactly the approach for which the authors were aiming. The writing is folksy and knowledgeable.

In contrast to most books with the lofty goal of providing information on sexuality and development, the explanations, discussions, and answers in this book include no graphics, no diagrams, no photographs or visuals of

any kind. Though filled with details and multiple variances, the guidebook focuses on an open, holistic approach to teen hood, adolescence, and the challenges facing those living with and working with young people.

The premise of the book is that open communication and positive relationships can be nurtured through honest conversations. Responses to questions must be accurate and open, based on thoughtful consideration and accurate information and the authors aim to provide the practical tools for dealing with these challenges. This is an ambitious but accessible guidebook or "road map" for parents. It is informative and reassuring. It is not an all-encompassing encyclopedia on how to deal with teenagers and their questions but it is an excellent starting base. In fact, the straight-forward non-clinical language interwoven with humour and real life anecdotes is a positive and simple approach to "adolescent realities"—a good go-to resource for young people and their parents who are trying to develop and maintain communication.

The Gift in the Heart of Language: The Maternal Source of Meaning

Genevieve Vaughan
Fano: Mimesis International, 2015

REVIEWED BY NANÉ JORDAN

> *The over-emphasis on exchange and force, together with the denial of mothering/being mothered influences all of Western thinking.*
> —Genevieve Vaughan (p. 184)

Genevieve Vaughan's new volume continues her groundbreaking work on the gift economy, as understood through the primary lens of mothering and motherhood. Vaughan reveals the extent to which theories of the gift and economics have failed to consider the obvious: maternal giving. The "maternal gift" refers to the one-way flow, from mother to child, of material and non-material gifts and services (i.e. food, shelter, care, and language). The gift economy is based in a unilateral satisfaction of needs, without thought of return or reward on the part of the giver. Key to understanding the maternal gift economy is in how it has been hidden, distorted, and exploited by the exchange economy and patriarchal capitalism. Our mothers gave birth to our bodies and lives and gifted us with early and ongoing mother-care (gift-

work). This simple fact can be so amazingly ignored that we miss our physical and philosophical "foundations"!

I appreciate how Vaughan develops a unique term: "motherer," meaning anyone, of any sex or gender, who functions as a gift-giver towards children and/or society as a whole. Forming the basis of once long-sustaining indigenous societies, the gift is interconnected to the exchange economy, in so far as the exchange economy is a parasite on the gift. In this way, one can see how the many social and economic challenges that mothers face are rooted in the exploitation and devaluation of their daily gifting practices by the forces of exchange that govern our lives. The exchange economy uses gifts (e.g. of the mother or the Earth) as free resources to fuel its systems of accumulation, scarcity, and domination through power-over others.

Vaughan provides detailed analysis of the gift by linking "mothering, gender, cognition, economics, language, neuroscience, politics…and the rest of life on Earth" (35). Her expansive contribution investigates and critiques Marxist theory and capitalism, sociological, anthropological, and philosophical studies on the gift from Mauss to Derrida, Bataille, and Bourdieu. Vaughan especially engages new conceptions of the infant as seen by psychologists (and known by mothers for millennia). The child is understood to be a highly communicative and interactive being who learns through relational mirroring with their mother/er. Language development is itself a gifting process, where mother and child nurture and follow each other's cues. Babies smile, babble or cry, capturing our attention and love, projecting their own affection back to us. Such communicative gift-giving reinforces positive human relations.

Vaughan thus interprets language as functioning according to the "Symbolic Order of the Mother," a term coined by Italian philosopher Luisa Muraro. In her chapters entitled "The Virtual Plane," and "Money, Property, and Epistemology," Vaughan expounds upon the relationship between language and money, towards conceptions of human subjectivity. Money, as an "extra-somatic token of ideas" (242), is a communication and power strategy of patriarchal capitalism, appropriated from "the heart" of the maternal gift of language. We desperately need to understand this projection of exchange ideas into our thinking and actions, which inform our very notions of what it "means" to be human.

In the end, the gift can function very well on its own, without the need for exchange. Like an out-of-control demon, the exchange economy has become a necrophilic system feeding upon our mother-worlds and mother-life. Yet we can all be motherers. Vaughan is herself a grassroots advocate, activist and networker, a "motherer" philosopher who organizes international conferences that are devoted to recognition and support of the mater-

nal gift economy. These gatherings connect feminist thinkers, indigenous scholars, activists, community groups and academics, healers, motherhood and matriarchal studies scholars, through the gift of multiple languages. In her final chapter, Vaughan draws on her on-the-ground experience to provide solutions and examples of the maternal gift economy at work around the world. Things like social justice work, music festivals, problem solving, co-ops, and the air we breathe are all forms of gift giving. Ultimately, gift giving forms the basis for material and social abundance and well-being through caring, nurturing societies that live in reciprocity with the Earth and all beings. As such, we do not need to reform exchange, or even put an economic value on mother-work. Rather, and perhaps radically, we can bypass exchange completely, returning to the maternal gift as the primary means and meaning of life.

Memoralizing Motherhood: Anna Jarvis and the Struggle for the Control of Mother's Day

Katharine Lane Antolini
West Virginia University Press, 2014

REVIEWED BY LISA LYNN

Katharine Lane Antolini's book offers a historical account of Anna Jarvis and her work to found and control the expression of Mother's Day. Jarvis made it her life's work to protect Mother's Day as a sacred time for acknowledging mothers and defending her claim as founder of the holiday. Mother's Day, as Anna Jarvis conceived it, begins with a worshipful state of mind to acknowledge a mother's service to her family. Therefore, a day should be set aside to offer tribute to the sacrifice of the mothers of the United States. However, after achieving the acceptance of Mother's Day as a national holiday, Jarvis spent the remainder of her life dominated by the business of maintaining the holiday's pure motives and reverence she intended.

Memoralizing Motherhood contains two major narratives. The actions of Anna Jarvis and her contemporaries in the creation and performance of the holiday enable an examination of maternal identity. Jarvis herself remains central to the narrative and historical understanding of the battle over who controls the discourse over mothering. Ever motivated by the notion of her own mother's purity, Jarvis fought to defend mothers from the encroaching commercialism brought on by the industrious floral and candy industry, and the public's conflicted notions of motherhood. Interestingly, a secondary

narrative throughout the text indicates the complicated navigation through the mother-daughter relationship, especially between Jarvis and her mother, Anna Reeves Jarvis.

In the late 1800s there were five separate calls for some version of Mother's Day. Each call activated the notion of mothering differently and approached a holiday observance for different political and cultural purposes. Three of the alternative founders were predecessors to Anna Jarvis. In Antolini's accounting, the first three people to promote a Mothers' Day—Anna Reeves Jarvis, Julia Ward Howe, and Juliet Calhoun Blakeley—used the term and grammatical notation to call for all mothers to unite through a shared mothering experience. These three contemporaries, working separately, used motherhood as an "opportunity to organize women and their shared maternal experience in a way that encouraged social and political activism" (7). Throughout the book, Antolini takes up the notable question, through a perusal of pre-holiday history, of what qualities make mothers worthy of honor.

The book mentions two other promoters of Mother's Day that would compete with Jarvis for the title of founder. For their own purposes, Anna Jarvis, Mary Towles Sasseen, and Frank Hering promoted Mother's Day based in sentimentality and not as a tool to engage maternal activism. Instead, the central focus becomes memorializing mothers from the perspective of a child. This type of memorialization nullifies a women's mothering experience, replacing the authority of the position with a sentimentality determined to celebrate the consecrated position of motherhood without acknowledging a mother's agency.

Antolini poignantly paints Anna Jarvis's desire to preserve the sense of "duty, love, faith and sacrifice" that she attributes to her mother, despite the non-consolidating facts of her mother's life and maternal activism (52). Jarvis's actions transformed her mother into the stereotyped Victorian mother, disentangled from the woman and the life she lived. Now pious and untouchable, Jarvis's Mother's Day lacked any essence of the work that her mother began decades before. Single-minded in her vision, Jarvis had no qualms dictating the moral trajectory of the American public in their acknowledgement of motherhood. Her aggressive written and verbal attacks on people or industry that threatened to abuse the spirit of Mother's Day marred her image in the media and eventually cost her credibility and her family's fortune through litigation. Her mission was to control the "proper" view of motherhood in a society that positioned mothering as a propaganda tool. Through Jarvis's antagonistic interactions with various capitalistic enterprises and civic groups, the book elegantly explores the motives behind the celebration of mothers. Antolini demonstrates that Mother's Day was

a pawn for political and economic interests, the differing expressions of the holiday vying for control over what made a model mother in the early twentieth century.

The Good Mother Myth

Avital Norman Nathum, ed.
Berkeley: Seal Press, 2014

REVIEWED BY MARGARET MCDONALD

The Good Mother Myth is an engaging five-part collection of the storied maternal experiences of thirty-six women, edited by Avital Norman Nathum with a forward by Christy Turlington Burns. This collection, bound by the common purpose of debunking the 'good mother' myth does so admirably with a strong sense of advocacy and purpose. Each short story paints an engaging self-portrait of women who see themselves as the antithesis of the 'good mother'. Their vignettes reveal shortcomings, contradictions, and an active push back and liberation from the archetypes of mothering and motherhood. Each story is presented in an entertaining and at times sardonic writing style that captures these women's poignant reflections on their struggles with motherhood (or in one case a move from fatherhood for a transgender parent) and their reflection on who they are and who they are to their children, friends, and families. In *The Good Mother Myth*, these women share their perspectives and experiences on career and family challenges, adoption, teen parenting, mental illness and parenting, anxiety, panic disorder, divorce, single parenting, only children, joint parenting, abuse, transgender parenting, gay marriage and parenting, adoption, abortion, fertility treatments, sexuality, maternal guilt, and more. The book is filled with vivid descriptions conveying the dilemmas, challenges and joys of mothering. Their stories rally against conventions and discuss their personal expectations and how these are at times set too high and at times used to motivate and improve their own lives and the lives of their children. Each story is also about alignment between views of the authors and the ethos of 'mothering' and being a 'good mother' within our society. The stories carry the common attribute of being well crafted, readable and both powerful and refreshingly honest. The thirty-six authors are drawn almost exclusively from American women who are active bloggers/writers/scholars/artists/filmmakers/feminists, accounting in part for the consistent, accessible voice and writing style and the clear focus on advocacy. Each author sets out to answer the question: "Who am I in relation

to the 'good mother' and how have I come to understand and embrace my difference?"

Despite being a highly readable contribution that articulates and embraces alternate ways of mothering to destabilize stereotypes, I was left at points wanting to go deeper into the stories and personal histories of the authors. Perhaps knowing a little more about each of the writers would give a better sense of the context, geographical locale, etc. that would deepen the connection of the reader to the author's message. One way this may have been achieved would be to have the biographical portion of the book interwoven into each piece, or to provide fewer entries with greater depth around the backgrounds of each author's life, although this would have been a difficult call given that each entry was very compelling. I also found *The Good Mother Myth* to be limited in its theoretical underpinning. Incorporating a theoretical framework of post-structuralist and post humanist perspectives to these powerful stories would draw this work closer to academic audiences and connect it to the larger issues of equity, the image of the mother and child, the role of technology, and marginalization of women and children. As an academic, I am left wanting a stronger link between these engaging commentaries and current theory to help us all move beyond description and into deeper epistemological ontological thinking around what it means to mother/love/nurture. Perhaps this is the job of the reader or other scholars who might take these stories as examples of American feminist advocacy and link them to the work of feminist post-structuralist theorists like Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, or Donna Haraway.

Mothers of Bedford

Jennifer McShane, Director
New York: Women Make Movies, 2011, DVD, 96 minutes

REVIEWED BY NAOMI M. MCPHERSON

Located in New York State, Bedford Hills is a maximum-security prison for women who are serving sentences from five years to life. The film notes that 80 percent of women incarcerated in the U.S. are mothers of children whose ages range from infancy to adolescent to young adult. Director McShane makes a powerful case for providing Children's Center programs in all prisons for women. Filmed over a four-year period, McShane follows five women as their lives and their relationships with their children unfold within prison walls.

The Children's Center program at Bedford was initiated 19 years earlier by Sister Elaine Roulet. Sr. Elaine, who appears in the film, points out that when mothers are incarcerated, their children are also penalized due to separation from their mothers. Compounded by the fact that they are often too young to understand full explanations about the context surrounding their mother's imprisonment, children wonder why their mother abandoned them; perhaps fearing they have done something to cause mother to leave them and finding little comfort in assurances that, at some future point in time, their mother will return. Some children are cared for by their grandmothers or their aunts (rarely by their fathers) while their mother is in prison, a situation that may or may not work out for all concerned. Most of the children of mothers in prison end up in the less than ideal "system" of child services and foster homes, which can lead to problems for them in families, schools, and society.

Mothers never cease being parents no matter where they are, and the women in Bedford try to retain connections and active parental involvement in their children's lives. The Children's Center at Bedford facilitates the women's efforts at mothering-from-a-distance. The program provides facilities, parenting sessions, and support from volunteers and other inmates so that mothers and children are able to create and maintain strong bonds. There is no hint of prison drab in the aesthetics of these mother and child areas. The Children's Center has an outdoor courtyard and playground where one mom, who excelled at basketball in high school, shoots baskets with her two adolescent sons. Indoors, the gathering place is beautifully decorated and furnished with child appropriate décor. This is where children's birthday parties, Mother's Day visits, arts and crafts sessions, scrap-booking, face-painting, and story-telling activities occur. It is a space where children and their mothers can talk, play, or simply curl up together for physical and emotional expressions of caring. Sr. Elaine comments that the Children's Center program provides the women an opportunity to begin again, to become a good mother. The Center director, who started as a volunteer, invests hours of time and buckets of emotional and psychic energy helping inmates in their mothering. Her aim is to foster "transformative experiences" for the women as they strive to cultivate valuable and lasting relationships with their children.

The film's director deftly follows the life stories of the five women who discuss what got them into Bedford, what life "inside" is like for them, and their struggles to be the kind of mothers they want to be for their children. For some women, the social circumstances that led them to prison seem unfortunate in the extreme: Mona, for example, was a passenger in a vehicle hit-and-run that killed the victim, for which she received a life sentence on the charges of second degree murder. If she had agreed to plead guilty to murder, she would have been given a three-year sentence, but she refused. "I am not

a murderer," she says. Before prison, Mona was a childcare worker; in prison she is known as Mona "the maker of magnificent moments." She is a dynamo of energy leading parenting workshops and special craft sessions, organizing Mother's day celebrations and children's special occasions to make children's visits with their mothers into "magnificent moments." After twenty-four years in Bedford, more than half her life, we watch as she is finally released into a new-to-her world of cell phones, computers, ATMs, and so many other cultural and social changes she has never experienced. Her two adult sons, with whom she has maintained contact through the Center program visits, collect her from the prison gates on her release. They will help their mother create her new life on the outside.

And then there is Melissa, a rebellious, drug involved, middle-class 18 year old, who was sentenced to two years in maximum security for attempted robbery. She discovered she was pregnant after she was sent to Bedford and, in due course, gave birth to her daughter in prison. The Child Center's program permits infants to live with their mother in her cell with their own crib until they are eighteen-months-old. Melissa was able to breastfeed and be in constant contact with her daughter for 24-hours a day. Melissa's release from Bedford coincided with her daughter's 18 months age limit and they left prison together. A happy little girl when the film ended, she has no recollection of "doing time" in Bedford, although Melissa muses she will have to tell her daughter someday.

There is much to ponder and to wonder about in this excellent film. Not least among the issues that had me reflect deeply was the engagement of volunteers, prison staff, and inmates in the Children's Center program. Together they work to create a successful program. Notable, too, is the work the women invest in their mothering practices working on the good mothers they want and know they can be. The Bedford program appears to provide a successful model for incarcerated women to mother (and learn to mother) their children. I searched the literature to learn if a similar program exists in Canada. The short answer is no, there does not appear to be a comparable Mother and Child program operating at this point in time. Brennan (Canada's Mother and Child Program) reviews the history of Corrections Services Canada's Mother and Child programs from 1995 to 2014. Some penitentiaries implemented programs but despite inmate enthusiasm for the program, had low participation rates and were discontinued. Brennan suggests that Corrections Services changes to program eligibility criteria created barriers to accessing the program thus low participation level. A footnote to the film notes that, since its release in 2011, funding for the program at Bedford Hills was cut by 40 percent. No reason for the massive cuts is offered.

This case study of a program for mothers and their children in very specific

circumstances makes a key point that such programs embrace the well-being of both mother and their children. There is no doubt that Bedford Hills is a maximum-security institution that penalizes inmates for breaking the law. But the existence of the Children's Center posits that mother and child programs are key to a woman's rehabilitation by acknowledging her as a mother making efforts to maintain relationships with her children, enhancing the children's chances of staying out of state systems of child services and foster-age. This film is highly recommended for teaching and learning, especially in training programs for Social Workers, Correctional Officers, and Families Services personnel.

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Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations About Men, Mothers, and Mothering

Fiona Joy Green and Gary Lee Pelletier, eds.
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY NAOMI R. MERCER

In the gendered, racialized, and classed rhetoric that surrounds care work, particularly of children, Fiona Joy Green and Gary Lee Pelletier contend that childcare itself and conversations about that care is "essential" (1). In weaving together essays that engage mothering from multiple perspectives, especially non-traditional mother figures such as men, Green and Pelletier attempt to make the "breakthroughs" alluded to in the volume's title that broaden the discourse around mothering to challenge the gendered and biologically essentialist nature of childcare and concomitant devaluing of that care. The anthology's premise uses Sara Ruddick's concept of maternal thinking as a feminist springboard to decouple gender and heteronormativity from acts of childcare without effacing the biological realities of pregnancy, labor and delivery, and lactation.

One of the most effective "breakthroughs" in the collection is "Mommie Dearest: Undoing a Gay Identity through Pregnancy" by Jack Hixson-Vulpe, which "queer[s] motherhood" (2) in order to expand the discourse surround-

ing it. Identifying himself as a transgender man, Hixson-Vulpe mixes theoretical analysis and a personal narrative of his experience of pregnancy and subsequent abortion. The fact of pregnancy itself, as a result of Hixson-Vulpe's queer relationship with another man, contradicts one of the known tenets of same-sex liaisons: the inability to reproduce without external assistance. The raw power of Hixson-Vulpe's narrative is no less tempered by its placement well into the volume followed by "The Ties that Bind Are Broken: Trans* Breastfeeding Practices, Ungendering Body Parts, and Unsexing Parenting Roles" by A.J. Lowik who demonstrates the potential for transgender parents to defy breastfeeding norms and social constructions of parenting.

First, however, the editors juxtapose Joanna S. Frye's "Parental Thinking: What Does Gender Have to Do with It?" with Pelletier's analysis of the rise of the childcaring "manny" in "Does the Manny Mother?" Frye advocates a "parental thinking" (15) practice free of gender constraints, arising out of maternal thinking and its flexibility but redefined. She acknowledges that gendered constructions may shape how we parent, but that individuals should be able to parent in ways that are best for them and for children, regardless of labels or traditional gender roles. Pelletier's essay, in contrast, finds that the discourse surrounding mannies is particularly "damaging" to women who nanny because it downplays the carework that most women do, paid or unpaid, and venerates men as caregivers if they offer care on par with women. The prevalence of this veneration highlights how our society expects women to routinely perform carework for free or for low wages with no such expectations for men.

The anthology includes four essays that address mother-son relationships from sons who have learned to mother in their parents' absence in "Changing the Gender Script: Ecuadorian Sons' Increased Domesticity and Emotive Responses to Transnational Mothering" by Ruth Trinidad Galván to Justin Butler's personal narrative "Why Isn't Everyone Celebrating Me? My Mom, Bankruptcy, and My Ego" that critically analyzes how his mother's single-parenting affected, or not, his development from child to adult. Nick J. Mulé's piece, "'Is He the Son of No One?' A Son's Relational Narrative on his Mother" examines how the author's mother positioned herself as a feminist while inhabiting a traditional heterosexual role as a housewife, a mother, and a woman. "Lesbian Families, Sons, and Mothering: Parenting Outside the Boundaries" by Alys Einion probes the navigation of societal expectations for providing male role models and the potential assimilation of lesbian families into heteronormative notions of the nuclear family for lesbian mothers of sons.

The next grouping of essays thematically concerns the ways in which popular culture and the nuclear family model that entrenches men as heads of

household present harmful images of motherhood, as performed by women, further reifying kyriarchal masculinity and treating women as objects rather than agents. Dwayne Avery's "TV's New Dads: Sensitive Fatherhood and the Return of Hegemonic Masculinity" describes how depictions of fatherhood in a sampling of popular TV shows focuses on the protection of children but never progresses to the other aspects of maternal thinking, nurturance and training. In "What's so Funny about Childbirth?: The Projection of Patriarchal Masculinity in Popular Comedic Childbirth Guides," Jeffrey Nall critiques the manner in which so-called humorous childbirth guides for fathers normalize misogyny and biological essentialism, re-inscribe kyriarchal norms, and marginalize women who give birth through a very narrow conception of masculinity. C. Wesley Buerkle struggles with the balance between helping one's pregnant partner/new mother and the male impulse toward control that wrests agency away from women in his essay titled, "Just Along for the Ride?: A Father-to-Be Searching for His Role."

The last essay in the volume, Michael Young's "Becoming Mother's Nature: A Queer Son's Perspective on Mothering in an Era of Ecological Decline" explores the development of maternal characteristics in a queer man through his relationship with his mother and other caregivers from his childhood. Young's essay brings together the myriad themes of *Essential Breakthroughs,* but primarily the need for a feminist lens with which to view men as caregivers and how men can and do engage in meaningful carework. So many of the essays have questions in their titles and leave their readers with questions about men and carework and how male caregivers destabilize the gendered discourse of childcare. The essays and the questions they raise open up new possibilities for transforming carework into a more egalitarian proposition for everyone who wishes to parent as well as confronts the limitations of traditional masculinity and advocates for the expansion of defining masculinity to include carework.

Natal Signs: Cultural Representations of Pregnancy, Birth and Parenting

Nadya Burton, ed.
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY AIDAN MOIR

Comprising scholarly contributions alongside creative works and poetry, Nadya Burton's edited volume *Natal Signs: Cultural Representations of Pregnancy,*

Birth and Parenting is a timely collection focusing on both the mediated and lived experiences of pregnancy, labour practices, and parenthood in Western culture. With topics ranging from how Ontario midwives have historically been framed in public discourse through the archetypes of hero and villain to the previously overlooked relationship between artistic practice and fatherhood, *Natal Signs* addresses how shifting representations of pregnancy, birth, and parenting work to challenge and subvert previous hegemonic beliefs pertaining to these life experiences. While pregnancy and labour are elements that once lacked visibility in visual culture, there is recent growth in this aspect of representation. Technological advances and the popularity of self-representation through digital media have altered how pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood are represented in visual culture, allowing diverse beliefs and images to circulate in both visual culture and public discourse. Collectively the contributions of *Natal Signs* emphasize the critical need to interrogate cultural and social shifts in representation, particularly since, as Burton argues, the imagery and narratives interrogated by the collection help "generate new forms of visibility and possible action" (2).

The media landscape is dominated by highly sensationalized representations of motherhood, a phenomenon critiqued by existing scholarship examining how the discourses of celebrity and consumer-capitalism have transformed maternity into a consumable identity representative of class politics and social citizenship (Clarke 2004; Douglas and Michaels 2004; McRobbie 2006; Podnieks 2012). The final contribution in *Natal Signs,* Betty Ann Martin's, "Go the Fuck to Sleep Prince George," acknowledges that the persona of Kate Middleton exemplifies how celebrity motherhood commodifies maternity into a lifestyle brand that consequently idealizes maternity into an unachievable standard. While Kate's pregnancies were highly documented by the tabloids and brought in an estimated 400 million pounds into the British economy, Martin argues that idealized representations of motherhood also stimulates the emergence of countercultural discourses enabling women to negotiate between unrealistic narratives of self-perfectibility and their lived experience in the everyday practice of identity construction. Through juxtaposing the media treatment of Kate with vernacular texts, such as websites and musical compilations, Martin's analysis demonstrates how women can subvert dominant maternal discourses produced by celebrity culture, which, in the struggle to gain visibility within the politics of representation, offers the potential resignification of maternal imagery in visual culture.

Despite the prominence of celebrity motherhood in popular culture, Martin's piece is the lone contribution focusing on this specific area of maternal representation and strategically follows a diverse selection of chapters, such

as Lauren Cruikshank's discussion on the representation of pregnancy in videogames, Natalie Jolly's analysis as to how discourses of femininity have shaped the labour experience, and Susan Hogan, Charley Baker, Shelagh Cornish, and Paula McCloskey's account of the liberating and therapeutic potential of artistic participatory workshops in assisting women into accepting their new identities as mothers. By addressing a variety of topics, *Natal Signs* highlights the cultural politics of (in)visibility that govern practices of signification. Burton critiques the heteronormativity prevalent in imagery and narratives of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood, and the volume directly challenges this heteronormative representations by illuminating the tensions and contradictions that shape the signification of these experiences in cultural politics and public discourse. For example, in "Masculine Pregnancy: Butch Lesbians', Trans Men's & Genderqueer Individuals' Experiences," Michelle Walks details the struggles facing genderqueer individuals and butch lesbians when struggling to maintain their masculine identity in a consumer culture that normalizes pregnancy as an inherently feminine experience.

The strength of *Natal Signs* is the way in which Burton's collection seamlessly explores a diverse range of themes that collectively places representation directly within the experiences of everyday life. Drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu's argument that cultural production represents a form of symbolic power, Burton's volume highlights the numerous possibilities embedded within the politics of representation in facilitating dialogue pertaining to pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood. The breadth of *Natal Signs* illuminates the powerful ways in which image and representation influence the politics of everyday life. *Natal Signs* ultimately argues for the necessity to engage with representations since they inherently political, and it is only through engagement with such imagery can social change materialize in public discourse.

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Blended: Writers on the Stepfamily Experience

Samantha Waltz, ed.
Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY SHELLEY M. PARK

In *Blended: Writers on the Stepfamily Experience,* Samantha Waltz brings together over thirty writers to speak on their experiences inhabiting blended families. The constituent pieces are brief, autobiographical reflections, ranging from three to twelve pages. The brevity of the pieces does not allow for sustained analytical development of any one writer's experiences but does result in a relatively expansive collection of familial snaphots that, cumulatively, provide a kaleidoscopic portrait of the blended family. Greater cross-cultural diversity would be welcome (only two of the stories explicitly deal with the ways in which cultural differences may present unique challenges for stepfamilies), as would a greater representation of non-white authors. However, the range of experiences and perspectives represented here is otherwise broad. A primary strength of the collection is that the reflections of biological parents are intermixed with the reflections of stepparents and the reflections of adult children to yield colorful, multidimensional patterns that do not allow one perspective to dominate the others.

Some common themes that run through the essays in *Blended* include the problem of naming, holiday stresses, struggles over different parenting styles, and relations with exes. The language of "stepfamilies" ("stepmothers," "stepchildren," "half siblings") troubles several contributors who comment on how such terms connote a less than "real" familial relationship. Part of the lived reality of many members of stepfamilies is not knowing what to call one another. Mother's day is a particularly vexed holiday for stepchildren and stepmothers for this reason, as contributor Melissa Hart poignantly observes in her recollection of the annual struggle inscribing Mother's Day (or is it Mothers' Day?) cards ("Tales of a Confused Apostrophe"). Other holidays also include struggles over kinship boundaries, as sacred family traditions and

rituals need to be modified to include new family members. Family vacations become stressful as different parenting styles conflict. Dreams of a fairy-tale life crumble—although optimism prevails—on Rebecca Payne's "Stepfamily Honeymoon." In "I Love You More," Kerry Cohen courageously speaks of loving her "own" child more than her partner's, as she negotiates for time alone with her son that excludes her stepdaughter. The child's perspective on such exclusions is embodied in Sallie Brown's "Epiphany" that her father's second wife never wanted to be a mother.

Children in blended families may struggle with being wanted "too much" as well as "too little." At the same time as stepparents may disappoint the child's expectations, divorced parents may compete for their affection. As Nancy Atonietti's "Nightshade Love" and Gigi Rosenberg's moving tale of her "Secret Father" reveal, children of divorce are sometimes asked to lead segregated lives as they travel affectively, as well as physically, between two homes and two identities. In her tragi-comic essay, "It Takes a Villa," Barbara Lodge recounts her failed attempt to create an extended family for her children including all their parents. As Lodge, her ex-husband, and their current partners celebrate her son's graduation and daughter's birthday (and Father's day) together in Italy, Lodge remembers why she got divorced. As we witness an alcoholic ex-husband take their children binge-drinking, we are reminded that the "happily-ever-after-post-divorce-family" ideal may blind us to reality. The most compelling essays in the collection reveal, rather than obscure, the messy realities and emotional landscapes of stepfamilies and engage in critical self-reflection concerning the authors' own expectations and struggles.

The collection of essays is divided into five parts: "Coming Together," "Self-discovery," "Evolution," "Acceptance," and "Reflections." I have mixed feelings about this organization. The narrative arc upon which the collection is premised suggests a "natural progression" of stages that members of blended families go through (xvi). I am skeptical that such a common "journey" exists. As the characters in these stories attest—a young boy with autism, a morbidly obese adult son, cheating lovers, bitter, amiable, alcoholic, and bipolar ex-spouses, a young father with a prison record, an aging father with dementia and an aging stepmother who refuses to care for him and many others—different family members face unique challenges in, and pose different challenges for, the stepfamilies they inhabit as their different journeys unfold. Indeed, it is the diversity of these stories and perspectives that provide the strength of the collection. Like the members of stepfamilies themselves, the narratives comprising *Blended* contest the principles of inclusion and exclusion that seek to label, organize, and affiliate them according to preconceived ideals. And that, perhaps, is how it should be.

Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers, and What a "Good" Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence

Sarah LaChance Adams
New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

REVIEWED BY HELENA VISSING

In the introduction, Adams invites the reader to her project with examples of the phenomenon of filicide. She demonstrates the absurdity of the dichotomies between "good and bad" mothers and "bad and mad" mothers. As we know, maternal love includes contradictory impulses and emotions. Adams' project is to show us how maternal ambivalence is morally productive insofar as it helps us to recognize the alterity of others, and it is namely because of the tensions inherent to mothering that it is an instructive case for ethics. Adams argues that "the ambiguity of human relationships results in an ambivalent ethical orientation, contingent as it is on negotiating the interrelated yet separable interests of the self and the other" (4). It is with this contradiction of our intersubjective existence in mind that Adams offers an alternative philosophical treatment of motherhood with focus on the concrete experience of mothers.

Following the introduction, the book is deployed in five chapters. First, a methodological chapter on the mother as ethical exemplar in care ethics, where Adams lays out her assumptions, motivations, and intentions for her project. This is helpful and engaging. Adams puts words to the importance of the maternal and why we should study mothers. In the chapter "Motherhood's Janus Head", we are presented with a solid review of the pertaining psychology and psychoanalytic theory. Although Adams aptly discusses several relevant psychoanalytic writers from classic thinkers like Freud, Winnicott and Klein, to contemporaries like Kristeva, Parker, and Chodorow, I was puzzled and disappointed that she did not include Benjamin, who is arguably one of the most important thinkers in modern feminist psychoanalytic theory on the ethical implications of maternal subjectivity. Adams' passion for a new care ethics that brings in the maternal is captivating namely because she points out our "simultaneous needs to nurture, to be nurtured, and to maintain independence" (24) – which is Benjamin's (1994) theory of intersubjectivity in a nutshell. Adams then presents a chapter on each of the three philosophers her analysis centers around; Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, and de Beauvoir. As a reader from outside of philosophy, these chapters made me realize how difficult an endeavor it is to develop a philosophy of care. The chapter on Levinas was especially challenging to grasp and get excited about. It seems odd that Adams has chosen Levinas, when she also explains in great

detail all the ways he fails at recognizing the reality of mothers. The chapter on Merleau-Ponty is more convincing. Adams demonstrates how his idea of the maternal experience as "dehiscence in the flesh" captures the ambiguity and emphasizes the crucial role of ambivalence. In the chapter on de Beauvoir, Adams seems to be back on solid feminist ground with de Beauvoir's strong case against perfectionistic motherhood. This chapter was especially encouraging in its unapologetic insistence on the ethical importance of the assertion of maternal subjectivity.

It might be unfair of me to focus on what is absent, but I would have loved to read Adams' comments on Baraitser's esteemed book *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruptions*, which also addresses (and critiques) Levinas and namely explores the understanding of the interruption of the other as the opening for ethics. Another minor weakness of the book lies in the occasional use of philosophical concepts without clarifying notes and definitions, namely Adams' specific use of the concepts (for example, what exactly is meant by "intersubjectivity" since it is clearly not the psychoanalytic understanding). This might make some of the philosophical theory hard to approach for readers outside the field.

In conclusion, Adams argues that filicide is essentially a social problem. I am persuaded by her arguments and touched by her urges for solutions informed by care ethics, and I am even left longing for more of the social justice advocacy that seems to motivate her. Another strength of this book lies in its delineated focus of maternal ambivalence and the phenomenological approach. Adams clearly resists the urge to digress too far into other related topics or to expand her analysis to cover everything related to ethics and the maternal. I enjoyed reading so thorough an exploration of one topic, and its complexity deserves this exploration. Adams does a remarkable job of demonstrating the usefulness of philosophy when consistently connected to the concrete experiences of mothers. Although Adams' aim as philosopher is to develop a care ethics based on maternal feminist phenomenology, continuing the work of Sara Ruddick, I also read this book as profound advocacy for Maternal Mental Health. I believe Adams' insights are valuable for anyone working with mothers.

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Contributor Notes

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Maya Bhave's PhD (Loyola University, Chicago) focused on Ethiopian immigrant women. After teaching Sociology at North Park University for ten years, she now lives in Vermont researching life/work/family balance, gender identity among female soccer players, and motherhood and child loss. She teaches as an adjunct professor at St. Michael's College and lives with her husband and two sons near Burlington.

Pat Breton is a PhD candidate in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University, Toronto, Ontario. Her research areas are Canadian public policy of waged and unwaged caring labour, mother/child welfare and neoliberalism, and violence against women. Her work has been published in Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community (MIRCI) journal.

Rachel Epp Buller is a feminist, art historian, printmaker, and mama of three

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Deborah Byrd is Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Lafayette College, where she also serves as Director of the Center for Community Engagement. Her motherhood studies scholarship focuses primarily on intersectional, community-based learning pedagogy and on supporting and giving a voice to young and low-income single mothers.

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Lynn Garlick is a doctoral candidate at the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University, Australia. Lynn is researching mother writing and is completing an autobiographical book. She has an extensive background as a social worker, writer, and educator.

Jennifer Givhan is a Mexican-American poet from the Southwestern desert. She is the author of *Landscape with Headless Mama* (2015 Pleiades Editors' Prize) and *Protection Spell* (2016 Miller Williams Series, University of Arkansas Press). Her honours include an NEA Fellowship, a PEN/Rosenthal Emerging Voices Fellowship, The Frost Place Latin@ Scholarship, The 2015 Lascaux Review Poetry Prize, The Pinch Poetry Prize, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Best of the Net 2015, Best New Poets 2013, AGNI, Crazyhorse, Blackbird*, and *The Kenyon Review*. She is Poetry Editor at *Tinderbox Poetry Journal* and teaches at The Poetry Barn.

Kate Greenway is finishing her PhD in education at York University. She

has published articles and creative non-fiction on adoption in *Ephemera Journal*, *Adoption Constellation,* and several Demeter Press anthologies and has presented at many MIRCI and NeMLA conferences. She exhibited her adoption-themed glass art at the American Adoption Congress "Out of the Fog" 2014 juried group exhibition and as a solo exhibit at the Samuel J. Zacks Gallery in 2016. Her awards include 2014 York Graduate Development Fund for Research; 2013 *Toronto Star* Teacher Award Honour Roll; inaugural MIRCI Outstanding Graduate Student Conference Paper 2012, and York Alumni 2011 "Excellence in Teaching."

Nancy Simpson Greenwood. After a career of working as an educator/counsellor with teenagers Nancy loves having one in her own home who pushes, questions and amazes. Currently, the study of the individual is just as informative as the M.Ed (Mount St. Vincent) and semi complete EdD (OISE/UT). The adventure of life continues.

Florence Pasche Guignard is affiliated with the Université de Fribourg (Switzerland) as a postdoctoral fellow of the Swiss National Science Foundation. She holds a PhD in the study of religions from the Université de Lausanne (Switzerland, 2012) and conducted postdoctoral research at the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto (2012-2016). Her research engages with issues at the intersection of religion, gender, media, material culture, ritual and embodiment.

Aurélie Lacassagne holds a PhD from Science Po Bordeaux (France). She is an associate professor and teaches international relations at Laurentian University (Sudbury, Canada). Her research focuses on social theories, cultural studies, identity politics and motherhood. She has published numerous articles and co-edited a book entitled *Investigating Shrek: Power, Identity, and Ideology* (Palgrave, 2011).

Nané Jordan is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in Women's and Gender Studies, at the University of Paris 8, France. She is currently researching the work of the French-Algerian, feminist writer-scholar Hélène Cixous, in the context of arts-based research methods and life writing practices. This work follows Nané's previous red threads of research, including themes of mothering, birth, the gift economy, women's health, and woman-centred spirituality and education. Nané lives on the Canadian West Coast, in Vancouver, BC, with her husband and two daughters.

Emily R. M. Lind is a doctoral candidate at Carleton University's Institute

for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art, and Culture. Her research examines the intersections between identity, materiality, power, and knowledge production in interdisciplinary contexts.

Lisa Lynn is a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University's Curriculum Studies program.

Margaret MacDonald is an Associate Professor at Simon Fraser University whose research interests include Intergenerational Programs, Pedagogical Documentation, and Curriculum Development in early childhood education.

Naomi McPherson, Ph.D., is Associate Professor Emerita, UBC Kelowna. She has conducted research in Bariai, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea since 1981, publishing on Bariai cosmology, ethno-obstetrics, traditional and cosmopolitan systems of maternal health and birthing, and gender relations. With Michelle Walks, she co-edited *An Anthropology of Mothering* (Demeter 2011).

Naomi Mercer is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army and an assistant professor in the Department of English and Philosophy at the United States Military Academy. She specializes in twentieth-century American literature and feminist dystopian and utopian writing. She is the author of *Toward Utopia*.

Aidan Moir is a PhD Candidate in Communication and Culture at York University. Her research focuses on how icons circulate in popular culture by interrogating the social, political, and economic tensions between iconography, identity, and branding. More broadly her work addresses the intersections between celebrity culture, consumption, and motherhood.

Rachel O'Donnell is a PhD Candidate in political science at York University, Toronto, and a researcher and fellow at the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC). She has published on Sor Juana de la Cruz, feminism in the revolutionary forces during the Guatemalan civil war, and the gendered history of the botanical sciences in the Caribbean.

Andrea O'Reilly, PhD, is a pin the School of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at York University. O'Reilly is founder and director of *The Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, founder and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Motherhood,* and founder and editor of Demeter Press. She is co-editor/editor of nineteen books including most

recently *This Is What A Feminist Slut Looks Like: Perspectives on the Slut-Walk Movement* (2015), *Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood across Cultural Differences: A Reader* (2014), and *Academic Motherhood in a Post Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies, Possibilities* (2012). O'Reilly is author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* (2004), *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering* (2006) and the forthcoming *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (October 2016). She is editor of the first encyclopedia (three volumes, 705 entries) on motherhood (2010). She is a recipient of the CAUT Sarah Shorten Award for outstanding achievements in the promotion of the advancement of women in Canadian universities and colleges, is twice the recipient of York University's "Professor of the Year Award" for teaching excellence and in 2014 was the first inductee into the Museum of Motherhood Hall of Fame.

Shelley Park is Professor of Philosophy, Humanities and Cultural Studies at the University of Central Florida and author of *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended and Polygamous Families* (SUNY Press, 2013). Her current work focuses on the technologies of caregiving, including the technologies of childrearing.

Jane Satterfield is the recipient of awards in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, Maryland Arts Council, Bellingham Review, Ledbury Poetry Festival, Mslexia, and more. Her essays have received awards from the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society, Massachusetts Review, Florida Review, and the Heekin Foundation, among others. Her books of poetry are *Her Familiars, Assignation at Vanishing Point*, and *Shepherdess with an Automatic*. She is also the author of *Daughters of Empire: A Memoir of a Year in Britain and Beyond* (Demeter Press). Born in England, she currently lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

Jocelyn Fenton Stitt is Program Director of Faculty Research Development at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, University of Michigan. Her research interests include Caribbean literature, contemporary women's life writing, and mothering studies. She co-edited *Mothers Who Deliver: Feminist Interventions in Public and Interpersonal Discourse* and *Before Windrush: Recovering a Black and Asian Literary Heritage within Britain.*

Helena Vissing, PsyD, is based in Los Angeles, specializing in motherhood studies and maternal mental health from psychoanalytic and somatic perspectives. She works at The Saturday Center for Psychotherapy and Training

and is faculty on the Training Committee for Maternal Mental Health NOW, a non-profit outreach and advocacy organization.

Anissa Janine Wardi is professor of English and African American Literature at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and a past contributor to journals such as *African American Review*, *MELUS*, and *ISLE*. She is the author of *Water and African American Memory: An Ecocritical Perspective* and is currently at work on a manuscript titled *Toni Morrison and the Natural World: An Ecology of Color*.

Nicole L. Willey, PhD, is an associate professor of English at Kent State University Tuscarawas, where she teaches African American and other literatures, along with a variety of writing courses. Her research interests include mothering, masculinities, memoir, pedagogy, nineteenth-century American literature, and slave narratives. She authored *Creating a New Ideal of Masculinity for American Men: The Achievement of Sentimental Women Writers in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,* and co-edited the collection *Motherhood Memoirs: Mothers Creating/Writing Lives*. She lives in New Philadelphia, Ohio, with her husband and two sons.

Demeter Press
is seeking submissions (narrative and scholarly)
for an edited collection

Toward An Understanding of Motherhood and Affect (working title)

Editors: Julia Lane and Eleonora Joensuu

Deadline for Abstracts: September 1, 2016

At the most general level, affect refers to the capacity to affect and to be affected. We take this broad view of affect to invite consideration of the unique capacities to affect and be affected that are presented by motherhood and the socio-cultural figure of "mother." Understanding motherhood through the lens of affect and understanding affect through the lens motherhood has the potential to enrich and expand both, as experiential and as theoretical frameworks.

Our primary interest is in considering how accounts of affect can help us to unpack and understand motherhood differently. We invite broad approaches that bridge sociological, psychological, and philosophical distinctions between affect, emotions, and feelings.

Affectively, what constitutes motherhood? What activities, moments, and affects lead one to "feel" like a mother? How does the figure of "mother" operate in social encounters? What cultural frameworks and narratives structure the experience of pregnancy (body image, weight gain, etc)? What affects mark the transition from being two beings in one body to two separate beings with separate bodies?

As an academic volume, this anthology seeks submissions from across disciplinary perspectives, while maintaining an emphasis on affective experiences and affect theories. This collection also invites creative and reflective writing focused on the affective experiences of mothering. We are interested in submissions that seek to combine theoretical, storytelling, experiential, and broadly "affective" encounters with motherhood, including outside the normative "birth mother" paradigm.

Topics may include (but are certainly not limited to):

Encounters with disgust; shifting affective relationships (mother-child, parent-parent, and mother-self); embodied affective encounters; the affective experiences of queerness in mothering; mothering and (queer) invisibility; the legalities of mothering and their affect; the affective politics of mothering; adoptive mothers and affective encounters; mothering and the affect of loss

Abstract/Proposal (250-400 words) with 50-word bio
due: September 1, 2016
Acceptances made by: October 31, 2016
Accepted and completed papers
(15-18 pages, double-spaced including references, MLA format)
due: February 20, 2017
Please send inquiries to editors:
Julia Lane and Eleonora Joensuu at:
affectdemeterpress@gmail.com

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Demeter Press
is seeking submissions (narrative and scholarly)
for an edited collection

Pagan, Goddess, Mother

Editors: Sarah Whedon and Nané Jordan

Deadline for Abstracts: September 1st, 2016

Pagan spirituality and Goddess spirituality are distinct, yet overlapping movements and communities, each with much to say about deity as mother and about human mothers in relationship to deity. The purpose of this collection is to call categories of Pagan and Goddess mothering into focus, to highlight philosophies and experiences of mothers in these various movements and traditions, and to generate new ways of imagining and enacting motherhood.

What is distinctive about Pagan motherhood, what is distinctive about Goddess spirituality motherhood, and where is the overlap? How do these differ, and what does each have to learn from the other? How does study of these communities, philosophies, and practices highlight tensions and insights into gender, motherhood, and embodiment, more broadly? How do mothers in contemporary Pagan and Goddess movements negotiate their mothering roles and identities? What elements of these diverse contemporary traditions inform their experiences? How do theologies, thealogies, and devotions to Mother Goddesses affect experiences of mothering? How do Pagan and Goddess mothers engage with ceremony, ritual, magic, and priestesshood? How do Pagan and Goddess mothers interface with interreligious dialogue, social institutions for children, community leadership, social justice, and the public sphere?

Topics may include (but are not limited to):
The specific theologies, thealogies, mythologies, ethics, or practices of mothers in particular Pagan and/or Goddess traditions; theories of gender, motherhood, or embodiment in Pagan and/or Goddess traditions; Earth Mother, Great Mother, mother Goddess creation stories, eco-spirituality, or the maiden-mother-crone trinity; mothers' participation in ceremony, ritual, festival, magic, or priestesshood; the relationship between mother

Goddess and human mother's empowerment; pregnancy, birth, early mothering, and beyond; Pagan and/or Goddess spirituality in mom blogging, custody conflict, religious freedom, children's religious education, or other social institutions; diversity and difference in Pagan and/or Goddess mothering including grandmothering, race, disability, or lgbtq families.

Perspectives are welcomed from a wide range of disciplines and genres, including history, theology, thealogy, religious studies, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, biography, spiritual autobiography, personal essays, life writing, poetry and artwork.

Submissions Guidelines:
Please send abstracts of approximately 300 words
together with a short bio to:

Sarah Whedon & Nané Jordan at
pagangoddessmother@gmail.com by September 1, 2016

Accepted papers of 4000-5000 words (15-20 pages including references and endnotes) will be due February 1st, 2017.
Contributors will be responsible for ensuring that
manuscripts adhere to MLA style.

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Demeter Press
is seeking submissions (narrative and scholarly)
for an edited collection

When All Else Fails: Motherhood in Precarious Times

Editors: Dannielle Joy Davis, Anita Dolman, and Barbara Schwartz-Bechet

Deadline for non-fiction abstracts, poetry, and fiction submissions: October 1, 2016

When the infrastructure around us fails, when social supports wane, when war and environmental disaster threaten safety, what do mothers do? Children are especially vulnerable in difficult economic and emotional times, as family resources are often diverted away from promoting child health and development, to meeting minimum basic needs such as food, shelter, and security (Hayes and Hartmann 2011). Too often, children are impacted by trends of increased insecurity, instability, and deprivation, along with social and environmental crises that limit the resources needed to meet basic needs.

Motherhood can be an essential variable in lessening the effects of precarious times—including of trauma, terrorism, violence, death, homelessness, foster care, and lack of adequate health care, to name but a few salient, global issues. Who will "mother" children in such difficult circumstances—their mother, grandmother, father, sister, uncle, teacher? How is mothering defined during periods of loss or trauma? Why is mothering so important during difficult times?

This volume seeks to explore ideas, best practices, models, excerpts, and creative work that embodies the present, past, and future of mothers/mothering in times of austerity and upheaval. We highly encourage not only academic writings, but also creative submissions. We support the use of non-discipline-specific language so that articles and essays are accessible to a wide range of audiences.

(Hayes, Jeff, and Heidi Hartmann. *Women and Men Living on the Edge: Economic Insecurity after the Great Recession.* Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2011. Print.)

Deadline for non-fiction abstracts, fiction, and poetry submissions: October 1, 2016

For essays and creative non-fiction:
Send an abstract of 250-500 words and a biography of up to 50 words.
For fiction: Send completed stories of 1,500 to 3,000 words, and a biography of up to 50 words.
For poetry: Send completed poems of up to 250 words, and a biography of up to 50 words.

Non-fiction acceptances to be issued by: November 30, 2016
Deadline for full essays and creative non-fiction: March 31, 2017

Essays and creative non-fiction submissions must be 3,000 to 5,000 words (including references and endnotes).

All non-fiction contributors are responsible for ensuring their manuscripts adhere to MLA style.

To Submit:
Please send all inquiries, abstracts and submissions to the editors:
Dannielle Joy Davis (djdavis@slu.edu),
Anita Dolman (dolmanideas@gmail.com),
and Barbara Schwartz-Bechet (bschwartz@salus.edu).

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Demeter Press
is seeking submissions for an edited collection

Mothers, Mothering and Gun Violence
Editors: Annette Bailey & Rebecca Bromwich

Deadline for Abstracts: October 30, 2016

Gun violence threatens social functioning on a fundamental level. It profoundly tests the strength and fortress of mothering in significant ways. With the millions of children and youth who die, are injured, or are disabled by gun violence globally, mothers are left to navigate the realities of trauma, reconstruct their identities, and redefine their roles in society. The transformations that result carry social, political, legal and economic implications for mothers, often changing caregiving, family dynamics, and community engagement. As yet, there is little academic exploration and an unsatisfactory political response to questions relating to how mothering is affected by, and how mothers can and do agentically respond to, gun violence.

Scope
The proposed book *Mothers, Mothering and Gun Violence*, will explore a wide range of issues arising from the intersection of gun violence and mothering. Issues relevant to mothering and gun violence may include, but are not limited to: representations, stress and trauma, coping, resilience, advocacy/activism, policymaking, family functioning, social justice and equity, governmentality and the criminal justice system, public health/health care, caregiving, community programs/interventions, immigration and diversity.

Audience
This book will be an interdisciplinary collaboration intended to be read by a multidisciplinary audience. Accordingly, we invite the perspectives of diverse disciplines across different countries—e.g., researchers, educators, community advocates, public health/health care experts, criminologists, social workers, field-based practitioners, and victims/survivors of gun violence. These perspectives will include research-based discussions, case studies, stories/lived experiences, or creative analysis; all underpinned by critical appraisal and sound scholarship.

Submission Procedure
Please submit a chapter proposal that includes: title, abstract, tentative outline, and a short biography of the author(s). Proposals should be a maximum of 500 words written in English, using Microsoft Word format, Times New Roman, 12 font. Authors of accepted proposals will be notified and sent submission guidelines. Chapter contributions will be 6500 words, excluding figures, tables, and references.

Proposal submission deadline: October 30, 2016
Notification of acceptance: December 30, 2016
Full 1st draft of chapter due: May 30, 2017
Editorial review results returned: August 28, 2017
Final chapter submission: October 30, 2017
Projected publication date: May, 2018

Inquiries and submissions:
Send to
Dr. Annette Bailey via email at: bailbrombook@gmail.com

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is seeking submissions for an edited collection

Meditation Mamas: Intersections of Empowered Mothering, Mindfulness and Yoga Practices (Working Title)

Editors: Judith Mintz & Angie Deveau

Deadline for Abstracts: November 1, 2016

Many yoga practitioners and meditators find that pregnancy, the postpartum period, and mothering places new challenges on their commitment to practice. While some parents strive to integrate their yoga and meditation practice into their mothering, others are constrained from time and lack of support. Arlie Hothschild (1981) points out that domestic labour inequalities in partnerships place additional strain on a mother, particularly because of the high levels of emotional labour that raising a family demands. Meanwhile, Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn (1997) urge parents to be particularly mindful of their children's emotional lives and material needs while somehow encouraging them to maintain a modicum of their own practice in order to benefit their parenting. The parenting becomes a dynamic, spiritually demanding practice, but how is a mother supposed to continue or even embark on a wellness and spiritual practice such as yoga and meditation when mothering is so demanding? How can mothers integrate their practices when there may be minimal support in the material world? What are the ways in which mothers negotiate limitations and demands in order to maintain their practice? Without selling these practices, this volume asks what can yoga and meditation do to support empowered mothering, or are they incompatible? Pieces from all personal experiences and disciplinary perspectives are welcome and encouraged. Submissions of scholarly work, research, poetry, personal narratives, fiction, and creative nonfiction about mothering, meditation, yoga and mindfulness will be considered. The editors want to create a body of work that uses intersectional feminist analysis in order to frame mothering in the context of yoga and meditation.

Topics may include (but are not limited to):
mindful parenting; yoga and mothering; meditation and mothering; yoga teachers who are mothers; parenting the indigo child; holistic mothering (use of complimentary therapies); "natural" mothering (attachment

parenting and voluntary simplicity); mothering and yoga for special needs children; yoga to "get through the day"; spiritual awakening and parenting; Kundalini yoga practices and parenting; mothering and herbalism; racialized mothers and yoga; poverty, mothering and yoga; yoga and reproductive health; yoga and reproductive justice; yoga and queer parenting; mothers and online yoga; yoga and "getting your body back"; moment to moment mothering; mindfulness in schools; kids' yoga; yoga for children with special needs; yoga and intergenerational relationships; mothering and running the yoga business; mothering, work, and yoga; maternal theory and yoga philosophy; yoga therapy and reproductive health; prenatal yoga; teaching yoga while pregnant; yoga and childbirth; midwifery and yoga; mom and baby yoga; analysis of Gita Iyengar's *Yoga: A Gem for Women* and mothering; and yoga literature and mothering.

Submission Guidelines:
Abstracts/Proposal (350-500 words) with a 50-word biography due: **November 1, 2016**
Acceptances made by: **January 15, 2016**
Completed manuscripts (15-18 pages double-spaced with references in MLA format).
Please note that acceptance will depend on the strength and fit of the final piece.

Please send inquiries and abstracts to editors:
Judith Mintz & Angie Deveau at
meditationmamademeter@gmail.com

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Demeter Press
is seeking submissions for an edited collection

Voices of the Ancestors Calling from Our Motherline: An Anthology

Editors: Karen Nelson Villanueva and Annette Lyn Williams

Deadline for Abstracts: December 15, 2016

The Motherline is an exercise in which one is asked to examine one's life and the life of one's mother and maternal lineage back as far as possible in order to bring up points of inquiry that one may not realize existed within one's family.

One premise of the Motherline is that most people are more familiar with their paternal ancestry than their maternal, which may have been true for women who were reared with a Eurocentric or patriarchally based mindset that defined early feminist writers. In this scenario, the mother's ancestry is lesser known and neglected as less important. However, for many later generations of women, especially women who identify as racial and /or ethnic minorities in Canada, the United States of America, and Europe and women raised in cultures with strong matrilineal influence, this scenario is no longer apt. For women outside this cannon the mother's family is generally better known than the father's. Another premise of the Motherline is that the stories of women are lost. Whether due to less emphasis being placed on the lives of women, the undervaluing of the importance of the oral tradition of sharing the tales of women's lives across generations, or a lack of importance placed on the life of an individual, what is known about the women of one's ancestry is often little.

This volume, *Voices of the Ancestors Calling from Our Motherline*: an anthology, will explore Motherline stories from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives and we encourage scholars from a variety of disciplines to submit abstracts. This work may also prove to be a valuable resource to those women and classrooms that delve into researching their own Motherlines.

Submission Guidelines

Please send abstracts of approximately 250 words
and include a 50-word biography by
December 15, 2016

Please send submissions and inquiries directly to:

Karen Nelson Villanueva at knvillanueva@buddhistministry.org
and Annette Lyn Williams at awilliams@ciis.edu.

Submissions of 3000 to 5000 words are due by
June 15, 2017 (including all references and endnotes).

Manuscripts must conform to MLA style.
Acceptance is contingent and will depend upon the strength
and fit of the final piece.

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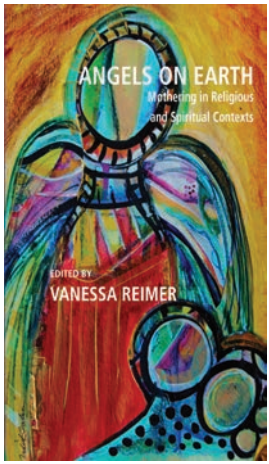
July 2016

Angels on Earth: Mothering in Religious and Spiritual Contexts

Edited by Vanessa Reimer



July 2016
250 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-022-8

This collection brings together scholarly and creative pieces that reveal how the intellectual, emotional, and physical work of mothering is informed by women's diverse religiosities and spiritualities. Its contributors examine contemporary and historical perspectives on religious and spiritual mothering through interdisciplinary research, feminist life writing, textual analyses, and creative non-fiction work.

In contrast to the bulk of feminist scholarship which marginalizes women's religious and spiritual knowledges, this volume explores how such epistemologies fundamentally shape the lived experiences of many mothers across the globe, and it further elucidates the empowerment and enrichment that women derive from their religious beliefs and spiritual worldviews. In doing so, it highlights the vital contributions that mothers have made, and continue to make, in transforming their local communities and institutions, as well as their broader religious and spiritual traditions.

Vanessa Reimer holds a Ph.D. in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies from York University. She is the co-editor of Demeter Press collections Mother of Invention: How Our Mothers Influenced us As Feminist Academics and Activists and The Mother-Blame Game. Her research interests include feminist studies in religion, girlhood, and mothering.

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August 2016

Borderlands and Crossroads: Writing the Motherland

Edited by Jane Satterfield and Laurie Kruk

August 2016
311 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-024-2

Motherhood does not just originate in the body, but in the world—a place, a region, a country or nation, a landscape, a language, a culture. Mothers are, as novelist Rachel Cusk once observed, "the countries we come from." This unique literary anthology features thirty-five poems and twenty-three works of prose (creative non-fiction and short fiction).

Here, forty-three award-winning and accomplished writers reflect on their complex twenty-first century familial identities and relationships, exploring maternal landscapes of all kinds, including those of heritage, matrilineage, geneaology, geography, emigration, war, exile, alienation, and affiliation.

Spanning the globe—from the U.K, the USA and Canada, Egypt, the former Yugoslavia, France, Africa, Korea and South America—these intimate and honest narratives of the heart cross borders and define crossroads that are personal and political, old and new. Recovering the maternal landscape through poetry and prose, these writers both memorialize and celebrate the power of family to define, limit, and challenge us.

Jane Satterfield is the recipient of awards in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, Maryland Arts Council, Bellingham Review, Ledbury Poetry Festival, Mslexia, and more. Her essays have received awards from the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society, Massachusetts Review, Florida Review, and the Heekin Foundation, among others. Her books of poetry are *Her Familiars, Assignation at Vanishing Point*, and *Shepherdess with an Automatic*. She is also the author of *Daughters of Empire: A Memoir of a Year in Britain and Beyond* (Demeter Press). Born in England, she teaches creative writing at Loyola University Maryland, USA.

Laurie Kruk teaches English at Nipissing University in North Bay, Canada. She has published *The Voice is the Story: Conversations with Canadian Writers of Short Fiction* (Mosaic, 2003) and *Double-Voicing the Canadian Short Story* (Ottawa UP, 2016). She is also the author of three poetry collections: *Theories of the World* (Netherlandic, 1992), *Loving the Alien* (YSP, 2006), and *My Mother Did Not Tell Stories* (Demeter, 2012). This last collection is described as weaving "tales that powerfully uncover the necessity of vocalizing that which is learned, experienced, and traditionally unshared" (ARC Poetry Magazine).

The reach is global in this gripping collection of poems, stories, and creative non-fiction about mothers and mothering. Here are voices wide-ranging and complex; they tell of love, loss, and renunciation. A wife dies in a cattle car destined for Auschwitz and her husband is forced to make a decisive move to care for their five-day-old son. A carefully guarded secret about her marriage is revealed after the death of a devout grandmother. An unplanned second pregnancy gives rise to confusion and remorse for biological and adoptive mother alike. The landscape of mothering is drawn anew in this raw and haunting collection. Every word rings true.
—Ruth Panofsky, author of *Laike and Nahum: A Poem in Two Voices*

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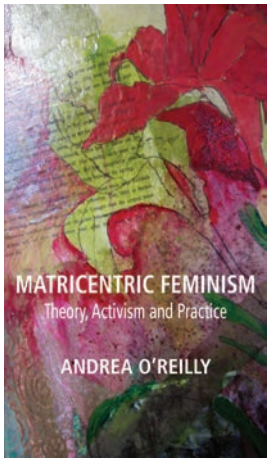
DEMETER PRESS
Forthcoming

October 2016

Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice
By Andrea O'Reilly



October 2016
300 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-083-9

The book argues that the category of mother is distinct from the category of woman and that many of the problems mothers face—socially, economically, politically, culturally, and psychologically—are specific to women's work and identity as mothers. Indeed, mothers, arguably more so than women in general, remain disempowered despite forty years of feminism. Mothers, thus, need a feminism of their own, one that positions mothers' concerns as the starting point for a theory and politic of empowerment. O'Reilly terms this new mode of feminism matricentic feminism and the book explores how it is represented and experienced in theory, activism, and practice. The chapter on maternal theory examines the central theoretical concepts of maternal scholarship to include Adrienne Rich's distinction between mothering and motherhood, Sara Ruddick's model of maternal thinking and practice and Patricia Hill Collins' concept of othermothering while the chapter on activism considers the 21st century motherhood movement. Feminist mothering is likewise examined as the specific practice of matricentric feminism and this chapter discusses varies theories and strategies on and for maternal empowerment. Matricentric feminism is also examined in relation to the larger field of Feminist Theory and Women's Studies; here O'Reilly persuasively shows how matricentric feminism has been marginalized in feminist scholarship and considers the reasons for such exclusion and how such may be challenged and changed.

Andrea O'Reilly, PhD, is Professor in the School of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at York University. O'Reilly is founder and director of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement, founder and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, and founder of Demeter Press. She is co-editor/editor of 19 books including most recently *This is What a Feminist Slut Looks Like: Perspectives on the SlutWalk Movement* (2015), *Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood Across Cultural Differences: A Reader* (2014) and *Academic Motherhood in a Post Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies, Possibilities* (2012). 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). She is editor of the first Encyclopedia (3 Volumes, 705 entries) on Motherhood (2010). She is a recipient of the CAUT Sarah Shorten Award for outstanding achievements in the promotion of the advancement of women in Canadian universities and colleges, is twice the recipient of York University's "Professor of the Year Award" for teaching excellence and in 2014 was the first inductee into the Museum of Motherhood Hall of Fame.

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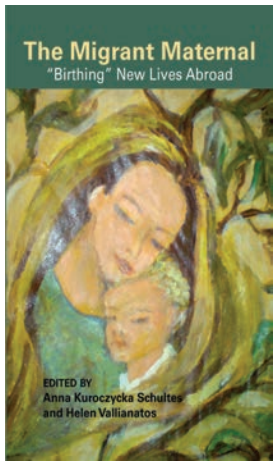
The Migrant Maternal: 'Birthing' New Lives Abroad
Edited by Anna Kuroczycka Schultes
and Helen Vallianatos



October 2016
300 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-080-8

This edited volume explores how and why immigrant/refugee mothers' experiences differ due to the challenges posed by the migration process but also what commonalities underline immigrant/refugee mothers' lived experiences. This book will add to the field of women's studies the much-needed discussion of how immigrant and refugee mothers' lives are dependent on cultural, environmental and socio-economic circumstances. The collection offers multiple perspectives on migrant mothering by including ethnographic and theoretical submissions along with mothers' personal narratives and literary analyses from diverse locales: New Zealand, Japan, Canada, The United States, Turkey, Italy and the Netherlands among others.

The first section of the volume focuses on mothers' roles in the family institution and the pressures and responsibilities they face in "creating" and "reproducing" families physically and socially. The second section shifts its attention to children and highlights mothers' continued roles in the development of their children abroad, along with the gendered/generational dynamics in the settlement process and the resultant effects on motherhood responsibilities. In all chapters, readers will find how women negotiate their traditional roles in a new sociocultural milieu, and how mothering processes are critical in creating connections with traditions and homelands.

Anna Kuroczycka Schultes holds a Ph.D. in English-Modern Studies and a Women's Studies certificate from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. A former Advanced Opportunity Program Fellow at UWM, Anna's research focuses on migrant female domestic workers, immigration, mothering and care work. Her publications have appeared, among others, in *The Journal of Research on Women and Gender* (2010), *An Anthropology of Mothering* (Demeter Press 2011), and in *Anti-Immigration in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia* (2011). Anna's interest in migration is fueled by feminist research theories. Over the past several years she has been conducting research on Polish mothers in the Chicagoland area.

Helen Vallianatos is an Associate Professor in Anthropology and Associate Dean in the Office of the Dean of Students, University of Alberta. Her research and teaching interests focus on food, gender, body and health issues, and the majority of her research involves collaborative, interdisciplinary work across disciplines and with various community organizations. Much of her recent research has focused on migrant mothers' health and well-being.

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DEMETER PRESS
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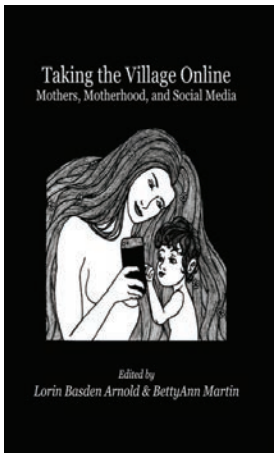
October 2016
Taking the Village Online: Mothers, Motherhood, and Social Media
Edited by Lorin Basden Arnold and BettyAnn Martin



October 2016
180 pages $24.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-082-2

The rise of social media has changed how we understand and enact relationships across our lives, including motherhood. The meanings and practices of mothering have been significantly impacted by the availability of online mother groups (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) as well as internet resources intended to 'enhance' and inform maternal experience and self-concept (ex. pinterest, YouTube). The village that now contributes to the mothering experience has grown exponentially, granting mothers access to interactional partners and knowledge never before available. This volume of works explores the impact of social media forms on our cultural understandings of motherhood and the ways that we communicate about the experience and practice of mothering.

The contributing authors in this anthology address diverse topics in mothering and social media, including framing of stepmothers in online forums, mothering in the digital diaspora, the construction of the "bad mother" on Twitter, immersive gaming and parenting classes, virtual mother outlaws, alternative mothering websites, feminist parenting, and more. While the works are primarily rooted in critical and feminist perspectives, a variety of methodologies and approaches to studying mothering and social media are represented in this text, and encourage a robust and thoughtful examination of the role of interactive media in the maternal experience.

Lorin Basden Arnold, Ph.D. is a family communication and gender scholar. Her recent scholarly work has primarily related to understandings and enactments of motherhood. Her work has appeared in recent Demeter editions, including Intensive Mothering: The Cultural Contradictions of Modern Motherhood and What's Cooking Mom? Narratives about Food and Family. She is the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the State University of New York, New Paltz.

BettyAnn Martin is a doctoral candidate in Educational Sustainability at Nipissing University, North Bay, ON. She is an educator, doula, mother, and postpartum support coordinator with PSI (Postpartum Support International). Her research interests include the cultural mediation of maternal experience and identity, as well as the educational and therapeutic aspects of shared personal narrative.

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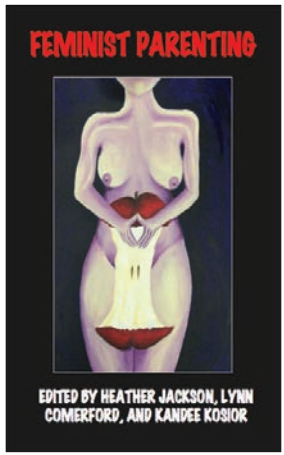
October 2016
Feminist Parenting
Edited by Heather Jackson,
Lynn Comerford, and Kandee Kosior



October 2016
220 pages $29.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-019-8

Feminist Parenting is a collection of writings from women around the globe who offer unique standpoints on feminist theory, parenting, and empowerment, through poetry, research, and prose. Global perspectives include Anwar Shaheen's research on parenting inequality in Pakistan, Marlene Pomrenke's examination of Aboriginal single mothers attending University, and Iza Desperak's insights on commonalities between contemporary single motherhood in Poland and twentieth century Papau, New Guinea. The collection offers Johanna Wagner's witty, self-reflective essay on her ambivalence toward her new role as a lesbian parent, and Sarah Keeth's abortion fantasy sonnet "Tomatoes" in which she describes a pregnant woman who desires, yet struggles with her pregnancy.

Feminist Parenting brings together unique voices and provides riveting perspectives on an institution in flux. The anthology pulls back the veil on power dynamics in relationships and exposes some of the challenges of feminist parenting in society. Authors shed critical light on long-held parenting conventions such as unpaid carework labor, gender roles, and family power dynamics, and expose how particular conventions reproduce gendered inequality. Feminist resistance strategies are offered by authors for "doing parenting," to increase "mother-power" in the family. This collection raises important questions about contemporary women's roles and adds to the current literature on feminism, parenting, gender, and family diversity.

Heather Jackson, a former teen mom, is now a 30-something single mom of a teen. She is a former site producer of girl-mom.com. Currently, she works as a birth doula, case manager of pregnant and parenting teens, and early childhood data collector in the Upper Northeast. She recently published a chapter in The Bakken Goes Boom regarding the change of maternal health related to the oil boom in North Dakota (where she grew up!). Her writing has also been published on thepushback.org, hipmama.com, girl-mom.com, books (including Demeter Press), and zines (ramonegirl on etsy). She bikes, plays guitar in an all female punk band, and is an anarchist.

Lynn Comerford, PhD, is a sociologist and Professor in the Department of Human Development & Women's Studies at California State University, East Bay. Comerford is director of Women's Studies and writes in the areas of feminist theory; state power and parental rights; and coparenting. She has published in the journals Communication Theory, Human Systems and Journal of Family Theory and Review and in the edited volumes Oppositional Discourses and Democracies (Routledge Press), Battleground: Women, Gender and Sexuality (Greenwood Press), The 21st Century Motherhood Movement (Demeter Press), and, More Than Blood: Today's Reality and Tomorrow's Vision of Family (Kendall Hunt Press). She is one of two feminist parents of a teen daughter.

Kandee Kosior is a feminist mother with special research interests in women and the law, moral regulation, women's human rights and motherhood. She has a BFA from the University of Regina, a BA in Criminology from University of Toronto and is a graduate of the Women's Human Rights Education Institute, OISE, University of Toronto. She is a longstanding member of ARM and MIRCI where she guest edited JARM's Mothers and Daughters, 2008 and JMI's Mothering Violence, Militarism, War and Social Justice in 2010. She is currently on the editorial board for the inaugural issue of the Museum of Motherhood's Journal of Mother Studies *(JourMS)*.

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December 2016
Interrogating Reproductive Loss: Feminist Writings on Abortion, Miscarriage, and Stillbirth
Edited by Emily R.M. Lind & Angie Deveau

December 2016
250 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-023-5

Feminist theories of the body, reproduction, and the institution of motherhood typically focus on issues of rights, autonomy, and choice. These themes become increasingly complicated when applied to questions of reproductive loss. Interrogating Reproductive Loss: Feminist Writings on Abortion, Miscarriage, and Stillbirth contains essays, short stories, and artwork that imagine a feminist epistemology of loss.

Whereas biomedical and feminist literature treat abortion, miscarriage, and stillbirth as differently conceptualized events, this collection explores the connections between these three categories. How have feminist debates and strategies around reproductive choice invigorated the cultural conversation about miscarriage, and stillbirth? How can we imagine more nuanced engagements with the spectrum of experiences that are at stake when a pregnancy ends? And how can we effectively create a space where women are given the opportunities to "identify and 'own'" (Cosgrove 2004) the ways that loss makes meaning for those who grieve and/or celebrate the end of pregnancy?

Emily R.M. Lind is a doctoral candidate at Carleton University's Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art, and Culture. Her research examines the intersections between identity, materiality, power, and knowledge production in interdisciplinary contexts. She is currently writing her dissertation on settler colonialism, Canadian art, and early twentieth-century Toronto.

Angie Deveau is a graduate of York University's Women's Studies M.A. Program and currently works for the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement. Previously, she provided research assistance for York University's Gender & Work Database, York University's 'Women's Human Rights, Macroeconomics and Policy Choices' project and the 'Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Study' at UNB. In addition to her background in research, Angie has worked as a Case Management Assistant for the Province of Nova Scotia's Department of Community Services (Social Assistance Division), and as the Community Development Coordinator for the Victorian Order of Nurses/Help the Aged project in Fredericton, New Brunswick. She is currently in the planning stages of co-editing a collection on Mothering and Yoga, Meditation, and Mindfulness.

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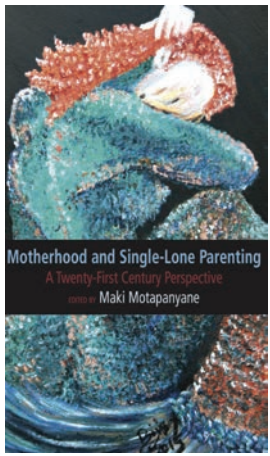
DEMETER PRESS
Recently Released

July 2016
Motherhood and Single-Lone Parenting
A Twenty-First Century Perspective
Edited by Maki Motapanyane



July 2016
375 pages $39.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-001-3

The 21st century sustains one significant commonality with the decades of the preceding century. The majority of individuals parenting on their own and heading one-parent families continue to be mothers. Even so, current trends in globalization (economic, political, cultural) along with technological advancement, shifts in political, economic and social policy, contemporary demographic shifts, changing trends in the labor sector linked to global economics, and developments in legislative and judicial output, all signify the distinctiveness of the current moment with regard to family patterns and social norms. Seeking to contribute to an existing body of literature focused on single motherhood and lone parenting in the 20th century, this collection explores and illuminates a more recent landscape of 21st century debates, policies and experiences surrounding single motherhood and one-parent headed families.

"This collection represents a significant contribution to the contemporary study of lone mothering, especially through perspectives that celebrate this experience and point out its unique parenting benefits, as well as those that reframe our understanding of single teen mothers. The essays in this volume lay the foundation for a more nuanced and multifaceted exploration of single motherhood in the 21st century."
—Tatjana Takseva, Department of English and Women and Gender Studies Program, Saint Mary's University, Canada

"Maki Motapanyane brings together an outstanding collection of essays to explore our fastest growing family form: the lone parent — usually lone mother — family. This exciting volume showcases a diversity of scholarly methods and disciplines — including media studies, women's studies, autoethnography, sociology and policy studies — to analyse lone mothering. The stand-out contribution here is the emphasis on diversity and the associated critique of heteronormativity with reference to two-parent families, though also, more interestingly, in relation to lone parents themselves. Here we see lone mothers as an internally heterogeneous group. This volume is essential reading for all who are interested in the rise and diversification of lone mother families."
—Petra Bueskens, Honorary Fellow, The University of Melbourne

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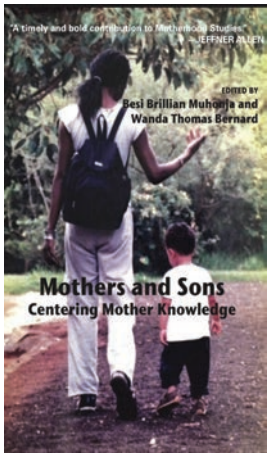
July 2016

DEMETER

Mothers and Sons: Centering Mother Knowledge
Edited by Besi Brillian Muhonja and Wanda Thomas Bernard



July 2016
332 pages $39.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-018-1

Mothers and Sons: Centering Mother Knowledge makes a case for the need to de-gender the framing and study of parental legacy. The actualization of an entire collection on this dyad foregrounding motherhood without particularizing the absence of fatherhood is in itself revolutionary. This assemblage of analytical, narrative and creative renderings offers cross-disciplinary conceptualizations of maternal experiences across difference and mothering sons at intersections. The authors' mother knowledge, or that of their subjects, delivers new insights into the appellations mother, son, motherhood and sonhood.

The contributors of *Mothers and Sons* are international women who are themselves straight, lesbian, abled, disabled, from various racial and ethnic groups, young, old, and in-between. They tell their stories with fierceness and commitment to expose mother knowledge in many of its ramifications. The result is a blessed diversity.
—Joanne V. Gabbin, Executive Director, Furious Flower Poetry Center, James Madison University

A timely and bold contribution to Motherhood Studies, *Mothers and Sons: Centering Mother Knowledge* enwraps readers in dynamic transcultural and transnational autoethnographies of contemporary mother son relating. The multidisciplinary, analytic, narrative, and creatively rendered gathering, by editors Muhonja and Bernard, sets in motion a wealth of personal and scholarly conversationsamid the hard-won encounters, humor, and raw emotions of diverse mother knowledges. Motherhoods, recognized through biological, legal, social, or spiritual connections ... mothers, queer, co-parenting, migrant, cross-racial, sole, adoptive, differently abled .... mothers and sons, among which, mothers of black sons, mothers of sons outside their own race, mothers of queer sons, biracial sons, differently-abled sons, poor mothers of sons, feminist mothers, mothers seeking a different language for mothering sons ... the anthology, unmatched in its breadth and depth, is decisively anchored in the realities of the present, while enacting new approaches to motherhood and sonhood for the near future.
—Jeffner Allen, Professor, Philosophy and Africana Studies, Binghamton University

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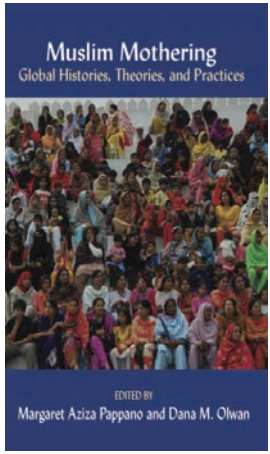
DEMETER PRESS
Recently Released

June 2016
Muslim Mothering: Local and Global Histories, Theories, and Practices
Edited by Margaret Aziza Pappano and Dana M. Olwan



June 2016
298 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-021-1

Muslim Mothering is an interdisciplinary volume, concentrating on the experiences of Muslim mothers, largely in the contemporary period. The volume is notable for the global range of its contributors and topics, indicative of the number of Muslim majority national contexts and large and diverse Muslim diaspora of today's world. While motherhood is highly valued in the sacred texts of Islam, the lived reality of Muslim mothers demonstrates that their lives do not often conform with traditional religious paradigms. With ongoing turbulence in the Middle East and subcontinent, many Muslims mothers face the difficulties of rearing children amongst frequent bombings and episodes of violence. Muslim mothers living in the diaspora face other challenges, such as the difficulty of fostering positive Muslim identity as a minority and in a context of Islamophobia. This collection demonstrates the diverse and complex ways that Muslim mothers define and redefine the resources of Islam to negotiate better situations for themselves and their children, revealing how religious identity is a dynamic and vital force in their everyday lives.

"This anthology is a much needed and timely intervention into a widely Islamophobic public imaginary in which Muslim women in general and Muslim mothers in particular are stereotypically understood in the cultural mainstream as victims of religious oppression or villainous terror conspirators. The contributions in this book critically unpack the nuances of the complex agencies of Muslim mothers in an international diaspora of many Muslim communities. The text is academically rigorous, emotionally touching, intellectually challenging, and important as a window into representations and the lived realities of Muslim mothers in a variety of contexts around the world."
—Rebecca Bromwich, lawyer and faculty member, Carleton University Department of Law and Legal Studies

" This is a very interesting and timely book. What I like best about this book are the case studies and accounts of women's agency through Muslim mothering. Their voices are loud and clear through the claiming of their religion and their commitment to good mothering on their terms. The diversity of the case studies covers a wide range of mothering experiences from conflicts to day-to-day lives across a wide range of cultures."
—Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, Professor, Department of Women's Studies, San Diego State University

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DEMETER PRESS
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May 2016
"New Maternalisms": Tales of Motherwork (Dislodging the Unthinkable)
Edited Roksana Badruddoja and Maki Motapanyane

May 2016
362 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-000-6

"New Maternalisms": Tales of Motherwork (Dislodging the Unthinkable) explores the perceptions of those who engage in and/or research motherwork or the labour of caregiving, and how mothers view themselves in comparison to broader normative understandings of motherwork. Here, the anthology serves to deconstruct motherwork by highlighting and dislodging it from maternal ideology, the socially constructed "good mom" (read as "sacrificial mom") and feminized hegemonic discourse. The objective of the edited volume, then, is to critically explore how we experience motherwork, what motherwork might mean, and how motherwork impacts and is impacted by the communities in which we live. Such an examination involves contesting dominant ways of thinking about motherwork.

The purpose of this collection lies in focusing on "new maternalisms" by exploring motherwork or the (invisible) labour of caregiving in our everyday lived experiences. This anthology is in service to this in-between space of research and theory and the lived and everyday. The selections are written by individuals from a multitude of vantage points, ranging from academia to art to medicine. Motherhood is much more varied and individualized than the media or "mommy and me" classes will ever divulge. The breadth of maternal experiences in this book may allow interpretation of others' experiences resulting not in judgement but in understanding.
—Lynn Kuechle, Glen Taylor Nursing Institute for Family and Society and Founding Member of the Museum of Motherhood

This rich collection draws together accomplished motherhood scholars across disciplines to raise new questions about how we define and understand global motherhood. It gives voice and new perspective to maternal figures previously less recognized in academic reading. Most importantly, the global perspectives explored in this book will raise awareness about the challenges of understanding motherhood both as an experience and a discipline.
—Laura Tropp, Professor, Marymount Manhattan College, author of *A Womb With a View: America's Growing Public Interest in Pregnancy*

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DEMETER PRESS
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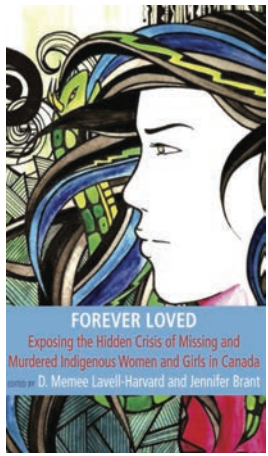
May 2016

Forever Loved: Exposing the Hidden Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada

Edited by D. Memee Lavell-Harvard and Jennifer Brant



May 2016
362 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-020-4

The hidden crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada is both a national tragedy and a national shame. In this groundbreaking new volume, as part of their larger efforts to draw attention to the shockingly high rates of violence against our sisters, Jennifer Brant and D. Memee Lavell-Harvard have pulled together a variety of voices from the academic realms to the grassroots and front-lines to speak on what has been identified by both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations as a grave violation of the basic human rights of Aboriginal women and girls. Linking colonial practices with genocide, through their exploration of the current statistics, root causes and structural components of the issue, including conversations on policing, media and education, the contributing authors illustrate the resilience, strength, courage, and spirit of Indigenous women and girls as they struggle to survive in a society shaped by racism and sexism, patriarchy and misogyny. This book was created to honour our missing sisters, their families, their lives and their stories, with the hope that it will offer lessons to non-Indigenous allies and supporters so that we can all work together towards a nation that supports and promotes the safety and well-being of all First Nation, Métis and Inuit women and girls.

"Heart wrenching and enlightening at the same time, this book debunks many of the myths that have perpetuated and excused the appalling levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada. The authors challenge conventional thinking on the nature of so-called 'high-risk lifestyles,' emphasizing the legacy of oppression and the abuse of Indigenous peoples as they make the connection between the history of colonization and genocide and our contemporary experiences of racialized, sexualized violence."
—Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, Past President of the Native Women's Association of Canada

"Tremendously informative work on one of the most pressing issues in Canada today. For those seeking answers on how to address the deplorable situation of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada, they are here." —Kim Anderson, Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University

"Too many lives have been stolen and too many communities have been destroyed by violence. This volume is both timely and, of course, long overdue. Just as silence and invisibility have allowed the violence to continue, by shining a light on the crisis and bringing awareness to this important issue this collection makes an important contribution towards improving the lives of Indigenous women and girls."
—National Chief Dwight Dorey, Indigenous Peoples Assembly of Canada

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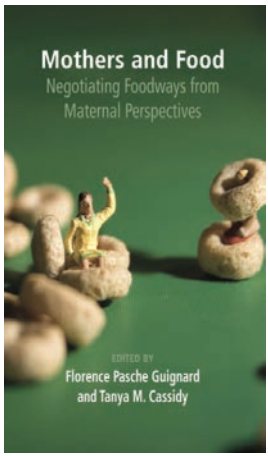
March 2016

Mothers and Food: Negotiating Foodways From Maternal Perspectives

Edited by Florence Pasche Guignard and Tanya M. Cassidy



March 2016
300 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-002-0

From multidisciplinary perspectives, this volume explores the roles mothers play in the producing, purchasing, preparing and serving of food to their own families and to their communities in a variety of contexts. By examining cultural representations of the relationships between feeding and parenting in diverse media and situations, these contributions highlight the tensions in which mothers get entangled. They show mothers' agency — or lack thereof — in negotiating the environmental, material, and economic reality of their feeding care work while upholding other ideals of taste, nutrition, health and fitness shaped by cultural norms. The contributors to *Mothers and Food* go beyond the normative discourses of health and nutrition experts and beyond the idealistic images that are part of marketing strategies. They explore what really drives mothers to maintain or change their family's foodways, for better or for worse, paying a particular attention to how this shapes their maternal identity. Questioning the motto according to which "people are what they eat," the chapters in this volume show that mothers cannot be categorized simply by how they feed themselves and their family.

This collection explores the ways that a mother's role in food procurement, food preparation, and meal serving becomes a crucible for gendered, class, and racial dynamics that reflect public and private agendas. Mothers are shown to be agentive actors whose mothering work repurposes, repackages and rewrites dominant ideologies through everyday activity. The authors creatively demonstrate important ways that mainstream discourse and the dynamics of the neoliberal project articulate with mothers' lives and identities in their kitchens and at their dinner tables.
—Janet Page-Reeve, Research Assistant Professor, University of New Mexico

This manuscript effectively brings together the multifaceted and socially/culturally complex topic of mothering and food. Taking a global perspective that includes recognition for the constraints of social expectations and economics, the collection highlights the relationship between mothers and food while also critiquing the naturalization of this association. It is a powerful contribution to maternal studies, sociology and the anthropology of food.
—Melinda Vandenbeld Giles, University of Toronto, Editor of *Mothering in the Age of Neoliberalism*

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DEMETER PRESS
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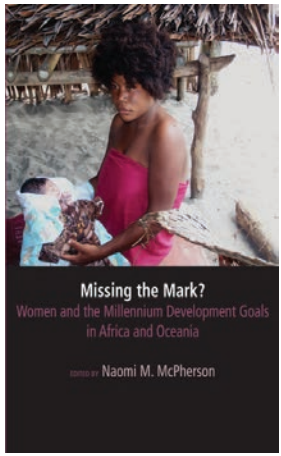
February 2016

Missing the Mark? Women and the Millennium Development Goals in Africa and Oceania
Edited by Naomi McPherson



February 2016
317 pages $34.95
ISBN 978-1-77258-004-4

In the year 2000, United Nations world leaders set out eight targets, the UN Millennium Development Goals, for achieving improved standards of living at the micro level in poorer nations around the globe, by the year 2015. The papers in this collection present fine-detailed ethnographic studies of cultures in Africa and Oceania, with a focus primarily on MDG 3, targeted to "promote gender equality and empower women" and MDG 5, targeted to "improve maternal health" to ascertain whether or not these goals have made or missed their mark. Ethnographic case studies located in Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Ghana, Malawi, Cameroon, and South Ethiopia show that women in these cultures, regardless of nation state, face the same issues or problems—lack of empowerment, gender inequities, and inadequate access to cultural or state resources—to realize good health in general and good maternal and reproductive health, in particular.

This is a unique book that brings together fine-grained ethnographic research on women's health in various global contexts, and does so in the particular development context of the Millennium Development Goals. The topic is significant, particularly as we have come to the end of the timeframe of the MDGs and there is work being done to shape where the development and maternal health fields go from here. Having a socio-cultural perspective is imperative at this point.
—Susan R. Hemer, University of Adelaide

This book provides a detailed narrative that gives a much needed voice to women. It is an enjoyable read that illustrates the complexity of a problem that is often oversimplified.
—Dale Ballucci, Western University

This volume is both timely and relevant to a wide range of disciplines including social sciences, health care, and development studies. The ethnographic focus is particularly welcome. It illustrates the range of cultural variation and the complexity of measuring and attempting to meet the MDGs.
—Susan Schalge, Minnesota State University, Mankato

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