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RE-INSCRIBING THE MOTHER: FEMINIST THEORY AND FICTION

by

JULIA LOWE, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

27th May

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submitted by Julia Lowe, B.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine the different ways feminist theory and literature has defined the multiple meanings of the maternal which have been suppressed by the patriarchal paradigm. Chapter I will explore the Anglo-American feminists' recovery of a lost matrilineal literary inheritance; the French feminists' appropriation of the mother's body as the key to a female "elsewhere"; the object-relations feminists' analysis of why women want to mother. In chapters II, III, and IV, we will see how feminist fiction mirrors or distorts these theoretical premises. Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, it will be argued, reclaims the mother as the daughter's Muse. By contrast, a Lacanian reading of Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle will show the mother is incapable of liberating her daughter from patriarchal Law. In Audrey Thomas' Intertidal Life the valorization and deconstruction of the mother figure are fused, as the mother as artist demands recognition for both mother and "other".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Barbara Gabriel, for her direction of this thesis. I would also like to extend my thanks to my family, for many reasons; to Kit and Paul, for all their support and encouragement; and particularly to the Garners, not only for all their help, but also for enduring my thesis without complaint!

CHAPTER I
PARADIGMS OF THE MOTHER IN FEMINIST CRITICAL THEORY

i

A Literature of Their Own: Reclaiming a Matrilinear Tradition

One of the most prominent areas of focus for feminist literary theory has been the rediscovery of the lost matrilinear inheritance, a search that looks beyond the obvious figures of Austen, Eliot and the Brontes, who are already central to the canon, to resurrect the forgotten women writers of the "maternal" literary tradition. In the light of recent critical theory that shows "aesthetics" to be an ideological product,³ it is no longer sufficient to account for the apparent absence of women writers in normative terms. As Mary Eagleton points out, "aesthetic value is not universal, or eternal; it does not reside within the text. Rather, it is culturally and historically specific" (4). Since Western culture has always been patriarchal, these aesthetic values have been male-dominated. Thus it has been all too easy for women's literature to disappear from mainstream literature. As Greer has demonstrated, women's literary fame has always been transient, and all too often "women have enjoyed dazzling literary prestige during their own lifetimes, only to vanish without trace from the records of posterity" (*Flying Pigs*).

It becomes important, therefore, to re-acquaint the woman writer with her foremothers for two reasons: a matrilinear tradition offers her an ancestry of her own, and simultaneously assures her that, as a woman, she is not excluded from the powers of fictional creativity: "Women can't paint, women can't write" has been, after all, the patriarchal voice which has haunted not only Lily Briscoe, but one which has sounded in women's ears for centuries. Hence, Ellen Moers is careful to explain that "confidence was the resource that women writers drew from the possession of their own tradition" (42). In

INTRODUCTION

Throughout patriarchal mythology, dream-symbolism, theology, language, two ideas flow side by side: one, that the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, 'the devil's gateway.' On the other hand, as mother the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood - that same body with its bleedings and mysteries - is her single destiny and justification in life. (Rich, Of Woman Born 34)

Alone in a room full of mothers and children I have some sense of what it must be like for those who never had children, never had that clear proof of their female-ness. See! See! I'm a mother; at least I've done something with my life. (Thomas, "Mothering Sunday" 157)

A proof of her femininity; a justification of her existence; the main, often the only purpose in her life, motherhood has always been regarded as woman's natural "career", her ultimate fulfilment. Defined and described almost exclusively in terms of her "physical potential" for reproduction, woman has been alienated from the "mysteries" of her sexuality by a patriarchal structure¹ that has insisted on trying to confine her within the single identity of the selfless, sexless mother figure. Inscribed within the discourses² that have traditionally limited her to the "maternal" role, her actual experiences of motherhood have been silenced by the culturally produced image of the maternal ideal, an archetype that bears little resemblance to the reality of the mother's life.

Not surprisingly, this conflation of womanhood and motherhood has come under increasing scrutiny from feminist writers who have begun to question the patriarchal discourses that have absorbed women so completely in the myths of maternity. Looking beyond the patriarchal construct of the motherhood paradigm, therefore, writers and theorists alike have started to chart the suppressed meanings of motherhood as biological and cultural identities; as a source of power and as a restriction upon women's personal freedom; as an institution and as individual experience. The different feminist responses to the multiple layers of meaning that lurk behind the traditional paradigm testify to the

complex nature of this quest for the silent (M)Other. This thesis will explore these various strategies to map the feminist recovery of the mother in both its theory and textual practice.

The first chapter will look at different critical interpretations of motherhood, and the ways in which feminist criticism has accommodated the maternal in its outline of a new feminist poetics. The absence of the literary foremother for the artistic daughter has long been the concern of one branch of feminist theory. In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf asserts the importance for the woman writer of re-discovering her lost matrilineal literary inheritance in order to free herself from the criticism that "women can't paint, women can't write" (Lighthouse 48). Following Woolf's lead in recuperating the history of the female artist, and her exploration of the social conditions that have determined the possibilities of combining "femininity" with artistry, contemporary American feminist theorists have emphasized the need to dispel the patriarchal myth that has polarized procreativity and creativity. Assuaging the woman writer's "anxiety of authorship" (Madwoman 49), therefore, Ellen Moers, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have begun to rediscover and valorize the lost matrilineal tradition that has been marginalized or obscured within the "canon" of "great" literature. Recognizing the futility of trying to fit women into the patriarchal order described by such critics as Frye and Bloom, Showalter goes on to outline an alternative critical strategy that will accord women a "literature of their own". Turning to "feminist critique" and "gynocriticism", she explores literary texts from the perspectives of both woman as reader and woman as writer, establishing a resource for the contemporary feminist that draws upon the earlier experiences and gains made by her foremothers.

While the recuperative emphasis of one of the earliest branches of feminist theory focused upon re-memembering and valorizing the maternal line, more recent approaches have begun to dismantle this notion of a unified female subject. French feminist theory rejects the humanist belief in the autonomous individual in favour of a multiple female sexuality. Rather than reconstructing a lost tradition, therefore, French feminists use Lacanian

psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction to undermine the image of the mother, while locating the "feminine" in the subversive space of the pre-Oedipal unconscious. The mother's body, because of its special relationship to the pre-Oedipal, becomes the site of a disruptive female "Otherness" that challenges the phallogentrism of patriarchal discourse.

In her application of this "l'écriture féminine", Hélène Cixous celebrates the open-endedness of "writing in the feminine", displacing the limitations of the binary structure of patriarchal rationality by the plurality of "writing of the body", particularly the body of the mother. Luce Irigaray, on the other hand, foregrounds the value of "différence", the female Otherness that has always been obscured by the symbolic order. Lending new significance to woman's "absence", she rejects the discourses of maternity that have been used to trap mothers and daughters in a single identity, exploring, instead, the multiplicity of "the sex which is not one". According to Irigaray, the "feminine" is located in the meaning of a "parler femme", the language of women that is outside the discourses of the symbolic order. Julia Kristeva's terminology for the language of female experience is the "semiotic", the disruptive voice of the unconscious which is specifically related to the body of the mother and her special connection with the pre-Oedipal experience. Kristeva maintains that the semiotic is capable of disrupting the symbolic order, and she regards it as a useful tool in the search for a new discourse of the maternal, a "herethics" based on women's experience.

In contrast with the French feminist appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the approach adopted by object-relations feminism sidesteps the debate about the pre-Oedipal significance of the unconscious and the suppression of the fragmented self by identifying the pre-Oedipal phase as the beginning of gender socialization. Adopting the object-relations theory that identifies this earlier phase as the moment when the child begins its separation and differentiation process, Nancy Chodorow aims to account for what it is about this process that restricts nurturing capabilities in boys, while encouraging the same capabilities in girls. As long as mothers continue to be the primary caretakers, Chodorow

argues, this pattern will continue to repeat itself, for boys will always have to curtail their relational skills when they separate from the mother, while girls who never have to make this break will experience adult relationships as an extension of the mother-daughter bond.

Exploring the adult consequences of this gender socialization, Dinnerstein and Rich demonstrate that as the inhabitants of the "maternal" body, women frequently find themselves playing the role of mother as well as wife in their relationships with men. Dinnerstein goes on to argue, however, that because women feel dissatisfied with man's inability to meet their relational needs, they turn to motherhood as a means of re-creating the intimacy of their own mother-daughter bond. According to this approach, what makes women want to mother is the cyclical nature of the "reproduction of mothering", a cycle which cannot be broken until shared parenting becomes a widespread reality, until the "natural" conflation of "parenting" and "mothering" is exposed as a social construct.

The divergent responses to the question of the mother's place in feminist theory, the tension between her valorization on the one hand, and the deconstruction of the mother figure on the other, is a drama played out in women's fiction as well as in feminist theory. This thesis will explore the work of Virginia Woolf before turning to contemporary Canadian women writers, examining the ways in which the feminist daughter's perception of the mother has altered since the beginning of the century. To the Lighthouse serves as a model text for the daughter's appropriation and valorization of the mother figure, although even at this early stage, the daughter signals a rejection of her mother's social values. Nonetheless, it is not until after Woolf has rescued the mother from her silent Otherness that her own matrilineal descendants are free to begin their deconstruction of the motherhood paradigms. Arguably, different as Lady Oracle is from To the Lighthouse, Atwood's fiction is dependent upon the gains made by her literary foremother. Yet Atwood's text marks another important stage in the development of feminist thinking, destabilizing patriarchal discourses of maternity from within the symbolic order, while testifying to the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship. Furthermore, just as

Atwood's anti-heroine constantly tries to transcend the discourses that define her, Thomas' protagonist begins to look at what it is in these discourses that keeps women enthralled. The mother as artist in Intertidal Life occupies the point of contradiction between both patriarchal and feminist models of maternity, yet out of this tension a new discourse emerges, one which begins the simultaneous valorization of both the "other" and the Mother.

The discussion of these novelistic texts aims to examine the ways Woolf, Atwood and Thomas implicitly affirm or challenge the ideas put forward in a more theoretical mode by various contemporary schools of feminist criticism. Woolf's own writing offers some insight into the complex relationship between these imaginative and discursive forms. How, for instance, do Woolf's fictional and biographical narratives relate to the arguments mapped out in her own A Room of One's Own, and later Anglo-American feminist theory? How is this text's re-appropriation of the mother reflected in her memoirs and fiction? Using To the Lighthouse as the fictional parallel of the autobiographical "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past", this chapter will explore the ways in which Woolf inaugurates the mother-daughter narrative in women's imaginative writing.

All three of the texts under discussion focus on the difficulty faced by the feminist daughter trying to rescue her mother from the traditional "feminine" role she will inevitably reject for herself. Julia Stephen and Mrs. Ramsay both conform to patriarchal ideals of the selfless wife; nonetheless, Woolf emphasizes those aspects of their lives that subvert this image, even as they continue to comply with its demands. Elevating their roles in the domestic sphere to new artistic significance, she demonstrates that the mothers' creative genius lies in their ability to generate harmony out of the chaos of disparate lives. Contrasting their sensitivity and intuition with their husbands' unimaginative rationality, she goes on to identify the mother as the guardian of an alternative source of knowledge, a "truth" that the artistic daughter must learn before she can successfully record its significance in her own art. Ultimately valorizing the mother as the female artist's Muse,

she outlines the maternal power that is capable of making life "stand still" so that the daughter can secure her "vision".

Yet the mother is simultaneously regarded as a dangerous role model to imitate, one whose selflessness and self-destructive "giving, giving, giving" must be avoided by the daughter as artist. Paradoxically, though, it is only after the Mother has been newly re-inscribed as Muse that the daughter can turn once again to her patriarchal inheritance, and reclaim it as her own.

Whereas Woolf regards the mother-daughter relationship as potentially beneficial, Margaret Atwood, by deconstructing the newly-prominent mother figure, raises doubts about the nature of the maternal legacy. For Joan Foster's problematical relationships to both her literary and biological mothers demonstrates that it is the mother who inscribes her daughter in the same patriarchal discourses that have always imprisoned women. The mother in this novel is defined not so much as a unified female subject, but as a position in dominant social discourses. As such, she is fully confined within the symbolic order, incapable of leading her daughter out of the patriarchal maze of love, romance, and male domination.

Although Joan is situated by her mother in patriarchal Law, her life is nonetheless a parodic imitation of the patriarchal myths of femininity: the suicidal American confessional poets of the 1960s; the screen goddesses of the 1930s and '40s; the three-headed mother as monster/Muse; woman as Great Mother. Her multiple, fragmented selves, in spite of their affiliations with all of these identities, do not quite fit the pattern of any of the recognizable role models, and in the space between the reality and the ideal, the novel suggests ways of disrupting the social codes from within the social order. Rejecting, in particular, the role of the selfless, beneficent mother, Atwood's parodic treatment of the institutionalized paradigm demonstrates the implausibility of this fiction when women attempt to translate it into reality. Unlike Woolf's valorization, then, this deconstruction of the mother challenges even the possibility of a kindly Muse figure, and insists, instead, that women should be

allowed to exist as individuals, rather than as "examples of a gender" (Curse 227).

While Woolf's and Atwood's fictions correspond to the divergent strands of feminist theory that respectively valorize or deconstruct the mother figure, Audrey Thomas' narrative occupies the point of tension between these strategies. Although Intertidal Life challenges patriarchal myths of maternity, it does not lose sight of the fact that women continue to experience motherhood as discursively inscribed subjects. Like Atwood, Thomas sees no easy way out of the traditional patterns that have always shaped women's lives, although Alice's intellectual insight into her identity as wife and mother prevents her from becoming totally engulfed in her family relations. Nonetheless, she does not fail to perceive her own desire to become the ideal wife, an identity which closely resembles the ideal mother. Caught up in the cycle of reproduction outlined by Chodorow, she recognizes the extent to which she has become a "capital-M Mother", a label she never completely sheds, even in her writing.

Yet motherhood is not always a handicap in this novel; indeed Alice acknowledges that her children have made her strong, and her experiences as a mother are clearly an important theme in her writing. Although Alice's roles as writer and parent are often in contradiction, the narrative suggests that there are potential benefits to be gained from her double-identity as creatrix. Asserting a positive connection between writing and motherhood, Thomas lends new significance to a maternal body which cannot always be relied upon as the source of an alternative female knowledge, but which is identified as a source of women's power. Alice, herself, never quite resolves the tensions between the female body and patriarchal discourses, between her career as writer and her life as a mother. Yet through her constant struggle to "try to see", she never abandons the search for a solution to the dilemma of mother as artist.

Just as Alice ends her self-examination without discovering a perfect solution to the problem of how to exist as woman, writer, wife, and mother, so too does feminist literature and theory finally remain unresolved about the "mother" question. "What is it we

wish we had, or could have, as daughters; could give, as mothers?" Rich asks in her discussion of Motherhood and Daughterhood (Of Woman Born 246). What is it, we might add, mothers wish they could have for themselves? The multiplicity of feminist discourses that have grown up around the question of motherhood suggests its continuing status as a central feminist problematic. Indeed, as Jane Gallop argues, the "other" in mother remains elusive both as subject and as trope:

The other tongue is hard to pronounce, but those of us who have learned critical interpretation from psychoanalysis and from feminism are learning how to read it. At its best, psychoanalytic feminist criticism is teaching us not how to speak the mother tongue, not *only* how to see the mother as other, but how to read the other within the mother tongue. (Gallop, "Reading the Mother Tongue" 314)

CHAPTER I
PARADIGMS OF THE MOTHER IN FEMINIST CRITICAL THEORY

i

A Literature of Their Own: Reclaiming a Matrilinear Tradition

One of the most prominent areas of focus for feminist literary theory has been the rediscovery of the lost matrilinear inheritance, a search that looks beyond the obvious figures of Austen, Eliot and the Brontes, who are already central to the canon, to resurrect the forgotten women writers of the "maternal" literary tradition. In the light of recent critical theory that shows "aesthetics" to be an ideological product,³ it is no longer sufficient to account for the apparent absence of women writers in normative terms. As Mary Eagleton points out, "aesthetic value is not universal, or eternal; it does not reside within the text. Rather, it is culturally and historically specific" (4). Since Western culture has always been patriarchal, these aesthetic values have been male-dominated. Thus it has been all too easy for women's literature to disappear from mainstream literature. As Greer has demonstrated, women's literary fame has always been transient, and all too often "women have enjoyed dazzling literary prestige during their own lifetimes, only to vanish without trace from the records of posterity" (*Flying Pigs*).

It becomes important, therefore, to re-acquaint the woman writer with her foremothers for two reasons: a matrilinear tradition offers her an ancestry of her own, and simultaneously assures her that, as a woman, she is not excluded from the powers of fictional creativity: "Women can't paint, women can't write" has been, after all, the patriarchal voice which has haunted not only Lily Briscoe, but one which has sounded in women's ears for centuries. Hence, Ellen Moers is careful to explain that "confidence was the resource that women writers drew from the possession of their own tradition" (42). In

her efforts to consolidate this confidence, Showalter has tried to "establish the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade, rather than from Great Woman to Great Woman" (Poetics 137). Taking issue with Moers' description of the female tradition as a "movement", however, Showalter rightly affirms that "each generation of female writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex" (Literature 11-12). Gilbert and Gubar develop this point further, arguing that women fear they have "forgotten" their "matrilineal heritage of literary strength" (Madwoman 59). Consequently, they have repeatedly had to fight the belief that women experience themselves as "lack", that without a penis they are bereft of the organ of generative power. If the Lacanian interpretation sounds far-fetched, we have only to remind ourselves of recent male criticism of women's literature to recognize the accuracy of Gilbert's and Gubar's argument: Anthony Burgess is not alone in his opinion that women lack the "male thrust" he views as fundamental to creativity (see Madwoman 9). In short, because they have been unable to claim a "posterity" of their own, women writers have, indeed, appeared to be "female eunuchs".

Even before the advent of feminist consciousness-raising of the 1960s and 1970s, however, Virginia Woolf had already identified the need to distinguish the rise of the female writer, and signalled the importance of literary mothers to contemporary woman writers:

Towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle class woman began to write... Without those forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontes and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer... For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people. (Room 62-3)

A Room of One's Own is one of the earliest feminist texts to discuss the power of patriarchal society to silence the voice of woman in history and literature, and to emphasize

the importance for women writers of re-discovering this lost voice. Asserting that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (72-3), Woolf stresses that it is important to recover a matrilineal inheritance, without which the female artist works in isolation and confusion, prey to all the doubts and inhibitions that attended her foremothers. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, contemporary women writers "attempt the pen with energy and authority" only because "their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness" (Madwoman 51).

But although Virginia Woolf had been urging feminist scholars as early as 1929 to trace this heritage, little work was done to recover these female "forerunners" until the 1960s and 1970s. Only then, principally through the pioneering work of Ellen Moers, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and feminist scholars begin to define a "feminist poetics", and truly begin the search for the "foremothers" of female literature. Not until 1985, with the publication of the Norton Anthology of Literature by Women (NALW), was a comprehensive range and variety of women's writing collected in one volume. Even today, feminist theory continues to remain largely at the margins of academic study, on the periphery of the canon of the "great men".

The need to distinguish women writers from the canon of "great" literature has rightly been identified as a central concern for the feminist scholar. As Moers explains, "at one time I held the narrow view that separating major writers from the general course of literary history on the basis of sex was futile" (xi), but "the suspicion has grown upon me that we already practice a segregation of major women writers unknowingly, therefore insidiously" (xii). Feminist critics of the 1960s and '70s could no longer afford to accommodate women represented exclusively in a literary tradition dominated by male writers: the time had come to establish a literary tradition made up of women themselves. Toril Moi sums up this strategy clearly, emphasizing the "necessity of viewing women as a distinctive group if the common patriarchal strategy of subsuming women under the general category of 'man', and thereby silencing them, was to be efficiently counteracted" (53).

Although Showalter would agree with this approach, she is careful to draw a distinction between similarities shared by women writers on the grounds of their related experiences on the one hand, and the suggestion that they are all linked by a fundamental "female imagination" on the other:

The theory of a female sensibility revealing itself in an imagery and form specific to women always runs dangerously close to reiterating the familiar stereotypes. It also suggests permanence, a deep, basic, and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world. I think that, instead, the female literary tradition comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society. (*Literature* 12)

Showalter's distinction is important because it alerts feminists to the dangers of claiming to speak for all women: to do so would be merely to repeat the already familiar patriarchal strategies which silence those who do not fit into "mainstream" culture. The usefulness of her own approach is twofold: in qualifying the essentialism of a "female sensibility" it avoids any suggestion that there is an unchanging, "essential" feminine nature. Simultaneously, it also makes room for the effects of the social on women's experience, admitting commonalities in their historical experience, without reiterating restrictive gender stereotypes. What Showalter describes as linking female experience cross-culturally and through history is not, after all, the biological fact that one is born woman. Rather, she is acknowledging de Beauvoir's famous observation that "One is not born woman, one becomes one." What all women share is the fact that they are bounded by a socially constructed notion of femininity defined by their native patriarchal culture, and any consideration of their work should bear this shared experience in mind:

Women writers should not be studied as a distinct group on the assumption that they write alike, or even display stylistic resemblances distinctively feminine. But women do have a special history susceptible to analysis, which includes such complex considerations as the economics of their relation to the literary marketplace: the effects of social and political changes in women's status upon individuals, and the implications of stereotypes of the woman writer and restrictions of her artistic autonomy. (cited by Moi 50)

These are the considerations that Woolf begins to explore in A Room of One's Own, and which Gilbert and Gubar take up in their introductory sections in the Norton Anthology. Asking herself "why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age", Woolf realizes that this question cannot be answered satisfactorily until we know more about their social position: whether or not they were educated; what the pattern of their daily life was like; "what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night" (45). She goes on to project the miserable fate that might have attended Shakespeare's sister, doomed to silence and death in a society that would not let her speak, for "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at" (48).

Not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when women were able to profit by their publications, do we really begin to see a significant number of women writers beginning to emerge. The career of these earliest writers could not have been an easy one, for although writing gave them a practical means of making money, it did not allow them to escape ridicule and censure. Taking Aphra Behn as the figurehead of this development, Woolf acknowledges the ambiguity of this early success: "now that Aphra Behn had done it, girls could go to their parents and say ... I can make money by my pen. Of course the answer for many years to come was, Yes, by living the life of Aphra Behn! Death would be better! and the door was slammed faster than ever" (Room 61). Likewise, in the NALW, Gilbert and Gubar identify the same problematic, which they show to be reflected in the "emergence of a new image of woman, a satiric portrait of the female artist which constituted a reaction against the growing visibility of literary women" (52).

In the light of these prejudices, it is little wonder that women writers felt obliged to apologize for their "scribblings" and sought anonymity even while they desired publication. As Mary Eagleton explains, these women writers occupied a point of tension, for their writing "challenge[d] the conventional view of what is appropriate for women and

encroache[d] on what some see as a male preserve" (40). Thus, in the nineteenth century, even the "great" women writers published under male pseudonyms, for, as Showalter points out, they found themselves in a no-win situation: "Women, urged to write, if they must, like ladies, were despised as inferior when they did, attacked as 'unfeminine', when, like Charlotte Bronte, they did not" (cited by Lovell 84). By this time, cultural notions of femininity were clearly defined, and women were expected to be passive, submissive, selfless, pure and mute, the virtues epitomized by Coventry Patmore's dead heroine.⁴ The woman writer was, of course, in direct contradiction with this "Angel in the House", and thus her creativity was identified, in terms more absolute than ever before, with unnatural femininity.

In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf demonstrates that the suppression of female creativity on the grounds of its "perversity" has always been an obstacle for the female artist: "when ... one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet ... crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to" (48). Woolf argues that the female artist has always been ostracized as a repulsive and perverted being, thrust to the edge of "normal" society in an effort to silence her. Gilbert and Gubar would agree, identifying this patriarchal tendency to suppress female creativity even in those tales we learn as children. Fundamental to almost every child's upbringing in the Western world is the story of the wicked Queen who tries to kill Snow White (the perfect/passive, dead heroine). The (step)mother in Snow White, like all creative women, is seen to be evil, duplicitous, monstrous, a perversion of "femininity" that will be neither rewarded, recognized nor tolerated. Unlike the passive Angel, this woman will not be silent, but insists on voicing her own story as woman.

Anne Sexton describes the consequences of this inheritance in her poem "The Red Shoes", where the ("wicked") Queen's death shoes are passed down by matriarchal descent: "I tie on the red shoes... / They are not mine/ They are my mother's./ Her

mother's before./ Handed down like an heirloom/ but hidden like shameful letters" (28). Thomas observes the ambiguous nature of this "gift" in Intertidal Life (226), and in Atwood's Lady Oracle the connection between female creativity and suffering is made clear: the red shoes are the bloody feet of a woman who tries to dance, and is made to suffer for her creativity.

In their efforts to bring women's experience to the forefront of literary attention, however, Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar have not only had to examine the problems encountered by women writers in the past, but have also had to confront the more immediate difficulties presented by contemporary criticism. A Literature of Their Own and The Madwoman in the Attic were written in competition with the shadow of "classics" of patriarchal scholarship, such as Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism, and Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence, which continue to "subsume" women in their discussions of a literary tradition that remains almost exclusively male:

The culture of the past is not only the memory of *mankind*, but our own buried life, and study of it leads to a recognition scene, a discovery in which we see, *not our past lives, but the total cultural form of our present life.*
(Frye 346: my italics)

Whilst Frye's Anatomy of Criticism may well speak for "mankind", the "buried life" of woman as writer, and the "recognition" of her experiences as a woman remain unearthed. The culture of the past, which we are invited to recognize in the present, has been, and remains, a patriarchal culture expressly addressing man. When Frye asserts, then, that "poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself" (97), we see again how important it is for women to chart their own matrilineal inheritance.

But another major problem with Frye's theory, and one which causes many feminist literary theorists to part company with him, is that, in a patriarchal culture, the archetypes he discusses continue either to proscribe woman's role or to silence her. Until we question

these archetypes it will be impossible either to get beyond gender-stereotyping, or to achieve social change. As Belsey explains: "For Frye the archetypes recur because human nature is constant, not just in its physical needs but in its desire for the forms of civilization, its rage for order in the face of chaos... Literature transcends history and ideology, giving expression to the timeless aspirations of an essentially unchanging human nature" (24). In fact, it is in the interest of feminists to destabilize these received notions of gender, the idea of a fixed "human nature", and to argue that literature does not transcend ideology.

Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence elaborates a poetics which uses Milton's Paradise Lost to trace a tradition from God, the Father, via Satan and Adam, to Milton himself, and all subsequent inheritors of the creative power. In this patently patrilinear model, Milton's Satan is depicted as the archetypal "great" poet, and the only role for the female is that of Muse, whose copulation with the poet gives birth to other poets. "We remember how for so many centuries, from the sons of Homer to the sons of Ben Jonson, poetic influence had been described as a filial relationship" (26). In a Freudian revision of the tradition, Bloom argues that, in fact, the relationship between father and son is much more complex. The "son" of the great poet is shown to give birth to his father, and must wait, in turn, for his own successor to give birth to himself. But whatever way Bloom chooses to analyse the relationship, he never calls into question the gender of the two protagonists: "Battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads; only this is my subject here" (11).⁵

Patriarchal as Bloom's account might appear, Gilbert and Gubar point out that it is an accurate reflection of Western literature, which appears to be, with few exceptions, almost exclusively male: "the poet, like God the Father, is a paternalistic ruler of the fictive world he has created" (Madwoman 5). The power of the "Word", of creating and naming, seems to belong almost exclusively to "man" and the pen does, indeed, seem to be a "metaphorical penis":

In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis's power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim. (Madwoman 6)

In the case of the woman writer, however, who has only recently been able to lay claim to a literary maternity, the problem she has to come to terms with is not an "anxiety of influence", but rather, an "anxiety of authorship" (Madwoman 49). Women can and do create good literature, but as we have seen, the individual artist creates largely in a feeling of isolation, struggling against patriarchal definitions which both inhibit and exclude her. For as Gilbert and Gubar explain, if "male precursors symbolize authority ... they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as writer" (Madwoman 48). The female artist is also faced with the problem of finding a voice to articulate her own experiences: does she inherit an already-existing patriarchal discourse or can she find ways to make language her own? Ultimately, she is faced with the question of where she belongs in Bloom's and Frye's accounts of the literary tradition.

These are precisely the questions that feminist scholars of the 1970s began to tackle. In fact, as Moers, Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar point out, woman *does not* fit into the patriarchal systems Bloom and Frye describe, but has remained outside the male tradition, excluded. And according to Showalter, it is foolish to continue to try to force women writers into the limitations of patriarchal structures. Instead she offers her own "poetics" of feminist criticism, which puts forward the case for "feminist critique" and "gynocriticism".

Showalter describes feminist critique as "a historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena" (*Poetics* 128). This critique aims to explore the images and stereotypes in literature, "the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history." In the light of these studies, women have begun to deconstruct the patriarchal paradigm of femininity in what Rich describes as an act of "re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - [which] is for women more than

a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" ("When we Dead Awaken" 33). Like all feminist critics, Rich is aware that women have been trapped within patriarchal paradigms of femininity: they must come to terms with, and revise these paradigms "not to pass on a [patriarchal] tradition but to break its hold over us" (35).

Whilst this aspect of feminist scholarship has concentrated on an exploration and deconstruction of culturally mediated "images of women" from the point of view of "*woman as reader* - with woman as consumer of male-produced literature ... with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience" ("Poetics" 128), gynocriticism, on the other hand, has focused its attention upon woman as writer:

Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit woman between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture. (131)

Although the terminology is specific to Showalter's text, gynocriticism typifies much of the important work that has been done in the field of feminist literary criticism. Gynocriticism aims to "develop new models based on the study of female experience" ("Poetics" 131), models that will lend authority to the female voice and develop a "female framework" of mother and daughter within which women can freely express their own experiences.

Gynocriticism is important, then, precisely because it assuages female "anxiety of authorship", and valorizes female experiences which have usually been erased or marginalized. Work in this field offers a new grid, a new framework for considering female literature, which has so far been absent from academic study. By exploring this "newly visible female culture" woman can re-member the shattered tradition that has helped to form her, re-creating the mother she has lost. The female artist's "revisionary struggle" begins, therefore, "only by actively seeking a *female* precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible" (*Madwoman* 49). The mother figure, far from being an image

to be feared or repulsed, is someone from whom we can learn, someone who holds the key to our own posterity:

The woman artist who enters the cavern of her own mind ... finds there the scattered leaves not only of her own power but of the tradition which might have generated that power. The body of her precursor's art, and thus the body of her own art, lies in pieces around her, dismembered, dis-remembered, disintegrated. How can she remember it and become a member of it, join and rejoin it, integrate it and in doing so achieve her own integrity, her own selfhood? Surrounded by the ruins of her own tradition, the leavings and unleavings of her spiritual mother's art, she feels ... like someone suffering from amnesia ... she no longer knows its languages, its messages, its forms... But it is possible ... for the woman poet to reconstruct the shattered tradition that is her matrilineal heritage. (*Madwoman* 98)

Vital as Anglo-American theory has been to the advancement of feminist studies in general, the emphasis it places on "reconstructing" a "female self" has come under a great deal of criticism precisely because of its oversimplification of a female subjectivity. By suggesting that the female artist will be "re-membered" when she pieces together the fragments of her matrilineal tradition, Moi argues, gynocriticism fails to detach itself from the structures of a patriarchal poetics that imposes phallic unity on the newly-emerging female consciousness.

In contrast with the Anglo-American approach, however, we will see how French feminist theory has emphasized the multiplicity of the fragmented female self. Far from offering a simple valorization of matrilineal inheritance, this theory deconstructs the paradigm of the mother figure, to give prevalence to the pre-linguistic relationship shared by mother and child. The pre-Oedipal experience becomes the focus of a newly-valued site of meaning, a space outside patriarchal discourses, where women can discover a language of their own.

L'Écriture Féminine: Writing the Mother's Body

American critics speak of creative self-expression and authenticity, French theories of the subversion of phallogocentric discourse; American feminism valorizes female consciousness as inherently oppositional, French feminism tends to consider the notion of the unified subject a remnant of patriarchal ideology which needs to be deconstructed. (Felski 22)

In sharp contrast with its Anglo-American counterpart, French feminist theory refutes the possibility of discovering a shared "female experience" or "feminine consciousness" on the grounds that such an identity presupposes a unified self which, in fact, does not exist. Rejecting humanist philosophies that focus on the autonomy of the individual, French feminists have sought to subvert the "subject", the already alienated and fragmented being, constituted in and constructed by language. Drawing upon post-structuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction, "l'écriture féminine" draws attention to the phallogocentrism of language and the way it operates to construct Woman as lack, constituting her as Other, and thereby excluding her from patriarchal discourses of power. In spite of the significant differences within French feminism, this notion is fundamental to a shared perception of the "feminine" as that which exists outside language, that which is originally located in the pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother, but which is relegated to the realm of the unconscious when we become speaking subjects.

According to Saussure's linguistic theory, language is a system of signs which function in relation to each other, and have no value on their own. The sign system is made up of "signifiers" (words) and "signifieds" (the concepts being named), and is dependent upon a recognized agreement of the relationship between the two. Immediately, therefore, we see that language is a "social fact" (Belsey 41) dependent upon social agreement for its meaning. Clearly, language begins to exist only because society needs a signifying system, and so by definition language must be socially constructed and intimately linked with the workings of ideology (for a definition of ideology, see Endnote 3). Far from being a

transparent medium which transcends the specificity of culturally produced meaning, language can, in fact, only operate as a signifying system *within* ideology, and as the process of signification, it simultaneously inscribes ideology in social discourse. In view of this close inter-dependence between language and ideology, it is not difficult to see that language, too, plays an important part in the "naturalization" of the social. Only through language, after all, and the adoption of the "I" position in discourse, is the subject able to produce meaning, so that in a very important sense, language "speaks" us in the same way that ideology interpellates us in discourse.

Working out from these premises, Lacan's revision of Freud's theories shows that only as speaking subjects do we enter into the "symbolic order" of language, simultaneously adopting the subject positions dictated to us by the "Law-of-the-Father", the social order governed by the "phallus". According to Lacan, the child has no notion of its sexuality in the pre-Oedipal phase, and no sense of itself apart from its mother or the outside world. Only when it enters the Imaginary, or mirror phase, does the child see itself as a separate identity, although it actually misrecognizes itself in the mirror by identifying with an external, unified subject that does not exist.⁶ Not until entry into the Symbolic order, when the child begins to speak, does it become a full subject, however, taking up (false) subject positions of "I", "she/he", "girl/boy". Thus when the child learns language s/he is, in fact, internalizing the Name-of-the-Father, the social "Law" that disrupts the pre-Oedipal dyad, and signifies entry into patriarchal society.

Patriarchal law is founded upon the "phallus", which Lacan claims has no resemblance to the penis,⁷ but which functions as the "privileged signifier" (Lacan 82) about which all meaning is constructed and all value is "accrued" (Rose 43). When the subject enters language, s/he adopts an already constructed gender position established in relation to this "transcendental signifier": consequently, the phallus is not only the valued signifier, but is also the linguistic site of sexual difference. The "feminine" relationship to this signifier is

one of lack. Kuhn offers this summary:

Sexual difference is seen as structured by the subject's relation to the phallus, the signifier which stands in for the play of absence and presence that constitutes language... Men and women enter language differently, and Lacan's argument is that the female entry into language is organized by lack, or negativity. (37)

What, then, are the consequences of Lacan's revisions of Freudian analysis for feminist theory? His discussions of the phallus as signifier, and the subject's internalization of the Law-of-the-Father upon entry into the symbolic, seem more likely to provoke feminist rage than feminist approval. After all, if language is phallogocentric, then women will inescapably occupy a negative position within it: the "feminine" must inevitably become that which cannot be spoken in language, as it lacks a relationship to the phallus. In fact, French feminists have appropriated and inverted these premises to promote their own causes. Accepting that the "feminine" is indeed excluded from language, they seek to expose the confining phallocentrism of patriarchal discourse, and through subversive textual strategies, they undermine the signifying system to create their own "l'écriture féminine".

This subversion takes place largely through the workings of the unconscious, that fragmented aspect of the self which is suppressed by the symbolic order. The unconscious operates in the "contradiction between the conscious self, the self which appears in its own discourse, and the self which is only partly represented there, the self which speaks" (Belsey 64-5). It is in this space that feminists locate the feminine, closely linking the unconscious with the maternal, specifically the pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and child. This leads to a "notion of the feminine as subversion, a transgressive force linked with the realm of the mother's body that continually threatens to disrupt the single fixed meanings of an authoritarian and repressive phallogocentric discourse" (Felski 23). As Burke points out, then, the strength of Lacan's work lies in its potential to "return us to the powers of the unconscious as potential revolutionary" (110).

According to Cixous, this revolutionary writing, which she describes as "writing in the feminine", rejects the closure of phallic structures in favour of a text that is open-ended and "doesn't stop" ("Castration" 53). Adopting the premises of Derridean deconstruction, the open-endedness Cixous proposes exposes the limitations of meaning produced by a binary system founded upon the fundamental dichotomy between male and female. In "Sorties", her textual format visually emphasizes the negative or inferior space women are destined to occupy in such a system of hierarchical binary opposition:

Where is she?
 Activity/passivity,
 Sun/Moon,
 Culture/Nature,
 Day/Night,
 Father/Mother,
 Head/Heart,
 Intelligible/sensitive,
 Logos/Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, seed, progress.
 Matter, concave, ground - which supports the step, receptacle.

Man

Woman (Sorties"90)

Only by challenging these binaries, by disrupting and subverting the language of the phallus, Cixous argues, can we make room for the fragmented self of the unconscious.

Specifically relating this form of writing with the pre-Oedipal unconscious, she maintains that "writing in the feminine is passing on what is cut out by the symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic" ("Castration" 54). The mother's voice is located in the woman's body, the body from which she has been alienated, but which holds the key to her femininity. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous clearly indicates the connection between the body and the word: only when the body speaks, she maintains, "will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth" (250). In calling upon women to "write herself" (245), she establishes a direct link between women's maternal

drives and their creative powers as artists: "Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive - all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive - just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood" (261).

Although Cixous's account attributes new significance to the centrality of the mother's body in feminist discourse, however, her approach runs the risk of repeating patriarchal strategies that already enslave women within their biological reproductive functions. By implying that the mother's preculturally "archaic voice" holds the secret of female experience, she is in danger of returning woman to what has always been ascribed to her as a "natural" role. As Jones has pointed out, "Cixous's praise for the nurturant perceptions of women ... echoes ... the coercive glorification of motherhood that has plagued us for centuries" (*Writing the Body* 368-9). We might also ponder who will be able to read what she has written if her text is written in the "white ink" of the "good mother's milk" (*Medusa* 251).

Whilst Cixous has attempted to deconstruct phallogentric discourses through "writing the body", Irigaray's deconstruction takes a different approach. Asserting the value of "différence", she aims to deconstruct what she describes as "that sameness in which for centuries we have been the other" (*And the one doesn't stir* 71). In her subversive application of Lacan's theory, she seeks to valorize all that is Other in Woman. Thus, for Irigaray, women are indeed outside the patriarchal discourses of representation, but this "absence", this "negativity", is something she tries to use positively. Woman becomes a "sex which is not one" not simply in the sense that she is lack, therefore, but also in the sense that her sexuality is multiple: her breasts, clitoris, vagina become pluralities of the feminine that disrupt phallic unity.

Critical to Irigaray's theory of *différence* is the exploration of this female sexuality, which has been suppressed by the mothering "instinct": "maternity", she argues, "supplants the deficiencies of repressed female sexuality" (*This Sex* 102). Irigaray explores

the consequences of this in "And the one doesn't stir without the other", where mother/daughter simultaneously give meaning to each other, while robbing each other of identity. "She despairs over the nullity of her mother's personhood (as well as her own by extension) sandwiched as it is between the roles of mother's daughter and daughter's mother... Mothers, daughters, all women, Irigaray is saying, are swallowed up in the sole function of 'maternage' " (Wenzel 58). In fact, it becomes clear in this text that, as long as women are defined and confined within patriarchal discourses of motherhood, "maternage" will always be threatening to female sexuality: "I, too, [am] a captive when a man holds me in his gaze; I, too, am abducted from myself. Immobilized in the reflection he expects of me... Trapped in a single function - mothering" (66).

Far from delighting in her matriarchal ancestry, therefore, Irigaray finds the inevitability of reproduction, her matrilineal inheritance, annihilating. "You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother. Between the two, where are you? What space is yours alone?" (63). Playing here with the Lacanian imagery of the mirror phase, Irigaray shows the mother as both split subject, misrecognizing herself, and as a woman simultaneously defined and excluded by the patriarchal reflection of the symbolic order. More than a misrecognition, however, the mother's vision is an insight into the fact that she is invisible, an absence. We see this more clearly when the mother "strips off" her "disguises", removes her "face of a mother's daughter, of a daughter's mother": "You lose your mirror reflection. You thaw. You melt. You flow out of yourself" (63).

Jones interprets Irigaray's deconstruction of the mother figure as a "suggestion of a newly positive symbiosis" ("Inscribing Femininity" 87). Certainly we can identify the daughter-mother's plea, "Don't remain caught up between the mirror and this endless loss of yourself" (64), as a cry of recognition for the Other in Mother: "And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive" (67). Nonetheless, in an essay that claims to voice the interests of the Other over and above the interests of the

Mother, it is difficult to read Irigaray's poetic images without feeling that the victory of the one is at the expense of the (M)other: "With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice" (60); "You put yourself in my mouth, and I suffocate" (61); "Didn't you nourish me with lifelessness?" (64). Rather than a valorization of the mother, or an exploration of her subjectivity, the text promotes a daughter's matrophobia which silences the mother. Only through words, through the verbal distinction between "you" and "I" is the daughter able to maintain her separateness, but in doing this, Hirsch points out, "the mother is excluded from discourse by the daughter that owns it" (The Mother/Daughter Plot 137). Of course Irigaray intends this negative approach to motherhood, the annihilation of the mother-daughter bond, to be seen as the result of patriarchal institutionalization of the mother:

When I speak of the *relationship to the mother*, I want to say that, in our patriarchal culture, the daughter may absolutely not determine her relationship to her mother. Nor the woman her relationship to maternity, unless it is to reduce herself to it. ("This Sex" Trans. Wenzel 56)

By suggesting that women are "reduced" to motherhood, however, Irigaray seems to negate what is arguably the only essentialist feature of female sexuality, for regardless of whether or not a woman chooses to have children, only women can be mothers.

Irigaray sees the woman's way out of the patriarchal labyrinth to lie in her notion of a "parler femme", the secret language women share amongst themselves, spoken outside the symbolic order, and therefore beyond symbolic meaning:

One must listen differently to hear *another meaning*. For when 'she' says something, it is already no longer identical to what she means...[She is] already elsewhere... If you ask them insistently what they are thinking about, they can only reply: nothing. Everything. ("This Sex" 103)

Of course it is easy to appreciate the logic behind Irigaray's approach, for if femininity is that which cannot be spoken in language, woman, by implication, cannot express her meaning in the symbolic order. We are reminded here, however, of the fate of Cordelia

who dies because she says "Nothing". As her father rightly warns her, "Nothing will come of nothing: speak again" (*King Lear* Act I, Sc i, 90) The same lesson should be applied here: by suggesting that feminine writing is undefinable, it becomes too easy to say that "parler femme" cannot be defined, thus locating woman in that silent region of unknowability from which she has been trying to escape.

In sharp contrast to Irigaray's attack on the paradigm of the mother, Kristeva's "Stabat Mater" explores the joys (as well as the pains) of motherhood, in an effort to inscribe a new discourse of the maternal based on women's experiences. Using the image of the Virgin Mary, as well as her own experiences as a mother, Kristeva's essay addresses the question of "what is there, in the portrayal of the Maternal in general and particularly in its Christian, virginal, one, that reduces social anguish and gratifies a male being; what is there that also satisfies a woman?" (163). Following the development of Virgin iconography, mapped by Warner in *Alone of All Her Sex*, Kristeva seeks to answer this question by examining how the image of the Virgin Mother has, on the one hand, empowered women, whilst on the other, has allowed the symbolic order to maintain its control over her. As Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, the image of Mary has been invested with immense power. The Virgin birth allows her to deny man his part in procreation, and as compensation for Eve's prior sinfulness, her immaculate conception permits her to transcend death and obtain eternal life. All of this is permitted upon one condition: "that the ultimate supremacy and divinity of the male be maintained in the person of the Son, before whom the Mother kneels and to whom she is subservient" (Suleiman 368).

The "post-virginal" decade of the nineties has rendered the powerful Marian tradition obsolete.⁸ Without a substitute paradigm to replace the myth of the Virgin, Kristeva argues, we are left without a corresponding discourse that satisfactorily accounts for women's desire to have children. In her search for a new discourse, Kristeva demands that women move beyond Christian morality to create an "herethics" of their own: "Its reformulation demands the contribution of women. Of women who harbour the desire to reproduce. Of

women who are available so that our speaking species, which knows it is mortal, might understand death. Of mothers" (185).

In her own text, Kristeva locates this new "herethic" in the fragmented narrative of her experiences as mother and daughter, a narrative which interrupts her discursive account of the Marian tradition, and occupies the "extra-linguistic regions of the unnameable", the "tremendous territory hither and yon of the parentheses of language" vacated by the obsolete Virgin (174-5). Like the Virgin's milk and tears, Kristeva's "lyrical fragments" (Suleiman 369) "are the metaphors of non-speech, of a 'semiotics' that linguistic communication does not account for" ("Stabat Mater" 174).

The importance of the non-verbal, of the "semiotic", is fundamental to any understanding of Kristeva's works. Associated with the unconscious, it is the site of all those experiences suppressed by the symbolic order, but made manifest in various intrusive (potentially subversive) ways. Felski explains that these "ruptures in syntactical and semantic unity, the exploration of patterns of rhythms and repetition in poetic language, do not allow the reader to apprehend any coherent and unified signified" (33). Just as the unconscious operates to destabilize our experience of ourselves as unified subjects, so too does the semiotic operate to deconstruct the phallic wholeness of the symbolic order.

As an alternative to Irigaray's "parler femme", the semiotic is linked specifically with the pre-Oedipal experiences of infancy, the pre-linguistic dialogue associated with the body of the mother, through whom we experience our earliest sensations. An awareness of the semiotic is not specific to women, nor is it exclusively appropriated by either "masculinity" or "femininity": existing in the pre-Oedipal phase, where masculine/feminine opposition does not exist, it partakes of both, and is available to both sexes. Nonetheless, women do have a special relationship to the semiotic because the sensations they experience as mothers are likely to make it more accessible to them.⁹

In "Stabat Mater", therefore, Kristeva is able to re-create the pre-Oedipal experience she shared with her own mother through her relationship with her son. United by the same

pre-Oedipal sensations, she rejoices in the link that connects the mother, the daughter, and the son, recognizing and celebrating this union in the semiotic discourse:

Concerning that stage of my childhood, scented, warm, and soft to the touch, I have only a sensual memory... Fragrance of honey, roundness of forms, silk and velvet under my fingers, on my cheeks. Mummy... Almost no voice in her placid presence. (180)

Recovered childhood, dreamed peace restored, in sparks, flash of cells, instants of laughter... opaque joy that roots me in her bed, my mother's, and projects him, a son, a butterfly soaking up dew from her hand, there, nearby, in the night. Alone: she, I and he. (172)

Kristeva's imagery here echoes the sensations she has earlier described when breast-feeding her son: "Scent of milk, dewed greenery ... it slides under the skin ... fondles the veins ... inflates me ... while he dances in my neck ... slips on the breast, swingles, silver vivid blossom of my belly" (171). Contrasting with Irigaray's imagery, the mother's milk, far from nourishing a "paralyzing effect of lifelessness", evokes, instead, the sensuous pleasures that enhance life.

Kristeva does not fall into the trap of painting an idyllic picture of motherhood, however, but recognizes the pain attendant on child-birth and child-rearing: "One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain" (167). Like Irigaray, she is aware of the problematics of the mother-daughter relationship, the hatred of the mother for the daughter (180), and the daughter's confusion when she realizes that the mother, the other, is a separate being (181). "Within this strange feminine see-saw that makes me swing from the unnameable community of women over to the war of individual singularities, it is unsettling to say 'I' " (182). Remaining outside the patriarchal "Law" that demands "individual singularity" is not possible either: she "yearns" for its identity in the face of "the impossibility of being without repeated legitimation (without books, man, family)" (174).

In the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic enacted here, Kristeva cannot resolve the tensions within herself, but she does use the semiotic to challenge the phallic constructs of femininity that she is forced to live in the symbolic order. Finally, she is

unable to resolve the paradox of "deprivation and benefit of child-birth" (168) but she has begun to un-freeze the see-saw between the unconscious and the conscious being. Suleiman summarizes the power of her text clearly: Kristeva's semiotic discourse, through its interruptions, "counterpoints" the Law-of-the-Father. Similarly, "the mother's *inner* discourse is in counterpoint to the discourse given to her, constructed about her, by Christianity, the dominant order of Western culture" (369).

It seems ungrateful to criticize Kristeva's efforts for what is a genuinely brave and daringly open-ended attempt to create a new discourse of motherhood, yet the difficulty many feminist theorists have found with her work ultimately bring us back to problems that seem to lie at the heart of French feminism. In spite of their different approaches, the fact that Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva all see women as a linguistic absence seems, in the end, to be self-defeating. Kristeva is not exempt from this approach, stating that "I therefore understand by 'woman' ... that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies" (137). Rita Felski, in particular, is powerfully articulate in voicing the major flaw inherent in their approach. Calling into question their association of language with power, she undermines the premise at the heart of their work:

The definition of language proposed is a circular one; symbolic discourse is phallogentric, therefore processes of communication are always and necessarily phallogentric. Whether it is men or women who speak and whatever the context and content of their language, in speaking discursively they are doomed to speak the masculine. This view thereby serves to reinscribe women in a position of speechlessness outside language, theory and the symbolic order, denying any potential power to female discourse. (42)

In an argument that she relates specifically to the semiotic, but which can also be applied to Irigaray's "parler femme" and Cixous's "writing the body", Felski goes on to say:

This argument seems to me unsatisfactory in that it reinscribes at the level of theoretical abstraction those gender specifications whose inevitability

feminists should be calling into question; from the social given that young children are primarily cared for by the mother, it extrapolates an abstract dualism grounded in the equation of the masculine with culture and the feminine with the baby and the presocial. (35)

In contrast with the French feminists' appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, therefore, we will go on to look at the way in which object-relations feminism has begun to question the "social given" at the heart of this debate, posing an entirely different problematic. Why is it that women want to mother?

iii

Object-relations Feminism: Psycho-Sexual Arrangements of Mothering

Unexamined assumptions: First, that a 'natural' mother is a person without further identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children; ... that the isolation of mothers and children together in the home must be taken for granted; that maternal love is, and should be, quite literally selfless. (Of Woman Born 22)

We have seen that, in spite of their different approaches, both French and Anglo-American feminists have insisted upon the importance of the mother figure in any consideration of feminist theory. Whether they are valorizing the mother-daughter relationship, or equating the pre-Oedipal phase with a particular experience of the "feminine", however, neither school of thought directly tackles the question of why it is that women want to mother, or what satisfaction they find in this parental role. Nonetheless, the assumption that parenting is to be equated with motherhood, and the isolation of mothers in the home as a "natural" consequence of this belief, is coming under increasing scrutiny from a certain branch of American feminism. Growing out of sociological studies, and more particularly, the object-relations school of psychoanalytic theory, the works of Chodorow, Dinnerstein and Rich have revolutionized feminist theory by challenging the cultural "norms" that dictate woman's role as mother. Deconstructing the patriarchal structure which lies at the heart of society, these writers destabilize our most

fundamenta' notions of the family in an attempt to liberate women from the institution that has become their prison. Rich explains that "[motherhood] has alienated women from their bodies by incarcerating us in them" (13); de-institutionalization and liberation, she argues, can only take place when women free themselves from the "selflessness" of the motherhood paradigm that currently defines and consumes us all.

Rich begins her critique of received notions of the mother figure by examining the evolution of the nuclear family, the social unit that determines our understanding of parental roles. Far from being the social "given" we have learnt to accept as "natural", Rich shows that the isolation of mother and children in the nuclear home is a relatively recent cultural development which arose largely as a result of industrialism, and the death of cottage industries. Of course women had been responsible for parenting before this time, but the rise of the nuclear family polarized the responsibilities of men and women, separating women from the work place in a previously unprecedented way. Although, as cheap labour, women did initially work in the factories, high unemployment soon put a stop to this: working away from home all day, they were now seen to be "neglecting" his children as well as growing dangerously independent. Ultimately, only the men were allowed to migrate from the home to the workplace, and women found themselves limited to unpaid, unacknowledged work in the house.

At the same time that women were forced into the home, however, the importance of what had now become exclusively "women's work" was devalued, although their "vocation" as wife and mother was elevated. Removed from the labour market, which became a masculine world characterized by utilitarianism and moral incertitude, women in the home became the receptacles of Christian love and salvation. Functioning as the key to man's salvation, woman became the redemptress whose duty was to rescue him from the secular amorality of the public sphere. Her home similarly became "a place of peace where the longings of the soul might be realized, and a shelter for those moral and spiritual values which the commercial spirit and the critical spirit were threatening to destroy, and therefore

also a sacred place, a temple" (Houghton 243). Vested with a new saintliness, woman became immobilized at the hearth by the selflessness and purity of the angelic ideal. Although she has now lost her sanctity, the ideal woman remains tied to the home, where she continues to be a loving wife, and selflessly devoted mother.

Gilbert and Gubar point out that the rise of the bourgeoisie distanced the middle-class women even from their power within the home: their "idleness" became not only a "symbol of their husbands' status" (NALW 54), but also distanced them from the skills they were expected to practice as "homemakers". For the working-class women who were forced into the labour force out of necessity, this new ideology meant that they now faced the extra responsibility of caring for their families as well as working full-time. In our present society, "stay-at-home" mothers continue to give up their own careers to bring up baby, while even the so-called "liberated" working mother continues to take chief responsibility for the upbringing of the children. Even as women begin to return to the workforce, then, they still bear the burden of child-rearing, and still have to come to terms with the image of the "Angel".

This image continues to form part of the strong social pressure that has influenced our concept of motherhood. It also suggests, however, that what we now accept as "natural" in mothers is as much a social construct as our sense of gender itself. Yet, useful as these social developments are in accounting for the *images* of ideal femininity, they cannot fully explain why women continue to want to adopt this parental role. Chodorow points out that even if social images "expect or require a woman to care for her child, they cannot require her or force her to provide adequate parenting unless she, *to some degree and on some unconscious or conscious level*, has the capacity and sense of self as maternal to do so" (Reproduction 33). It is precisely this psycho-social aspect of women's desire to become mothers that Chodorow begins to explore in her feminist revision of object-relations theory.

Unlike Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, object-relations theory locates the site of

gender construction in the pre-Oedipal phase, and argues that our sense of self is defined through relationships with others during this period. According to this theory, gender difference originates not at the Oedipal stage, or with entry into language, but is "created relationally" through the earlier mother-child relationship ("Gender" 4). The infant begins to realize itself as Other not through misrecognition of itself as a unified subject, nor through its entry into language, when it takes up its speaking subject position; rather, the infant enters upon a process of "differentiation" during its pre-Oedipal relationship with its "primary caretaker", usually its mother. Emphasizing the relational aspect of this development, Chodorow insists that, more than simply a process of separation from the mother, differentiation is "*a particular way of being connected to others*" (11).

Although in agreement with Freud insofar as they accept that the child initially experiences itself as continuous with the outside world, the object-relations theorists maintain that this narcissistic state ends when the child is relatively young, when it learns to recognize "a demarcation between the self and the object world, coming to perceive the subject/self as distinct, or separate from, the object/other" ("Gender" 5). This development of "ego boundaries" and "body ego", known as "separation-individuation", occurs when the child becomes aware of the mother's absences, aware of the fact that she is not always there to immediately satisfy its demands. The child begins to acknowledge the separateness of the mother as she who is "not-me", while simultaneously recognizing her separateness from the rest of the object world. More than merely learning its individuality through the mother's presence and absence, therefore, the individual's process of differentiation grows out of a relationship with the mother, in relationship to that mother, and through the recognition of the fact that she is not simply "other", but has her own distinct subjectivity. "Thus, as the self is differentiated from the object world, the object world is itself differentiated into its component parts" ("Gender" 6). Consequently, as the infant begins to learn of its own separateness, it also begins to learn something about the way other people relate to itself, internalizing these relational experiences as part of its own individuality.

Chodorow explains:

Images of felt good and bad aspects of the mother or primary caretaker, caretaking experiences, and the mothering relationship become part of the self, of a relational ego structure... As externality and internality are established, therefore, what comes to be internal includes what originally were aspects of the other and the relation to the other. ("Gender" 9)

Such an interrelation certainly places an extra burden on the mother, for as long as she is the one who provides primary care, it will be through her "good-enough" mothering that children learn, or fail to learn, not only their sense of self, but also their sense of self in relation to others. As Chodorow so accurately points out, "Mother is always the parent at fault when things go wrong. It is *her* care that must be consistent and reliable; it is *her* absence that produces anxiety" (Reproduction 60-1).

Nonetheless, this theory does promote other aspects of infant-caretaker relationships that have been useful for feminist theorists. The radical departure from Freudian analysis, the emphasis object-relations theory places on the child's ability to recognize its mother's separateness, does at least create room for the mother's individuality, so often overlooked by psychoanalytic theory. It is in feminists' best interests, after all, to emphasize her subjectivity, and this approach allows the mother to become more than simply "other", as all the rest of the outside world is other, finally according her a selfhood of her own. Of course the recognition of her separateness is not unproblematical for the child; indeed, as long as social discourses and psychoanalytic theory continue to position her as the *object* of pre-Oedipal attachment, we are likely to continue in our failure to acknowledge her autonomy, even when she reaches adulthood. Chodorow is very deliberate, here, in her additional emphasis that, important as it is for women to "liberate [themselves] from such perceptions" ("Gender" 8), this action alone will not be enough. Only when shared parenting becomes common-place, she argues, will women achieve an individuality that is not compromised by the institution of motherhood.

Although we have explored some of the revolutionary potential of object-relations

theory, we have yet to examine the ways in which feminists have used this theory to explain why the responsibility of child-rearing continues to be an almost exclusively female-dominated concern. As we have seen, the child's experience of selfhood develops in relation to maternal care, but this development is dependent on a much more inter-active relationship than has so far been suggested. For the mother-child relationship is not simply a one-way activity and the mother's experience of her child is a significant factor in that child's development. As an already-engendered subject, she is likely to experience her son as different from herself, a "masculine other" treated differently from a daughter, whom she recognizes as an extension of herself. Furthermore, as a subject influenced by her own socially conditioned expectations of gender roles, the mother is also likely to place her children in social and relational activities in different ways, thus re-stating the learned gender roles. These factors, in combination with the child's resolution of the Oedipus complex, Chodorow argues, ultimately affect female and male relational possibilities, and thus through gender socialization, nurturing capabilities are either emphasized or suppressed.

The closeness of the mother-daughter bond, and the fact that, as females, both protagonists recognize their similarities, means that the contention between mother-love and father-love occurs much later in girls than in boys. Chodorow hypothesizes that, in fact, the daughter may turn to the father only as a sign of sexual awakening. In his relationship with her, he will place her in the gender positions and activities associated with the "femininity" of her sex. If the daughter envies her father the penis at all, in this theory, it is only insofar as it is a symbol of the power from which, as a member of the "weaker" or "inferior" sex, she is excluded. The notorious Freudian theory of penis-envy is therefore laid to rest, and the focus of the Oedipal phase becomes a mother-daughter issue rather than a father-daughter concern. The daughter experiences herself as an extension of her mother; indeed the relationship is often experienced by the daughter as one that stifles her individuality. She turns to heterosexual relationships, therefore, as a means of asserting her

own identity, although it should be noted that the daughter's separation from the mother grows out of their shared relationship, rather than in opposition with the primary caretaker. Without having to reject her pre-Oedipal attachment, the daughter builds on her earliest relationship, gaining her autonomy while she continues to love and identify with the mother. As a result, girls experience relationships as an extension of the mother-daughter love, and "their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries" (Reproduction 169).

Unlike the daughter of the mother, the son of the father must adopt a culturally defined gender position that demands the rejection of his earliest love. Partly through his mother's treatment of himself as a sexual "other", and partly through the socializing process that demands identification with the father, the son must learn to suppress those aspects of self that operate in conflict with his sense of himself as masculine. He must therefore establish clear, fixed boundaries that define him as the opposite of his mother. This inevitably results in the emergence of a self that is distinct from pre-Oedipal attachment; indeed the "successful" resolution of his Oedipus complex dictates that he detaches himself from the mother, and redefines his ego boundaries. Although he will later learn to attach his earliest, heterosexual love to another woman, his desire for the other does not develop beyond the pre-Oedipal phase. His relational capacities will also have been curtailed by a separation that girls are never required to make. Chodorow summarizes the consequences of this difference clearly:

From the retention of pre-Oedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define themselves as continuous with others... Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of the self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate. (Reproduction 169)

In The Mermaid and the Minotaur, Dinnerstein explores the implications of this male/female development in adult relationships, demonstrating that the process of

socialization renders men and women incapable of satisfying each other's needs. The woman's sense of self flows outward, and she will look for emotional fulfilment in her relationships with man. Although he turns to woman as the sex that he first loved, and as a confirmation of his masculinity, his suppression of relational intimacy unfortunately renders him incapable of satisfying her relational needs. She is therefore unlikely to find the emotional intensity she desires from a relationship, while he cannot comprehend the reasons for her dissatisfaction: "She is typically dealing with a partner in some way heavily calloused, and he typically lives in an atmosphere of some kind of reproach: he is heartless; she nags and complains" (71).

Mother-dominated child-rearing, according to Chodorow, Dinnerstein and Rich, also generates a tendency for the man to want to be mothered by the woman, a desire that the woman often aims to satisfy. Chodorow states that the emphasis on the woman's "relational" and "personal" role is "maternal" for both children and men (Reproduction 5). Rich agrees: "the mother looms in each woman for the grown-up boy" (Of Woman Born 189). Dinnerstein succinctly explains the causes of this when she connects the dynamics of mother-dominated parenting with adult sexual experience. The male adult once again finds sexual pleasure and tenderness outside himself, in a relationship with the female body that, for him, has not altered since infancy. Qualities that he first experienced in his mother are now replayed for him by his female partner. The woman, however, has on one level inhabited the body that first gave her pleasure, and in a sense has become the mother. Her own feelings, then, and the way she is viewed by the man, place her in the mother's role, a role confirmed by social discourses. As Rich describes it, the "sons of the father", those who have been forced to abandon their pre-Oedipal love, are "searching everywhere for the woman with whom they can be infantile" (Of Woman Born 209).

Furthermore, because the man's sense of self is separate, the woman is prompted to compensate for his lack of relational capabilities, which fall short of her needs for intimacy. Disappointed and frustrated by a relationship that fails to satisfy as the original

mother-daughter relationship did, and troubled by a self-esteem that values itself on the success of her relationships, the woman tries to recreate the original mother-daughter bond by having a child of her own. Rather than being a substitution for the penis, the child becomes a means of recreating the lost intimacy the daughter shared with her mother.

Using her feminist revision of object-relations theory, Chodorow explains this need for maternal intimacy on the woman's part, and the absence of comparable relational needs on the man's, as a cyclical product of mother-dominated nurturance:

Women's mothering reproduces itself cyclically. Women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. By contrast, women as mothers (and men as not mothers) produce sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed. (Reproduction 7)

Convincing as Chodorow's account is, however, many feminist critics have criticized her for failing to take on board any consideration of other social factors that have influenced women's position as mother. In Of Woman Born, Rich is careful to explore a number of social institutions, as well as the principles of psychoanalysis, that can account for why women mother. She shows how the State, for example, has never hesitated to interfere with the female body and order its reproductive capacities to suit its own purposes. Patriarchal governments of various countries and cultures have used or denied birth control and abortion for their own political ends, and propaganda has always been used either to encourage pregnancies or restrict the size of families. (Of Woman Born 271f). Rich also demonstrates ways in which religious doctrine has established archetypes of motherhood that women have been forced to try and emulate. We have already seen how the iconography of the Virgin Mary has dominated women's perceptions of the ideal mother: her image operates in contrast with Eve's, the volumptuous temptress whose sexuality has been held up as the cause of female suffering in child-birth. Rich points out that both of these images associate woman with passive suffering: medieval woman saw herself as

paying for Eve's transgression in her child-birth, and in the Victorian age woman could live a "blessed" life pursuing the martyrdom of the "Angel in the House", redeeming man by atoning for Eve's original fall (Of Woman Born 163).

Lynne Segal likewise suggests that many social practices and institutions, such as schools, music, recreation and the media, also play a large part in determining the child's perception of gender roles. This gender coding is eventually carried over into the adult world of politics and the work place, which do not encourage female participation, but often act as an inducement for women to remain at home (see Segal 156-7). Segal is concerned that, in limiting herself to a psycho-sociological account, Chodorow fails to consider, for example, the economic set-up of a working world that encourages underpaid women workers to remain at home and bring up baby. She goes on to argue that Chodorow's theory totally discounts the weight of social benefit men stand to gain by giving up mother:

It seems bizarre therefore to suggest that boys simply acquire their masculinity negatively, in the rejection of their mothers' embrace, when they are embraced and boosted up constantly ... by a myriad of social practices which will continue to place boys and men in positions of power over girls and women. (152-3)

In Chodorow's defence, it should be pointed out that she is aware of "the barrage of oughts about having babies and being a good mother from television, toys, storybooks, textbooks, magazines, schools, religion, laws", but ultimately she believes that these serve only to "reinforce the less intended and unconscious development of orientations and relational capacities that the psychoanalytic account of feminine development describes" (Reproduction 51-2). She accepts that "the sex-gender system is a social, psychological and cultural totality" (Debate 502), but maintains that her book sets out to account for why women *want* to mother, which she sees as a psychoanalytical concern.

But the major doubt about this branch of feminism is that, although it has proved useful in counteracting the argument that women mother naturally or instinctively, it does not

necessarily help women to escape from the motherhood paradigm. Shared parenting may *not* resolve differences in the relational capacities of men and women, and as long as the social structure reinforces the assumption that women are "natural" primary caretakers, men are unlikely to take on their full share of parenting responsibilities. Finally, we are left with the question of where these "new men" will come from, and whether women will welcome them when they appear. As Suleiman eloquently observes, the fact that we now understand *why* we mother does not automatically erase the "maternal" instincts we have learnt:

What is involved here ... is not simply an institutional or social problem; alternate nurturers will not necessarily relieve it ... because the conflicts are *inside* the mother, they are part of her most fundamental experience. One can always argue, as Rich and others have done, that the internal conflicts are the result of institutional forces, the result of women's isolation, women's victimization by the motherhood myth in patriarchal society. But while this argument can help us understand *why* the conflicts are internal, it does not eliminate them. (362-3)

The paradox that seems to lie at the heart of this debate, the tension between the valorization of the mother figure and the deconstruction of the motherhood discourse, remains at the heart of a feminist problematic.

CHAPTER II

THE MOTHER/DAUGHTER PLOT: RECLAIMING THE MOTHER AS MUSE

As soon as she was able to consider things, Virginia believed that she was the heiress to two very different and in fact opposed traditions; indeed she went further and held that these two rival streams dashed together and flowed confused but not harmonised in her blood. (Bell 18)

The tension between the conflicting legacies Woolf was to inherit from her mother and father, themselves emblematic of the contrast between the patriarchal and matriarchal traditions generally, emerges as one of the most significant factors to influence Woolf as a feminist writer. In Moments of Being and To the Lighthouse she struggles to reclaim the mother, yet this re-appropriation proves to be problematical for the feminist daughter. For as she recovers her matrilineal inheritance, Woolf inevitably finds herself valorizing a mother figure confined within a traditional role she must reject for herself if she is to succeed as a female artist. Similarly, she must distance herself from her father's tradition, although her position and interests as writer and critic identify her more closely with his concerns. Although Bell maintains that these "rival streams" flowed "confused" and unharmonized, the working out of this tension in both her autobiographical and fictional work suggests that Woolf finally was able to achieve some sort of balance between the two traditions.

In what was a new departure for women's writing, To the Lighthouse was unashamedly acknowledged as an autobiographical fiction, a public display of what Woolf privately described as her inner "obsessions":

Until I was in the forties - I could settle the date by seeing when I wrote To the Lighthouse. ... the presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings. She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life. (Sketch'89)
Further, just as I rubbed out a good deal of the force of my mother's memory by writing about her in To the Lighthouse, so I rubbed out much of [my father's] memory there too. (Sketch'119)

In fact, To the Lighthouse was to prove a pivotal text in Woolf's resolution of her ambivalent feelings towards both of her parents. Yet what she does in this novel is in some ways untypical of the work that follows, for the central characters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the fictional representations of Leslie and Julia Stephen, rigidly adhere to the traditional gender binary that Woolf was later to undermine, most obviously in Orlando. Arguably, this development in Woolf's work can be seen as a reflection of the progress of feminist theory in its larger aspect, for it is only after she has constructed the mother as a positive presence that she is free to begin the deconstruction of gender identity. In "Reminiscences" and To the Lighthouse, therefore, the mother becomes the valorized figure of the masculine/feminine dichotomy, retaining her newly-esteemed position in "A Sketch of the Past" which, written twelve years after To the Lighthouse, finally makes room for the father's contribution to Woolf's inheritance.

Raised within the conservative traditionalism of her aunt's and uncle's home, Julia Stephen is always recognized as a product of the Victorian concept of femininity, her "education" merely a confirmation of her role as ministering angel:

Little Holland House then was her education. She was taught there to take such part as girls did then in in the lives of distinguished men; to pour out tea; to hand them their strawberries and cream; to listen devoutly, reverently to their wisdom; to accept the fact that Watts was the great painter; Tennyson the great poet; and to dance with the Prince of Wales. (Sketch'98)

As confirmation of her occupation of the roles of ideal wife and mother, Julia Stephen is described always in terms of her beauty and her social presence; she is truly the Angel of the House who devotes herself to husband and family. In her "supremely beautiful youth" she is like a "princess in a pageant" (Reminiscences"38): "her presence was large and austere, bringing with it not only joy and life, exquisite femininities, but the majesty of a nobly composed human being" (Reminiscences"43). Mrs. Ramsay is similarly described as an "incomparable beauty" (31), a "queen who, finding her people gathered in the hall, ... descends among them... and accepts their devotion and their prostration before her" (77-8).

Julia Stephen and Mrs. Ramsay not only embody the ideal physical attributes and social talents traditionally ascribed to women: they also play the irrational, sensitive foils to their husbands' cold rationality. While Leslie Stephen's "severe love of truth" ("Sketch" 147) would never permit him to make up stories about "wild eagles flying over London" ("Sketch" 132), Julia Stephen delights in "striking out in a phrase or two pictures of all the people who came past her" ("Reminiscences" 43). His love of factual knowledge is also counter-balanced by her instinctive knowledge which intuitively directs her responses: "she had great clearness of insight, sound judgement, humour, and a power of grasping very quickly the real nature of someone's circumstances" (41). Mrs. Ramsay's knowledge of this "truth", suspect because it cannot be accounted for in rational terms, nonetheless partakes of this female intuition:

She knew then - she knew without having learnt. Her simplicity fathomed what clever people falsified. Her singleness of mind made her drop plumb like a stone, alight exact as a bird, gave her, naturally, this swoop and fall of the spirit upon truth which delighted, eased, sustained - falsely perhaps. (31)

But Mrs. Ramsay's sensitivity is inseparable from these very qualities that Mr. Ramsay often finds intolerable:

The extraordinary irrationality of her mind, the folly of women's minds enraged him... She flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what was utterly out of the question, in effect, told lies ...
To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilization so wantonly, so brutally, was to her [a] horrible ... outrage of human decency. (34)

These conflicts between rationality and irrationality, "masculine" intellect and "feminine" sensitivity, are the inevitable moments of discord in marriages that also enjoy their share of perfect harmony. The melodious notes of marriage, however, "the high consonance, the flute voices of two birds in tune", can only be achieved after what Woolf describes in her own parents' marriage as "rich rapid scales of discord, and incongruity"

("Reminiscences" 44). Although she is prepared to acknowledge that "whether you judge by their work or by themselves ... it was a triumphant life, consistently aiming at high things", Woolf is also aware that this triumph was only achieved at her mother's expense: "there were certain matters which seem to us now decided by her too much in a spirit of compromise, and exacted by him without regard for justice or magnanimity" ("Reminiscences" 40). Although Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay achieve similar cordiality, Mrs. Ramsay also bears the weight of the burden these rich moments entail:

Every throb of this pulse seemed, as he walked away, to enclose her and her husband, and to give to each that solace which two different notes, one high, one low, struck together, seem to give each other as they combine. Yet, as the resonance died ... Mrs. Ramsay felt ... exhausted in body. (40)

It is as a result of this exhaustion, her constant "giving, giving, giving" (140), that Mrs. Ramsay dies, for the effort of becoming the "resting platform of stability" from where she "summons others together" finally overcomes her (Lighthouse 39). Like Julia Stephen, she is seen to have "expanded so far ... that retrenchment was beyond her power" ("Reminiscences" 45), and death becomes inevitable.

Nonetheless, in absorbing the discord of married life, Julia Stephen and Mrs. Ramsay are acting to fulfil their roles as good wives. They have learnt the "magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (Room 35), reverencing their husbands' intellect as something beyond their own understanding, even beyond their view from the domestic sphere. Julia's pride in Leslie Stephen's intellect, therefore, was like "the pride of one in some lofty mountain peak, visited only by the light of the stars, and the rain of snow; it was enthusiastic, but very humble" (44). Re-assessing her father's skills from her own adult perspective, Woolf is not so blind to his failings, for she recognizes the scope and limitations of her father's mental abilities, a man with a "strong" mind, but one that is not "subtle", "not an imaginative mind; not a suggestive mind" ("Sketch" 127).

Consequently, when Woolf returns to the same mountain imagery in To the

Lighthouse, she offers us a different interpretation of the father's philosophical trek. Her depiction of Mr. Ramsay's journey through the rugged peaks of intellect is far from reverential, for although "there was nobody [Mrs. Ramsay] revered more" (34), Woolf herself is ironic in her treatment of his "expedition across the icy solitudes of the polar region" (36). Mr. Ramsay does not have the mind of a genius, but, rather, an unimaginatively logical intellect which is limited in its own rational terms:

It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. (35)

In spite of the fact that this "splendid mind" is constructed upon the individual components of music or language, it lacks sensitivity to artistic beauty, and although we are constantly invited to "think of his work", we do so always in the light of Lily Briscoe's understanding. His philosophy becomes associated with the banality of a "scrubbed kitchen table" (26), which Lily visually projects into a pear tree. In her "painful effort of concentration", she has to close off her mind from its own imaginative response to the organic "silver-bossed bark of the tree" or "its fish-shaped leaves" in order to become attuned to Mr. Ramsay's method of thinking, but this exposes Mr. Ramsay's "work" as both reductive and absurd:

Naturally, if one's days were passed in this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table (and it was a mark of the finest minds to do so), naturally one could not be judged like an ordinary person. (26)

Woolf's irony touches here upon one of Mr. Ramsay's and Leslie Stephen's most delicate concerns, because it is precisely as "ordinary people" that they are judged and found wanting. Aware of their deficiencies, both the real-life Leslie Stephen and his fictional counterpart repeatedly turn to their wives for reassurance and sympathy, to be told

that they do have talent, that their fame will last. In fact, in an inversion of outward appearances, Woolf demonstrates that the public renown of these "great" male thinkers actually draws all its strength from the woman's creative source:

Mrs. Ramsay, who had been sitting loosely ... braced herself, and ... seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating ... and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. (38)

Adding a new dimension to the motherhood paradigm, therefore, Woolf elevates the mother's familial role to a new artistic significance. More than mere reflectors of patriarchal power, Julia Stephen and Mrs. Ramsay are accorded a creative genius of their own, a talent formerly unrecognized in the public realm of art. "The whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating" rests upon Mrs. Ramsay's talents (79), whose triumphant dinner party unites "a house full of unrelated passions" in a communion that "disintegrates" in her absence. For Mrs. Ramsay, her family and her guests, the supper becomes one of those "moments of being" that Lily and Woolf aim to capture in their work. For just as they record and create in words and paint respectively, so Mrs. Ramsay inscribes her genius in memory:

[Mrs. Ramsay] brought together this and that and then this, and so made out of that miserable stillness and spite ... something ... which survived after all these years, complete, so that [Lily] dipped into it ... and it stayed in the mind almost like a work of art... Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent). (150-51)

The earlier characterization of Julia Stephen also describes a female artist of the domestic sphere who similarly constructs order out of the chaos of daily life: "All lives, directly she crossed them seemed to form themselves into a pattern and while she stayed each move was of the utmost importance" (*Reminiscences* 42). Situated at the centre of the

family circle, she is "omnipresent", "the creator of that crowded merry world which spun so gaily in the centre of [Woolf's] childhood" (Sketch"94). After her death, the giddy world of Hyde Park Gate "stood still" and the family integration dissolved, just as in Mrs. Ramsay's absence, "the link that usually bound things together had been cut" (!38).

Initially undertaken as a study of Leslie Stephen, To the Lighthouse evolved into a different kind of fiction, one which privileged the figure of Julia Stephen. In Woolf's writing, it was the mother who was to become the prominent figure of her novel. Thus it is Mrs. Ramsay's inspiration and approval that Lily Briscoe seeks, just as the young Virginia Stephen delighted in her mother's praise and attention:

How excited I used to be when the "Hyde Park Gate News" was laid on her plate on Monday morning and she liked something I had written! Never shall I forget my extremity of pleasure - it was like being a violin played upon - when I found that she had sent a story of mine to Madge Symonds; it was so imaginative, she said. (Sketch"105-6)

More than the person from whom their daughters seek approval, however, the mother figure also becomes the source of inspiration who holds the key to the discovery of "truth":

Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge? Was it, once more, the deceptiveness of beauty ... or did she lock up within her some secret? ... She imagined ... in the chambers of the mind and heart of [Mrs. Ramsay] ... tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public... Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge. (50-1)

Rejecting the primacy of patriarchal "inscriptions", Woolf invests the mother figure with an alternative "truth" inscribed in a language unrecorded and unrecognized by the patriarchal literary tradition. This knowledge is locked within the maternal inheritance, which the daughter as artist can only discover by sharing love and intimacy with the mother, and it is not until Lily achieves this intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay that she experiences her final moment of vision.

As the guardian of the "truth" their daughters seek, the mother figure is invested with the revelatory power of the Muse, which Woolf claims as the daughter's source of visionary insight. She is the figure who makes life "stand still", generating unity out of chaos. Appropriating the mother as the female artist's Muse was to prove a radical move on the part of the feminist daughter. Indeed, twenty years after the publication of To the Lighthouse Robert Graves was still claiming woman as the male poet's White Goddess and the source of inspiration, while Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence, in spite of its Freudian revisions of the White Goddess myth, continues to uphold the belief that the male poet "engender[s] himself upon the Muse his mother" (37). Robert Graves conceded that women could succeed as artists, but only on condition that they somehow became the White Goddess themselves. According to patriarchal doctrine, therefore, the only roles available to women were either the figure of the male poets' inspiration, the Muse whose presence is experienced as "mixed exaltation and horror" (Graves 14), or "a personification of primitive woman - woman the creatress and destructress" (Graves 384).

By invoking the mother as the artistic daughter's Muse, Woolf clearly signalled the feminist departure from this model, for although the earliest sketch of Julia Stephen idealizes the mother as almost otherworldly, she is well removed from Graves' destructive White Goddess. In Woolf's interpretation, the mother is a benevolent force who "seemed to watch, like some wise Fate, the birth, growth, flower and death of innumerable lives all around her, with a constant sense of the mystery that encircled them" (*Reminiscences* 41). Unquestionably, her presence generates meaning and significance for all those she encounters:

Whether she came merry, wrathful or in impulsive sympathy, it does not matter; they speak of her as of a thing that happened, recalling, as though all round her grew significant, how she stood and turned and how the bird sang loudly, or a great cloud passed across the sky. (*Reminiscences* 46)

It is not only Julia who lends meaning to the moment, for Mrs. Ramsay also possesses the power of "revelation", a power Lily must experience before her "vision" is completed:

Mrs. Ramsay saying 'Life stand still here'; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent ... this was the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this external passing and flowing ... was stuck into stability. Life stand still here Mrs. Ramsay said. 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she repeated. She owed this revelation to her. (151)

This is the secret that Lily has longed to share, and which Mrs. Ramsay finally reveals to her when she makes her visionary appearance: "Mrs. Ramsay - it was part of her perfect goodness to Lily - sat there quite simply in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat" (186). Only after this appearance can Lily voluntarily turn to Mr. Ramsay before completing her painting.

Representative of the standards that their daughters reject, however, the Mother as Muse also occupies a space of tension for her female beneficiaries, who are interested in carving out new professions for women. As "hero-worshipper" and selfless Angel, the mother figure is recognized as a dangerous role model to imitate, her creativity in the private sphere culminating in death, and her qualities as selfless Angel representing a different sort of death for the female artist of the public sphere. Certainly, Lily refuses to give herself up to Mr. Ramsay in the same way that his wife does. Indeed, on her return to the Hebrides, Lily registers anger over a wifely generosity that might be more accurately described as indulgence. Refusing to repeat the same mistake, she will not offer up anything of herself to Mr. Ramsay until she has secured her own independence as an artist. By the same token, the young Vanessa and Virginia Stephen also resented and rejected their father's claim to their devotion, refusing to follow the fatal example set by both their mother and their half-sister, Stella Duckworth:

There were signs ... which woke us to a sort of frenzy, that he was quite prepared to take Vanessa for his next victim. When he was sad, he explained, she should be sad; when he was angry ... she should weep; instead she stood before him like a stone. A girl who had character would not tolerate such speeches, and when she connected them with other words of the same kind, addressed to the sister lately dead, to her mother even, it was not strange that an uncompromising anger took possession of her. (Reminiscences"64-65)

Clearly distancing themselves from the selfless, sacrificial role taken up by their female

predecessors, the Stephens and Lily Briscoe use their vocations as artists to displace the marriage/family plot. Inevitably rebelling against the roles their mothers have fulfilled, they begin to "sport infidel ideas ... of a life different from [their mothers'] ... not always taking care of some man or other" (Lighthouse 12). Thus we see that, although on one level Lily venerates Mrs. Ramsay, on another significant plane she must reject her maternal power, and refuse to adopt the role intended for her in Mrs. Ramsay's marriage plot. Mrs. Ramsay, after all, "cared not a fig for her painting" (49), yet by moving the salt cellar at the dinner table, and reminding herself of her work, Lily remembers that she does not have to give herself up to marriage, but can be exempted from this "universal law" (50): "there's my painting ... that matters - nothing else" (81).

There are moments when Lily defies her Muse, then, which signal this difference between mother and daughter. One such moment occurs when Lily feels she has triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay by stamping her own values on life, by defining her own alternative:

And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes ... I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely. At that all her being, even her beauty, became for a moment, dusty and out of date. For a moment Lily triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay, who would never know that she stood here painting, had never married, not even William Bankes. (162)

Assessing the significance of Lily's defiant stand in what she calls the "mother-daughter plot", Hirsch locates the daughter's story "between *repetition* of past female plots and the possibility of *transformation*" (Mother/Daughter Plot 116): "What emerges ... is an intense, passionate, and ambivalent preoccupation with the mother, which oscillates between a longing for connection and a need for disconnection" (96). As we have already seen, the recovery of the mother from the urbanity of her housewifely role proves to be a difficult and complex task. The daughter as artist simultaneously elevates and criticizes the "femininity" her mother embodies, for as the unacknowledged artist who too-closely resembles the deathly Angel of the House, the mother figure cannot be easily accommodated in the daughter's "new order". As Carolyn Heilbrun points out, therefore,

the reader of To the Lighthouse is never quite certain whether it is Mrs. Ramsay's spirit or the fact of her death that helps her children on their quest to reach the lighthouse (see Heilbrun 155). We might also ponder on what Lily's fate might have been had Mrs. Ramsay lived, for although her *spirit* is unquestionably beneficial to Lily's work, Lily suspects that had she survived, Mrs. Ramsay might have succeeded in "compelling" her to marry William Bankes. There is definitely a suggestion, as Hirsch indicates, that in common with other female "Künstlerromane" of the period, Woolf's novel can only function as an elegy, for it is only after the mother's death that "memory and desire play their roles as instruments of connection, reconstruction and reparation" (97).

In writing the mother's story, then, Woolf acknowledges her debt to her maternal inheritance, but even the act of recording, the act of writing itself, indicates a gulf between mother and daughter, and a refusal of the traditional maternal role on the daughter's part. The relationship is further complicated when the ambivalence of Woolf's relationship to her father is introduced into the equation:

One evening, jumping about naked in the bathroom, [Virginia] shocked and startled her elder sister by asking her which of her parents she liked the best. Vanessa was appalled that such a question could be put, but she replied at once, for she was a very honest and forthright girl, that she thought she loved her mother best. Virginia, after much delay and deliberation, decided that she preferred her father. (Bell 26)

Throughout her life, Woolf constantly "deliberated" about her relationship to a mother whom she adored and a father whom she more closely resembled, and her eventual acknowledgement of an affinity shared with her father underlines the problematics of the valorization of the mother figure. Significantly, however, it is not until after the cathartic experience of writing To the Lighthouse, the novel that positions the mother in her rightful place as the female artist's artistic foremother, that Woolf is able to acknowledge her father's centrality in her own inheritance. Hence she paints two very different pictures of Leslie Stephen in "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past". In the earlier memoir,

pre-dating the novel, Woolf maintains that the young Stephens' image of the "tyrant father" was essentially accurate:

We made him the type of all that we hated in our lives; he was the tyrant of inconceivable selfishness, who had replaced the beauty and merriment of the dead with ugliness and gloom. We were bitter, harsh, and to a great extent unjust; but even now it seems to me that there was some truth in our complaint. (Reminiscences 65)

After writing To the Lighthouse, however, Woolf's analysis of her father-daughter relationship offers a more balanced account. Identifying a closer similarity between herself and Leslie Stephen, Woolf is aware that she inherits his interests, his library, the patriarchal literary tradition of his education. Simultaneously engulfed in and excluded by this tradition, essentially the Eton-Cambridge production which does not admit women, Woolf nonetheless associates more closely with the artistry of this world than with the concerns of her mother's domestic sphere:

I don't know if I'm like Mrs. Ramsay: as my mother died when I was 13 probably it is a child's view of her... She has haunted me: but then so did that old wretch my father... I was more like him than her, I think; and therefore more critical: but he was an adorable man, and somehow, tremendous. (To V. Sackville West. Congenial Spirits 223-4)

As a child, she often shared "his side" of an argument, and silently "affirmed [her] sympathy, felt [her] likeness" ("Sketch" 124). Although we have seen that the young Virginia delighted in her mother's praise, Woolf also recalls the pleasure of seeking out her father in his library, sharing her enjoyment of literature with him, and pleasing him with her request for yet another text to read:

Slowly he would unwrinkle his forehead and come to ground and realise with a very sweet smile that I stood there... Then, feeling proud and stimulated, and full of love for this unworldly, very distinguished and lonely man, whom I had pleased by coming, I would go back to the drawing room. ("Sketch" 172)

We must not, however, forget Woolf's scathing criticism of the "tyrant father" who

devastated her teenage years, and whom Woolf openly acknowledged to be a threat to her own career as a writer.¹⁰ Certainly, she does not want to emulate the limited genius of a logical mind that may well have progressed to Q in philosophical terms, but which, in terms of the imagination, barely knows its "ABC": "Give him a character to explain, and he is (to me) so crude, so elementary, so conventional that a child with a box of chalks could make a more subtle portrait" (Sketch"160). Woolf clearly identifies with Julia Stephen on this imaginative level, reaffirming Lily's belief that the mother figure carries within her the secret of artistic "truth". Nonetheless, it is her father who is more often and most obviously connected with the literary world, his library seen as a place apart from the chatter of the drawing room. Between his world of academia and Julia Stephen's domestic concerns "there was no connection. There were only deep divisions" (Sketch"172).

In To the Lighthouse Woolf finally comes to terms with these "deep divisions", drawing together the matriarchal and patriarchal artistry of the private and public sphere. Once Lily has learnt the centrality of Mrs. Ramsay to her creativity, she is able to accommodate Mr. Ramsay within her artistic consciousness. Throughout the final section of the novel she strives to "achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture" (178). The inspiration that *is* her painting comes from Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily relies on her for her "revelation", but once this artistic vision is secured, the opposing forces of masculinity and femininity can be resolved. With her mind "full of ... what she was seeing", she voluntarily addresses Mr. Ramsay before adding the final and crucial line at the centre of her painting: "And as if she had something she must share, yet could hardly leave her easel, so full was her mind of what she was thinking, of what she was seeing, Lily went ... to the edge of the lawn. Where was that boat now? Mr. Ramsay? She wanted him" (186).

Hirsch argues that the final line of Lily's painting is "drawn in the space where Lily can be productive - between mother and father, between feminine and masculine; not meant as a connection, it marks the perpetual boundary of Lily's difference" (114). But although

Lily's art is a means of asserting her refusal of the traditional feminine, or even masculine role, I think that Hirsch only tells part of the story here. Lily's final stroke settles whatever tension has been troubling her about the divided masses on the left and on the right of the picture. Hirsch interprets this final stroke as an "acceptance of contradiction", but stronger than "acceptance", Lily's vision must surely represent some sense of a contradiction reconciled or an opposition unified. Whatever effect the line at the centre of the painting has, in the eyes of the artist it successfully draws together two polarized forces into some sort of artistic harmony: the disparate elements of the painting, like the disparate elements of male and female gender identity, are finally "connected" in artistic creation. Drawing largely on the maternal dimension of this opposition, but finally reconciling it to its patriarchal counterpoint, Lily's vision, like Heilbrun's assessment of Woolf's work, becomes "less an inner tension between masculine and feminine inclinations than a search for a new synthesis and an opportunity for feminine expression" (154).

Writing "A Sketch of the Past" twelve years after this novel, Woolf recalls that in her childhood "there were so many different worlds: but they were distant from me. I could not make them cohere" (Sketch" 173). Through her writing, however, and the continual reassessment of the newly-esteemed female tradition on the one hand, and the egocentric patriarchal tradition on the other, she lends a new coherency to this dichotomy: "it is only by putting it into words that I make it whole: this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, great delight to put the severed parts together" (Sketch" 81). Thus in To the Lighthouse, Woolf writes out the "long felt and deeply felt emotion" for both her mother and father, and by "explaining" it, she "laid it to rest" (Sketch" 90).

If the categories of rationality and irrationality; logic and emotion; masculinity and femininity, remain polarized in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, then, there is at least the beginning of a reconciliation in Lily Briscoe's painting. By foregrounding the significance of the mother, Woolf structures a new model which lends authority to the female artist even as it

continues to draw on the literary canon of male authors. Although, within this model, Mother as Muse does not yet bequeath her daughter the independence of £500 a year and a room of her own, she does at least inspire her daughter as artist to claim an inheritance of her own.

CHAPTER III

"MY MOTHER WAS A VORTEX": MOTHERING IN THE PATRIARCHAL ORDER

Developing a feminist critique of the motherhood paradigm outside the strategies of Woolf's modernist novel, Lady Oracle deconstructs the newly-valorized mother figure in a post-modern narrative that questions the nature of the daughter's matrilineal legacy. In its emphasis upon the fragmented subject, the constant quitting and taking up of subject positions, the leitmotif of the mirror, the novel lends itself to a Lacanian interpretation which challenges the notion of a new discourse of femininity. Indeed Lady Oracle seems to confirm mother and daughter in their traditional social roles, for as an already-engendered subject, the mother cannot encompass the female "elsewhere" of French feminist theory. In Lacanian terms, the mother's centrality becomes simply another means of inscribing the daughter in the Name-of-the-Father, and in spite of all her efforts at separation, the daughter ultimately remains trapped in the same discourses that imprison the mother. As we shall see, Joan is unable to transcend either the cultural stereotypes learnt at her mother's dressing table, or the literary stereotypes that pervade her fiction. But it is in Atwood's parodic treatment of Joan's relationship to these social and literary foremothers that the novel functions to destabilize patriarchal definitions of femininity, to generate a new space for women *within* the symbolic order of language and culture.

Fully aware of her matrilineal literary inheritance, Atwood does, of course, identify with the newly-emerging female tradition, struggling with the same dilemma that has plagued all of her literary foremothers: the double dilemma of woman as artist. In her critical writing she draws parallels between the underlying patriarchal criticism of Austen, Eliot, and the Brontës, somehow "unwomanly" because they are writers, and the contemporary criticism that continues to be levelled at women writers of today. The biographies of these nineteenth-century women writers show them to be childless eccentrics, "somehow not women, or if they were women, they were not *good* women"

(Curse"225). The modern writer encounters the same prejudice, the "sexual put-down syndrome" now manifesting itself in a much more blatant form: " 'You may be a good writer ... but I wouldn't want to fuck you' " (Being a 'Woman Writer'"202). Looking for other role models in her spectrum of maternal exemplars, Atwood discovers that the only alternatives seem to be either "Elusive Emily, otherwise known as Recluse Rossetti" or "Suicidal Sylvia" (Being a 'Woman Writer'"200).

Even as she identifies with this female ancestry, then, Atwood takes care to distance herself from many of the unfounded, but deeply-rooted premises, that generate the paradox, woman and writer. In Lady Oracle, she uses the parodic mode to undermine these assumptions, deconstructing the romanticism of the poetess as death-cult figure, the dangerous role model for female artists that emerged in the 1960s: "The point about these stereotypes is that attention is focused not on the actual achievements of the authors, but on their lives, which are distorted and romanticized" (Being a 'Woman Writer'"200). Exploring, instead, the unglamorous "reality" of the female author's relationship to her literary mothers, Atwood's anti-heroine parodies the fate of the "doomed" poet of twentieth-century women's literature, emerging, or more accurately, "submerging" as a character at odds with both patriarchal and matriarchal (feminist) ideals of Womanhood, a mockery of the ideal from any and all angles. Like Plath and Sexton, Joan seems destined to become a "death cult" but hers is a fake suicide, a fraudulent drowning that undermines the stereotype of the tortured female genius. From her privileged view from Terremoto, Joan's "other-worldly" perspective can only emphasize the absurdity of the romantic distortion of her former life:

There was a lot of talk about my morbid intensity, my doomed eyes, the fits of depression to which I was apparently subject... Sales of 'Lady Oracle' were booming, every necrophiliac in the country was rushing to buy a copy. (313)

Yet Joan is not simply, or rather, not only a parody of her "serious" literary foremothers. She is also the writer of costume romances, which are, themselves, a

distortion of nineteenth century gothic fiction. In a reversal of the code of literary aesthetics, Joan, or rather "Louisa Delacourt", regards her romance writing as her "serious" career not only because it provides her with her major source of income, but also because it satisfies her sexual fantasies. Once "Joan Foster" is launched on her literary career, however, Joan finds it impossible to maintain these distinctions. Try as she might to separate the writer from the woman, her alter egos constantly intrude, Louisa Delacourt and the Fat Lady always threatening to undermine her credibility as the author of "Lady Oracle". Joan knows that from a feminist perspective, one that Arthur would claim to endorse, she ought to liberate herself from the constraints of the social discourses that have produced these fantasies: "How much better for me if I'd been accepted for what I was and had learned to accept myself, too." But precisely because Joan has internalized these "molds of femininity", such an attitude becomes impossible: "Very true, very right, very pious. But it's still not so simple. I wanted those things, that fluffy skirt, that glittering tiara. I liked them" (103).

In the struggle to release women from these restrictive patriarchal definitions of Woman, we have already seen that one branch of feminist theory looks to the mother as the guardian of an alternative code of the "féminine". Consequently, the quest for the mother has become a familiar motif for feminist literature, one that Atwood herself previously undertook in Surfacing. In Lady Oracle, however, Atwood's narrative deconstructs the premises that informed her earlier novel, questioning the assumption that there is a place outside language, outside culture, where women can locate their "femaleness".

Surfacing begins as a feminist revision of the epic search for the father, but the narrator eventually finds herself also looking for her mother's legacy, a different "truth" that, like Mrs. Ramsay's knowledge, cannot be inscribed in words:

More than ever I needed to find it, the thing she had hidden; the power from my father's intercession wasn't enough to protect me, it gave only knowledge and there were more gods than his, his were the gods of the head, antlers rooted in the brain. Not only how to see but how to act. (163)

The gift proves to be the narrator's childhood painting of her pregnant mother, in which she appears as the baby looking out of the womb at the god-like father. Read in the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, the picture also reflects the pre-Oedipal attachment of mother and child, a relationship overshadowed by the inevitability of entry into the Law-of-the-Father. Yet the painting may be accorded a further meaning, for in terms of French feminism, it encodes the "other" meaning of the "semiotic", the language of the mother tongue that cannot be inscribed in words. On another level, therefore, the pregnant woman of the painting is also herself as mother, an image that returns her to the pre-symbolic world, what Hirsch describes as "her own personal prehistory" (Mother/Daughter Plot 143). By re-interpreting the picture according to the meaning of the "other language" (170), the narrator frees herself from the guilty burden of her aborted foetus, her assumed pregnancy atoning for the earlier death of the unwanted child: "Language", she tells us earlier, "divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole" (157). This sense of "completion" (159) is only achieved when she comes into the inheritance of her maternal legacy.

In contrast with the "surfacers"'s imperative that "I must stop being in the mirror", however, Joan is drawn further and further into the looking glass until she cannot get out. For while Surfacing supports a French feminist interpretation, Lady Oracle challenges the concept of a female space outside the patriarchal order. The novel repeatedly shows that, having *internalized* the cultural discourses of femininity, Joan cannot escape the language or the images that have already interpellated her. Even after she submerges herself in Lake Ontario, therefore, to surface again in her new life in Terremoto, she does not manage to drown her former selves, and the Fat Lady, Louisa Delacourt and Mrs. Foster travel with/in her to Italy. In the end, there are no rebirths for Joan, there are only old beginnings, and the legacy she inherits from her mother merely confirms these plots. Located in the mirror itself, her mother's "other" language is nothing more than a reflection of the patriarchal order, encoded in the patriarchal discourses with which Joan is only too

familiar.

Joan's fascination with mirrors, traced back to early childhood, ominously frames her quest for truth, just as "the frame of a baroque mirror" reflects her "flabby", "scrolling" struggle with life (7). When she finally enters the mirror, she is convinced that she will discover the key to her existence, the revelation that waits especially for her. Carrying the reflections of three candles to light her way, she begins her search and the elements of her quest begin to fuse as she moves toward a discovery of the person who knows the "truth":

I was going to find someone. I needed to find someone. There was movement at the edge of the mirror. I gasped and turned around. Surely there had been a figure, standing behind me. But there was no one. (220)
There was the sense of going along a narrow passage ... the certainty that if I could only turn the next corner or the next ... I would find the thing, the truth or word or person that was mine, that was waiting for me. (221)

In fact, there are no words or people inside the mirror other than the words and people Joan already knows, for the elusive figure she seeks has many forms, one of which turns out to be none other than Joan herself, or rather herselfes. The text suggests that the imaginary phase of the Lacanian model cannot be transcended; indeed Joan's multiple mirror-images seem to imply that the imaginary is never left behind, even after entry into the symbolic order. Thus the imaginary and the symbolic become blurred in the reality of Joan's subjectivity, for her various subject positions are all mis-recognitions of her mirror image. Paralleling the fate of her fictitious heroines and anti-heroines, Joan is drawn further and further into the maze of her identities, and like the Ladies Redmond, she discovers that there is no escape from the centre of the maze of self. At the end of the novel, therefore, Joan may be wiser about herself, but this wisdom only confirms what has always been. We leave her in one of Mavis Quilp's romantic plots, with a different man, in a different genre, but still living the same story, and about to begin again on the old round of "love", this time falling prey to the romanticism of a man in a bandage.

Like everything else in this novel, however, the secrets of the mirror are not single, and

the looking-glass serves many functions. Initially, the three-way mirror reveals what Joan eventually comes to see as her mother's monstrosity, also a reflection of Joan's multiple personae:

In the dream, as I watched, I suddenly realized that instead of three reflections she had three heads... This didn't frighten me, as it seemed merely a confirmation of something I'd already known; but outside the door was a man ... If he saw, if he found out the truth about my mother, something terrible would happen, not only to my mother but to me. (66-7)

From the beginning, and in spite of Joan's determination to be different, the similarities between herself and her mother are very close, for the "I" within the glass is not only Joan's fragmented being, but is also Joan's mother, a fusion of mother and daughter that reflects all of their multiple roles. In spite of Joan's efforts to separate herself from her mother, first by her layers of fat, and later by the stretch of the Atlantic, the two remain trapped in the same subject positions, caught, like the daughter and mother in Irigaray's "And the one doesn't stir without the other", "between the mirror and this endless loss of yourself" (And the one doesn't stir 64). Joan, too, is "imprisoned by [the mother's] desire for a reflection" (64), haunted by her mother's astral body even before Frances dies. Thus Joan is, indeed, the "bail" to keep her mother from disappearing, for when she does lose weight, when she does leave home, her mother can no longer "find herself" (64). Expecting Joan "to last her for ever" (Lady Oracle 123), Frances becomes distraught at the loss of "her last available project", for nothing remains for her except alcoholic stupor and death.

Clearly, Frances is equally unable to move beyond patriarchal definitions of womanhood, and as the image Joan is destined to imitate, she fails to liberate her daughter from patriarchal constructs. In fact, as the partner within the marriage who possesses the symbolic phallus, Frances is the one to baptize Joan into the Name-of-the-Father. But although she relates to Lacan's transcendental signifier in the positive, valorized position of the male, she is not exempted from the discourses of good mother and loving wife. After

all, she marries into the romance of "de la court", and names her daughter after one of Hollywood's screen idols, although she will be betrayed by the too-plump child and the unambitious husband:

She used to say that nobody appreciated her, and this was not paranoia. Nobody did appreciate her, even though she'd done the right thing, she had devoted her life to us, she had made her family her career as she had been told to do, and look at us: a sulky fat slob of a daughter and a husband who wouldn't talk to her, wouldn't move to Rosedale. (178)

Conforming to the patriarchal Law, Frances fulfils her feminine role without winning any of the social prizes that this same Law suggests are her due. The daughter that mothers traditionally rely upon to earn their social status obstinately remains a "reproach ... which refused to be shaped into anything for which she could win a prize" (67), and her husband denies her any similar social reward. After her death, Joan discovers the full extent of her mother's "terrible anger": a product of the lie of a past "that had turned into the present and betrayed her" (179).

Yet if Joan resents the burden of becoming "the embodiment of her [mother's] own failure and depression" (67), it is a role she nonetheless clings to, relying on her mother for her identity, just as her mother has depended upon Joan for the justification of her own existence. Joan cannot avoid this fate, for what she learns in the mirror is that her mother's fantasies, her mother's desires, passed on to her in spite of all her efforts to rid herself of this particular maternal legacy, are her own fantasies, aspects of her own selves that she will never escape. Joan therefore wears her mother's picture like a "rotting albatross" in an iron locket around her neck, and like the ancient mariner, she is destined to repeat her story, her mother's story, ad infinitum. Consequently, it is in the well-known role of Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott", a role women have acted out for centuries, that Joan's mother makes her appearance in the glass:

She'd never really let go of me because I never really let her go. It had been she standing behind me in the mirror, she was the one who was waiting around each turn, her voice whispered the words. She had been the lady in

the boat, the death barge, the tragic lady with flowing hair and stricken eyes, the lady in the tower. (330)

At the end of the novel, therefore, the mother as monster is elevated to the subject position the fat Joan Delacourt has always craved, for Joan has always longed to be considered beautiful, even if she had to die to achieve this status. In fact, this is precisely what Joan as artist, as well as her mother must do, for not until Joan's mock-suicide can she join her mother in the serenity of the dead heroine: "There I was, on the bottom of the death barge where I'd once longed to be, my name on the prow, winding my way down the river" (313). United in their subject positions of ideal, dead heroines, however, mother and daughter find this role less glamorous, less desirable than first imagined. Life on the romantic "other side" proves as problematical as life in the unglamorous "real" world, and Joan will return from her "underworld" adventure, just as her mother's stylishly dressed astral body will try to return to Joan's reality.

The role of the Lady of Shallot is not the only model they try to emulate, however, for they are both caught up in the images of the Hollywood screen goddesses. Frances therefore paints her lips to look like Bette Davis and names her daughter after Joan Crawford. For Joan herself, the ultimate screen idol is always Moira Shearer, the heroine of The Red Shoes:

The one I liked the best was The Red Shoes, with Moira Shearer as a ballet dancer torn between her career and her husband. I adored her: not only did she have red hair and an entrancing pair of red satin slippers to match, she also had beautiful costumes, and she suffered more than anyone... I wanted those things too, I wanted to dance and be married to a handsome orchestra conductor. (82)

In "The Curse of Eve" Atwood explains that a whole generation of young girls were taken to see this film, although it is not until adulthood that she recognizes the moral behind the movie: "you could not have both your artistic career and the love of a good man as well, and if you tried, you would end up committing suicide" (224). The dilemma of this either/or distinction, which apparently results in the self-destruction of the artist, is one that

Joan encounters repeatedly, her parodic suicide only seeming to offer a solution. As the novel turns full circle, Joan finally understands the painful inevitability of her mother's curse, "the curse of Eve", the patriarchal condemnation that she has learned not only in school, but which pervades every aspect of the social:

I limped into the main room, trailing bloody footprints and looking for a towel. I washed my feet in the bathtub; the soles looked as if they'd been minced. The real red shoes, the feet punished for dancing, You could dance, or you could have the love of a good man. But you were afraid to dance, because you had this unnatural fear that if you danced they'd cut your feet off so you wouldn't be able to dance. Finally you overcame your fear and danced, and they cut your feet off. The good man went away too, because you wanted to dance. (335)

The curse of the red shoes, which can be traced back via Moira Shearer and Anne Sexton to Snow White's archetypal "wicked" stepmother, are the real maternal legacy that Joan inherits not only from her mother, but from her literary foremothers and Western society itself. More than a representation of the menstrual blood that emblemizes their womanhood, the real "curse" is the price women are made to pay if they want to wear the red shoes: like the Lady of Shallot, they can either weave or they can love, they can create art or they can be married, but they cannot do both. The mother's dance, therefore, the secret of her "other" language, provides no alternative code of knowledge and her message is always the same: "She couldn't stand the view from the window, life was her curse" (330).

Joan's foray into automatic writing reflects what women have known all along. Ironically, in what seems to be a contradiction in terms, the source of Joan's "inspiration" at once speaks to her of the impossibility of being woman and artist. Significantly, the Muse who "whispered the words" of Joan's vision is the same triple-headed figure who appears in Joan's mother's dressing-table mirror, and Joan finally recognizes that the "one and three" Lady Oracle is none other than the mother who has baptized her into the phallic Law that suppresses female creativity. Yet the "Lady Oracle" is also a reflection of Joan

herself, so perhaps we are meant to think that she is her own Muse, Robert Graves' self-destructive White Goddess whose urge to create will lead to her own death. Yet again, Joan is also the "escape artist" (334) who adamantly refuses to die and inhabit the "death cult" role expected of her. Assuredly this is a far cry from the destructive goddess apparently embodied by Plath and Sexton.

In fact, in what proves to be a complex parody of Graves' myth of woman as the destructive source of poetical inspiration, Atwood deconstructs not only the figure of the Mother as Muse, but also the concept of the Muse figure herself. In her article "My (m)Other, My Self", Godard interprets Joan as "the lady within the mirror, alias the Great Goddess" (21), attributing her fragmented selves to the duplicitous nature of this powerful figure: "She acknowledges the multiplicity of her nature - that she, like the goddess in the mirror, is destructive as well as creative, the moth-ball as well as the butterfly" (22). But while Joan does encompass both the mothball and the butterfly within her spectrum of beings, these multiple selves usually undermine each other to erase her power, until she becomes a parody of the devoted wife, the "doomed" poet, the Great Goddess: in Joan's case, the whole is definitely *less* than the sum of her parts. In equating Joan with the destructive powers of Graves' Muse, therefore, Godard surely overlooks what Gabriel describes as Atwood's "parodic send-up of the very idea of the goddess", a reading supported by Atwood's more direct observations upon Graves' poetic theories:

Maybe Robert Graves didn't have the last word on women writers ... Even though Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton had been setting new, high standards in self-destructiveness for female poets, and people had begun asking me not whether but when I was going to commit suicide (the only authentic woman poet is a dead woman poet?) I was wondering whether it was really all that necessary for a woman writer to be doomed. (*Great Expectations* xv-xvi)

Like her author, Joan certainly does not feel compelled to follow in the path of destruction, and her fake suicide, like all the mirror images of this novel, is actually nothing more than a shadow of the image it represents. Joan never intended to leave her real corpse behind, but

only "the shadow of a corpse, a shadow everyone would mistake for solid reality" (7).

Lady Oracle not only signifies a departure from the patterns of either "'create and be destroyed'" or "'create and destroy'" (Curse"224), however, but also signals Atwood's rejection of the myth of the Great Mother herself, the "dark lady" of the underworld who "was enormously powerful, almost like a goddess", but invested with an "unhappy power" (Lady Oracle 222). Once again, it is the shadow of the role model, the "almost" goddess, that Joan and her mother reflect as the Ladies Oracle, for their story is a parody of the Demeter/Persephone myth.

The unhappy power Joan's mother has is borrowed from Demeter, the archetypal Great Mother whose daughter is raped and abducted by the god of the underworld. Invested with the power of nurturance, the Great Mother refuses to allow any crops to grow until her daughter is restored to her, and Hades is therefore forced to relinquish Persephone to her mother for nine months of the year. To celebrate her daughter's return, Demeter is said to have founded the sacred Eleusian rites, in which she revealed the secrets of life and death to her female initiands.

As the benefactress of this mother-daughter legend, Atwood's anti-heroine is also shown the mother's secret, but unlike the earlier heroine of Surfacing, whose "dive into hallucination and visionary ecstasy ... carry the narrator past language, past boundaries and fences of all kinds, until she ... [is] one with everything" (Grace 41), Joan's initiation reveals the mother as already lost in patriarchal discourses of the feminine. Once again, the text denies the possibility of re-birth outside the realm of a social order that has abducted female Otherness as surely as Persephone was abducted by Hades. Certainly, in this novel, the myth of the Great Mother does not survive the patriarchal distortion of the motherhood paradigm used to trap women in their maternal roles. When Frances makes her final appearance of the novel, she is the same friendly enemy that has always haunted Joan:

It was only my mother. She was dressed in her trim navy-blue suit with the tight waist and shoulder pads, and her white hat and gloves. Her face was

made up, she'd drawn a bigger mouth around her mouth with lipstick, but the shape of her own mouth showed through. She was crying soundlessly, she pressed her face against the glass like a child, mascara ran from her eyes in black tears. (329)

Appearing in death as she did in life, she still cannot speak to Joan, and she is forced to mourn their separation in silent tears. Although Joan is moved to acknowledge her love for her mother, they remain divided, partly by their silence, partly by the glass that separates them. Significantly, it is the transparency of glass that comes between them now, as they see each other in the place of their own reflections. But there is to be no happy restoration of mother to daughter here, for when Joan awakens, she quickly returns Frances to her "vortex", "a dark vacuum" (330) from which the daughter can no more liberate the mother than the mother can liberate the daughter. Far from suggesting the happy reunion of Persephone with Demeter, mother and daughter remain separate in their life-denying likeness, for in this novel, it is the father who is invested with the power of taking life and raising the dead, a confirmation of the fact that men have always controlled women's lives: "nice men did things for you, bad men did things to you" (69).

In spite of the fact that Joan struggles to define herself in opposition to her mother, however, she cannot escape the discourses of the maternal that have already interpellated Frances. Her marital life is given over to the attendance of Arthur's needs, and she devotes an entire winter to cheering him up, feeling miserable and inadequate when he is depressed, because "the love of a good woman was supposed to preserve a man from this kind of thing" (212):

[Arthur] wanted me to be inept and vulnerable, it's true, but only superficially. Underneath this was another myth: that I could permit myself to be inept and vulnerable only because I had a core of strength, a reservoir of support and warmth that could be drawn on when needed. (92)

While Joan is happy to cast herself in this maternal role most of the time, the strain of fulfilling this image becomes increasingly difficult as her other identities begin to intrude. Finally, her identification with the Great Mother becomes as problematical as her

relationship to all the other images within the glass, and Joan will eventually rebel against this myth:

At the end we came to Diana of Ephesus, the guidebook said, rising from a pool of water. She had a serene face, perched on top of a body shaped like a mound of grapes. She was braced in breasts from neck to ankle ... The nipples were equipped with spouts, but several of the breasts were out of order.

I stood licking my ice-cream cone, watching the goddess coldly. Once I would have seen her as an image of myself, but not any more. My ability to give was limited, I was not inexhaustible. I was not serene, not really. I wanted things, for myself. (253)

When Joan returns from Italy she abandons her maternal role in pursuit of her love affair with the Royal Porcupine. As with all her other re-births, however, Joan does not transcend her subject position, for the novel's comic conclusion re-locates her in the discourses of romantic love, where she is all set to take up the role of nurturer once more: "[The reporter] is a nice man; he doesn't have a very interesting nose, but I have to admit that there is something about a man in a bandage..." (345). "Somehow I couldn't just run off and leave him all alone in the hospital with no one to talk to" (344).

Although Joan fails constantly in her efforts to create herself in the image of either patriarchal or feminist ideals, it is in her problematic identification with these conflicting images, the gap between her intentions and her actual success in occupying these roles, that Atwood creates a narrative space that begins the exploration of women as individuals, rather than as "examples of a gender" ("Curse" 227). Neither a "natural force" of female power, nor a "passive Solitary Weeper" ("Curse" 223), Joan's contradictory subjectivity exposes the impossibility of becoming either the passive feminine heroine of patriarchal design, or the feminist woman beyond the reach of patriarchal definition. Unwittingly destined to repeat her mother's story, she is haunted by more than her own former selves. For "the past that refused to forget" (214) is not simply Joan's own history, but the history of all women in the patriarchal order.

CHAPTER IV
MOTHER AS ARTIST: THE DISCOURSE OF THE "STRONG-ENOUGH" MOTHER

"It's awful and awesome," Alice said, "to think of the power our mothers have over us." (180)

Corresponding to the contradictory feminisms that respectively valorize or deconstruct the mother figure, To the Lighthouse and Lady Oracle represent the opposite ends of the spectrum of feminist debate over the nature of the matrilinear legacy. In a text that combines the "awesome" and the "awful" aspects of maternal power, Thomas' Intertidal Life situates the mother at the point of tension between these divergent feminist strategies. Yet Alice is not only caught within a pluralistic web of feminisms; she also finds her position further complicated by the desire to satisfy the patriarchal myth of the maternal ideal, while maintaining her own identity as an autonomous other. As the novel weaves itself in and out of the various patriarchal and feminist discourses, however, a new discourse begins to emerge, one which is based on the feminist woman's experience of motherhood within the patriarchal order, and which is dictated by the mother herself. As we shall see, this new discourse displaces the dissatisfactory concept of the "good-enough" mother with the model of the "strong-enough" mother, one who struggles to voice the interests of the "other" without losing sight of the value of the mother.

As the epithet of the "strong-enough" mother suggests, Thomas' protagonist offers no miracle solution to the problematic of how to speak as mother/other in the patriarchal order of the symbolic. Yet like Kristeva's exploration of the semiotic, the fragmented narrative does begin to formulate new discursive spaces that might begin to accommodate the maternal. The disruption of the patriarchal myths of motherhood begins when the mother "interrupts" the framework of her diary to relate the suppressed story of her own experience of the "birth day", an experience which is accorded new significance when it is narrated from her perspective:

Later I thought about the word birthday. Birth. Day. The child is told that it's his birthday but it's the mother who knows. And what she was wearing. And what the weather was like. And the incredible sense of relief as she lies there, bleeding, perhaps torn, smiling... Truly the birthday belongs to the mother, not the child... The mother remembers how it was, how it seemed as though the child might be scalded by the blood which boiled and bubbled between her legs. (51)

In common with French feminist theory, Thomas insists that the mother's body is, in fact, the site of women's suppressed power and knowledge. Indeed, her own "herethics" also seems to want to write the mother's body in an attempt to access this knowledge. Subverting one of the oldest, and, historically, one of the most influential of the patriarchal paradigms of the mother, Thomas' own version of "l'écriture féminine" re-writes the myth of the Virgin birth, which Thomas clearly regards as a denial of the physical dimension of the motherhood experience. Focusing on the "maculate delivery" (52) that follows the Immaculate Conception, she affirms that it is the mother's flesh and blood which provide the source and strength of life:

For the word is not made flesh, it's the other way around. The flesh made word, or rather, in the beginning, made cry, made howl. *Then*, later, the word, simple at first, all babies make it, race, color, creed do not come into it. Made word: Ma - Ma, Ma - Ma, the breast. And the breast, like the magic pitcher in a fairy tale, empties and fills up again.

Take this
Take this
Take this
In remembrance of me.
(and be thankful). (53)

Inverting the Christian concept of the logos, of the Word made flesh, Thomas privileges the female body over the word; for in the beginning there is the mother, and it is in communion with her flesh, together with the nourishment of her milk, that the child is given life.

Unlike the works of her French counterparts, however, Thomas' fiction never allows the escape into a female "elsewhere" to become the solution to the motherhood question. For despite the fact that the novel identifies the mother's body as the site of a potentially

revolutionary power, it also suggests that the mother's access to pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal knowledge is mediated by her experiences as an "always-already interpellated" subject within the symbolic order. The body therefore becomes as unreliable as the socially inscribed subject who inhabits it; indeed Alice's mysterious illness suggests that the body is as treacherous as the fragmented subjectivity of the individual. The subject's relation to the body is equally unreliable, for in what seems to be a reference to an earlier abortion, Alice is shown to have betrayed her maternal strength, causing a "sea change of the most terrible sort" (190). "Frozen" and "tossed out beyond her depth" as a result of this (189), Alice's return to life is complicated by feelings of guilt and selfishness which separate her desperate "heart" from the "frozen shell" of "me, me, me" (189).

Significantly, the "unnatural" event of the abortion, which Alice is "dumb" to describe, is the only experience that remains outside the order of representation. For Thomas insists on voicing the mother's account of child-birth and child-rearing within the symbolic order, refusing to allow the pre-linguistic relationship between mother and child to displace the importance of language as a weapon for the feminist struggle for change. In fact, Thomas constructs the two-way relationship between language and body as a complex dialectic, one in which language and discourse play an undeniably large part in shaping and defining the mother's experience. Thus the maternal body does not simply define its own narrative, but is also something that can be written over in patriarchal Law.¹¹

This inter-dependent relationship between the body and the discursively constituted subject is underlined in Thomas' use of lunar imagery, which, as Hutcheon points out, connects the female characters in their "bodily rhythms as surely as it does the rhythms of the tide" (112): "Sisters of the moon we are, shape shifters but oh so predictable in our shifting. We hold the waters of the world in our net" (*Intertidal Life* 206). The lunar/tidal imagery is returned to repeatedly as women's tears, their menstrual blood, and particularly the waters that break at birth are associated with the sea and the movement of the tides. Yet these same waters, the source of women's maternal strength, are the channels that the

"fathers" have claimed and charted: "Babies drop out of us from our most secret places, through channels the fathers have charted and laid claim to. Rivers of pain and blood" (205).

Not only colonized by Man, however, women as "moon ladies" have also learnt to depend upon his attention, shining only in the reflection of his sun, which "[draws] these women to him as surely as though he controlled the tide" (218). For just as women's lunar identity complicates Thomas' struggle to "write the maternal body", so too does it undermine women's struggle to define themselves separately from men. Even the Biblical myths retain their force here, for the sisterhood of femininity is always defined in relation to the opposite sex, just as Eve is always connected to Adam:

All Eve's sisters bobbing for apples. All connected like some vast archipelago. Herself. Selene. Stella. Trudi. The girl children. Connected by femaleness and by blood and by the moon. Yet can't do without Adam. (92)

The mother's reliance upon "Adam", which in this novel undermines the possibility of her ever entering a female space outside the symbolic order, brings us to the theories set out by object-relations feminism. For it is clear in Thomas' work that the relational aspects of women's lives continue to determine their "success" or "failure" at both the social and personal levels. In spite of its claims to free love, the Coon Bay counter-culture clings to the patriarchal structure that has institutionalized male/female relationships, and Selene's determination to "follow [Raven] round like a dog" (96) is no different from Alice's desperate attempt to cling, limpet-like, to "Peter the Rock" (60). Alice even frets that she is guilty of inscribing her daughters in the same patriarchal Laws that have always enthralled women. Although her younger daughter reads Madame Bovary as an antidote to the ideology of the Harlequin romances, and despite the fact that her elder daughter can design an apron that parodies the good housewife, traditional patterns and dependencies persist: "if there's one thing worse in this universe it's a woman ... without a ma-an" (108).

As Alice herself realizes, women regard marriage as more than a simple issue of

"status", for although "Mrs Hoyle" guarantees her the social approval conferred by an "official lover and protector" (172), it also satisfies one of her deepest needs. Even Alice, who has always known that she wanted to be more than a wife and mother, cannot transcend the social discourses which define the "fulfilled" woman as a married woman, for Alice has internalized the rules of the marriage plot as surely as Atwood's Joan Foster:

"I wanted to be a painter, funnily enough. But I wasn't as good at it as I was at writing. I was a writer by default. But I wanted to be married first. Didn't want the one without the other. Can you imagine a man thinking that way? Can you imagine a man thinking, well, once I get married I can think about being a composer or a painter or whatever! Once I find the right woman." (178-9)

Of course Alice as writer is not completely lost to that aspect of self which sacrifices every other personal interest in order to become the "ideal" wife and "Angel". In spite of the fact that she struggles to overcome the social discourses that have colonized women, however, she recognizes the difficulties of transcending a subjectivity inscribed in the dominant culture:

"Imperialism is over, for nations, for men. Do we really want somebody planting a flag on us and claiming us forever?" She laughed.

"I talk big, of course, but I guess that's maybe what in our hearts we still want. I was looking up 'abandon' the other day and discovered it, literally, means 'to set at liberty.' I say Peter abandoned me, and mean 'poor me,' when maybe I should be feeling 'he has set me free.' " (171)

Alice's ambiguous feelings about the nature of her relationship with Peter are reflected in her broader generalizations on the nature of women's roles in "marital" relationships. Although she feels that women have been "shanghaied" (170), she also understands that they have played the part of complicit victims in this domination: "women have *let* men define them, taken their *names* even, in marriage, just like a conquered or newly settled region" (171).

Part of the painful process of her own divorce, then, is the discovery that she has willingly created herself in the traditional female roles, that on one level she has, indeed,

allowed "love" to become her "whole life", her "whole reason for being" (171). Yet Alice has always been apprehensive about her ability to realize the ideals of perfect wife and mother in herself, an anxiety which grows out of her own insecurity rather than Peter's condemnation:

"I always felt that he was judging me, that I didn't live up to the ideal housewife or ideal mother or ideal lover. Now I wonder if a lot of that wasn't my own insecurity, if I wasn't judging myself. Wanting to be all those things and feeling I'd failed." (209)

Even after their separation, Alice continues to try to become the "ideal" wife, the model of the perfect mother, in the hopes that Peter will return. In fact, these two roles eventually become conflated when Stella suggests that Alice loses Peter precisely because she behaved too much like a "mother" to him. Too generous, too trusting in her selflessness, she "allowed him to do as he pleased, go where he would and come back any time, all is forgiven. So civilized. So understanding" (177). As Alice traces the development of this aspect of her marital relationship, the parallels with Dinnerstein's theories become increasingly clear. Peter is, indeed, "mothered" by Alice, and even after their separation, when it is Peter who leaves the marriage, he nonetheless weeps into her strong arms (50).

Yet once Alice becomes a "real" mother she finds it increasingly difficult to sustain her "maternal" relationship to Peter, partly because she is no longer "always there" for him (161), but more particularly because, "confused somewhat about mothers and lovers" (205), he can no longer relate to her on a sexual level. As his "lover" she had been free to satisfy his sexual desires, including his wish to be "mothered". As a mother, however, she resembles his own "primary caretaker" too closely, and he consequently casts her in the chaste, passive, asexual role apparently occupied by his own "taboo" parent. Asking Alice if "we should be doing this", Peter is clearly uncomfortable with the idea of making love to his obviously pregnant wife (82), and Alice is quick to identify the cause of his anxiety:

"Once I became a mother - actually once I became *pregnant* - he had trouble. And yet he is torn, is at heart a family man. Do all men want both - a mother for their children, a wife and a mistress?" (206)

Interpreted in the light of The Mermaid and the Minotaur, the answer to Alice's question must inevitably be yes. For until men learn to accept motherhood and sexuality as simultaneous, rather than polarized aspects of "femaleness", and until they learn to accept their own mother's sexuality without fear, they will continue to cast mothers in their "asexual" roles.

Of course we should not overlook the fact that Alice has, to some degree, positioned herself in the traditional role of mother, for she is only partly divorced from the ideology that equates knitting with the biological essentials of motherhood (see p81). Her breasts and vagina continue to define her subject position, and although she tries to resist it, she cannot help locating herself in the patriarchal discourse of maternity: "There's a lot of that capital-M Mother in me. I fight against it but it's there. My doctor says all mothers are Jewish mothers, which isn't very nice but I know what he means" (181). Even as a writer Alice remains rooted to the domestic sphere, "all wrapped up in her family" (136). Indeed, without a room that is exclusively her own, she writes at the kitchen table with one of her daughters sitting opposite, while most of her ideas are developed as she washes dishes at the kitchen sink (226).

Although Alice admits to experiencing the responsibilities of motherhood as a check upon her own career, however, she remains caught in the double bind of maternal knowledge, unable to abdicate her "parental duties". For while it is all too easy for Peter the Rock to transform into Peter Pan in his quest for a new authority figure, Alice finds it impossible to abandon her "real children" to his "carefree" world of "wonder" and "innocence" (135). As the only person in the novel to understand that "somebody's got to be the parent" (183), she is immobilized by the weight of her responsibility:

All of them on quests, longing for answers, the Lost Boys... Who was Purple Thing if not a Parent who could speak for God, a priest? And she,

too, wouldn't she like to find enlightenment and peace? Wouldn't she like to lay her anger down? ...

But one went on a true quest alone and, except for magical or divine intervention, one fought the terror of the dark wood alone. One didn't bring along three kids, a lame dog and a spiteful cat. (141)

Obviously unaware of the demanding, self-sacrificial aspects of parenting, Peter can happily join the "Lost Boys" in an exploration of the childhood world of Never-Never Land, but his irresponsibility would seem to confirm the fact that shared parenting does not exist as a realistic possibility that might effect social change. For even Peter, so frequently regarded by daughters and friends as a wonderful father, is really an absent figure, one who leaves Alice to face the fear and loneliness of child-birth and child-rearing on her own:

He. Had missed something. She wanted to tell him, then, about the fear and anger, about the loneliness. Everyone talked about what a wonderful father he was, how much he helped with the children. She wanted to offer him her memories of those times, like this bag of broken glass... Throw it at him. Hard. (252)

Clearly, Alice's experience of motherhood does not always correspond to the idyllic pictures depicted by the patriarchal myths of maternity, but by recording her ambivalent responses to the maternal identity, Alice begins to distance herself from the discourses that threaten to engulf her "otherness". Although she identifies with the patriarchal paradigm of motherhood on one level, then, her writing prevents her from being totally subsumed in its discourses of procreativity and nurturance:

Alice saw warm glows behind the drawn curtains of ordinary-looking homes. She knew that's where she really belonged, cutting recipes out of the evening paper, kiddies asleep or downstairs watching television in the family room. Tears stung at her eyelids because no, she didn't fit in *there* either. Not without some kind of lobotomy. (123)

Obviously the lobotomy would mark the end of her writing, for this is the activity that demands so much of herself, and distances her from the motherhood "tableau" she longs to inhabit. Yet Alice cannot give up her writing even if she wanted to, for she, too, is heirless to the mixed blessing of the red shoes which keep on "dancing, dancing, dancing", and

which so often resemble a curse (226).

As we see throughout this novel, the relationship of the mother as artist to the patriarchal myth of maternity is always a complex one. On the one hand, because she remains inscribed in phallogentric discourse that continues to valorize this myth, Alice cannot transcend the patriarchal role model. On the other hand, if Alice is to succeed as a writer, she must resist the role of the selfless "Angel", and insist on her autonomy. But it is precisely because Alice as writer and mother falls between the patriarchal and feminist models of maternity that a new discourse begins to emerge, a discourse which grows out of Alice's ambiguous relationship to the maternal "ideals". For in spite of the fact that Alice is incapable of either totally "deconstructing" the patriarchal myths, or totally embodying the patriarchal paradigm, her personal response to motherhood offers a new alternative, one which establishes a close connection between her maternal and creative drives:

"I can't wait to get the damn thing done," I said. "When I have to leave something as big as [a novel] it's like trying to interrupt a pregnancy and then take it up again three months later. I'm always scared the little creature will have died." (107)

Connecting her writing and her mothering in this way, Alice defies the traditional either/or categories of art and procreativity as she struggles to assert the positive relationship between her reproductive and creative powers. Insisting not only that she can be a "creatix" on multiple levels, but also maintaining that her writing can benefit from her identity as mother, she simultaneously valorizes both her parental and creative talents, which contrast with the "flabbiness of spirit" (202), the "passivity" (201), of an unreflective age that fails to appreciate either of these qualities. As Hutcheon makes clear, "Alice thinks it is a major trivialization of life and love to want to revert to being a child... As both writer and mother, creatix and nurturer, [she] finds she is offended by this sort of passive rejection of both creativity and responsibility" (111).

While the "hippie culture" claims to be "marching to a different drummer" (201),

therefore, it is only Alice, writer and mother, who really attempts to promote and explore social change. In spite of her "broken heart", she clings to her artistic "layer of self-is-ness" (173) as she implements "new maps, new instruments to try and fix our positions" (171). She deliberates whether it is "the turn of women, now, to go out exploring? Do we want to remain like John Donne's mistress, passive - 'She is all States/and all Princes, I' " (70); or is it time to shake off this passivity, to assume the active part traditionally ascribed to men and become "officers and captains ourselves" (170)? Certainly there is one dimension of Alice that identifies with the poet, rather than his subject, for she, too, wants to become the namer, the explorer:

"I'm like John Donne in his love poetry... His language reflects what was going on around him in the outside world. I read about ... this whole male world of the age of exploration and I see that women are going to have to get out there and do the same thing." (170)

A courageous thought, indeed, but Alice is only too aware of the difficulties facing the mother as explorer and adventurer. Yet the movement of the novel finally undermines the necessity of this quest, for although Alice feels restrained by her family duties, she is doubtful as to whether or not she really wants to leave the family shelter: "Would we take our children with us, on these voyages of discovery?" she asks herself: "Would we really want to go?" (70).

Alice is never very clear about this, for she does not feel any compulsion to "chart", "colonize" and oppress the unknown, and is anxious not to repeat the male in his raids of "conquest and plunder" (170). Inhabiting the body that brings forth the "secret" of life, she does not have the same fears as Man, and so she does not need to lay claim to alien territory. Like the feminist search for the lost foremothers of literature, her voyage is not so much one of discovery but one of recovery, a quest to locate the silenced voice of the oppressed Other within herself.

Operating on a different plane from Peter, then, Alice journeys towards self-knowledge

as she writes at the kitchen table. For it is in her "common place book", where she is free to "sprawl" her emotions, and "scrawl" her hate and her fury (30) that she undertakes the "lonely work" of "trying to see" (62), trying to uncover what it is she really wants, a question that presents itself to Alice repeatedly, and one to which she is never certain that she has found the right answer. She knows "Nothing" is the wrong response as soon as she says it (30), and later she amends her reply: " 'Nothing,' I said, 'nothing.' When what I meant was 'love' " (166). But even "love" is not all of what she wants, for Alice wants to write her novel, too:

"I want the whole works! I want to be with a man, not just any man but the miracle man, *and* be writing my novel. I want to be free to work six or eight hours a day and then play with my kids and then have supper miraculously appear and the children instantly fall asleep and the nannie look up from her knitting and say, 'Don't worry dears, stay out as long as you like,' and then my man and I go off down the road in the moonlight to make love in the woods" (179).

Of course Alice never realizes her romantic dream, for she is unable to work out a solution to the problem of how to be wife, mother and artist, the difficulty of how to reconcile the characters of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe within herself. Alice constantly draws parallels between herself and Woolf's archetypal mother. Indeed, her diary is a response to Mrs. Ramsay's question "But what have I done with my life" (125)? Like Mrs. Ramsay, Alice knows all about the isolation of her own "wedge of darkness" (115), and as she moves closer to her operation, we cannot help remembering the fate of the mother who dies from the consequences of her "giving, giving, giving".

Yet Alice does not only identify with the mother, for she carries the double burden of parenting and creativity that dramatizes the conflict at the heart of Virginia Woolf's novel. In Intertidal Life, it is the mother as artist, alone, who is "trying to see", trying to generate meaning out of the chaos of her own life. In the short story that was to foreshadow Intertidal Life, a similar emphasis on the ordering of unity out of chaos, the effort to record and understand the insight of a Woolfian "moment of being", is particularly clear:

The trick was, of course, to try and get the right distance on everything; to stand in just the right relationship to it all... Another image came to mind. ... a stereopticon... *That* was the trick. To slide it all ... back/forth, back/forth, back/forth, until 'click,'

until 'click,'

until 'click'-

there it was: wholeness, harmony, radiance; all of it making a wonderful kind of sense ... And then, suddenly, she did see, if only for an instant. (Natural History"33-34)

The ambiguous ending of Alice's own narrative makes it impossible to say with any certainty whether she has successfully secured her vision, for she discovers no answers to the paradox of how to be artist, mother, lover. The fact that Peter and Flora sail without her certainly calls to mind the death of Mrs. Ramsay, while Alice, herself, reminds us of Woolf's own death by drowning: "Mrs Woolf walking into the water with her pockets full of stones... Could I have done that - if I'd had no children?" In fact, the answer is no, for as Alice realizes, "[h]aving children has made me strong - or strong enough not ever to do such a terrible thing" (243).

Clearly, Alice's roles as writer and mother combine in one person the staged debate between the figures of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in Woolf's novel. Their co-existence in Alice suggests the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship, offering us the model of a woman whose mothering enables her to be "strong-enough" to become an artist. By drawing on her own resources as the "strong-enough" mother, Alice begins to navigate a new maternal (dis)course, founded not in the patriarchal institution of motherhood, but in women's own experiences of mothering within the patriarchal order.

It is at this point that the novel re-joins recent feminist criticism, as both fiction and theory begin to explore the tensions between Mother and Other. In fact, Thomas' "herethics" parallels Marianne Hirsch's discursive text, a text which begins to sketch the outline of a new "catechism" of maternity:

How can I combine the voices that are writing this book, or how can I continue to live out the contradictions that shape it - contradictions between

writing and motherhood, between the concrete, literal, material work of the mother combined with ... the theoretical discourses feminists are trying to forge?

I believe that feminists are in the process of inventing new theories and new fictions that might be maternal without falling into essentialism, that might act out the mother's contradictory double position. Such fictions, such theories, will have to be grounded in the material and repetitive work of mothers in culture even as they account for the structures of language and representation... They will have to account for women's and for mother's collusion with patriarchy even as they imagine ways of overcoming that collusion... They will have to include aggression, ambivalence, contradiction, even as they wish for connection, support and affiliation. They will have to include the body even as they avoid essentialism. They will have to imagine ways that, in spite of repeated conflicts and disappointments, women and men can parent together... And they will have to oppose ... mystifications of maternity and femininity, by creating ways to theorize adult, maternal ... experience. (199)

NOTES

1. Patriarchal refers not simply to male-dominated social institutions, but also encompasses cultural practices which valorize the sign of Man over the sign of Woman.

2. I use "discourse" in Foucault's sense of the word: "it is not an ideal, timeless form that also possesses a history ... it is, from beginning to end, historical." Foucault, makes it clear that "discursive practices" are not to be confused either with "expressive operation by which an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image; nor with the rational activity that may operate in a system of inference; nor with the 'competence' of a speaking subject" (117). Rather, discourse is "a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function". It is important to realize that "discourses are not non-contradictory, uniform processes ... but are complex systems of regulated differences that are intricately in ongoing struggles involving power and social relations" (Henriques 113). Also, "the subject of discourse, author or speaker, is itself caught in this web of calculations" (114). For a particularly good overview of what is meant by "discourse", see Henriques et al., Changing the Subject, esp 105-118.

3. Ideology is used here in the Althusserian sense of the word, as that which "has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects" (175). Belsey's summary is particularly helpful: "Ideology is not an optional extra, deliberately adopted by self-conscious individuals ... but the very condition of our experience of the world, unconscious precisely in that it is unquestioned, taken for granted" (5).

4. The phrase "Angel in the House", borrowed from Coventry Patmore's poem of the same title, has become standard use for the representation of the Victorian ideal of womanhood. Woolf's description of this "intensely sympathetic" ideal highlights the problems she poses for the woman writer:

She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily ... in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others... Directly ... I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: 'My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own.' (Professions 51)

5. It is worth noting here that in his most recent publication, The Book of J, Bloom has hypothesized that the author responsible for creating some of the earliest Biblical myths could possibly have been a woman. He places "J" on a par with Shakespeare and Homer, setting her at the head of the Hebrew tradition. J is a storyteller: all of her "grown-up", heroic characters are women (32), and her greatest fiction is the character of Yahweh himself. Far removed from subsequent Judeo-Christian characterizations of a quintessentially good, holy God, J's Yahweh is "impish" (15), "eccentrically irascible" (26), exuberant. Edward Hirsch notes that she "undermines and mocks rather than endorses patriarchal authority" and "exalts women as tougher and more vital than men." Of course Bloom's suggestion that J is a woman cannot be confirmed; indeed Bloom himself probably argues this only in jest (his J is not only a woman; she is not even a great

lady: she is no less than a royal princess descended from the line of David!). Rather ironically from a feminist perspective, however, the sexual identity of J is beside the point (in terms of Bloom's book, at least. Wider implications of subsequent suppression and distortion of J's voice are a separate issue). For what does Bloom intend by presenting us with such an hypothesis? He tells us that feminism led him to develop this theory, and he began to entertain the possibility of a female Yahwist because of the ironic treatment of the Biblical patriarchs (34): "What is new in J? ... What is it about J's tone, stance, tone of narrative, that was a difference that made a difference?" (10).

Regardless of whether or not we choose to believe Bloom's argument, however, his book remains important: his probably playful "fiction" about J indicates that there might be more in the Bible than patriarchal readings have so far suggested.

6. Silverman points out that, like the symbolic order, the imaginary is also "culturally mediated" (160), "always occurring within the symbolic order" (161). She argues that Lacan, himself, encouraged such an interpretation, since he "describes it as a moment which is only retrospectively realized - realized from a position within language, and within the symbolic" (161).

7. In The Daughter's Seduction, Gallop reminds us that the "neutrality" of the phallus is actually more ambiguous than Lacan suggests:

The penis is what men have and women do not: the phallus is the attribute of power which neither men nor women have. But as long as the attribute of power is a phallus which refers to and can be confused ... with a penis, this confusion will support a structure in which it seems reasonable that men have power and women do not. And as long as psychoanalysts maintain the separability of phallus from penis, they can hold on to their 'phallus' in the belief that their discourse has no relation to sexual inequality, no relation to politics. (97)

8. The post-virginal 1990s era has adopted a new "Madonna", a singer, dancer, actress, who inverts all the conventions of virginity, religious purity, passivity in her sexually explicit and irreligious exhibitionism. Yet even Madonna does not escape the traditional maternal role, despite the fact that she subverts the Christian paradigm of the mother. For in her latest movie, Truth or Dare, Madonna appears as the mother to an entourage.

9. Although the semiotic returns us to the pre-Oedipal relation to the mother, we should be aware of the fact that it does not automatically guarantee that the mother will speak in this "other" language. It is true that, by re-experiencing this relationship, she has special access to the semiotic, but she still remains a speaking-subject within the symbolic order (see Gallop, The Daughter's Seduction 124).

10. Heilbrun refers to Woolf's diary entry, in which Woolf states that had her father lived, he would have ended her life (see Heilbrun 127).

11. The limitations of "writing the body" are even clearer in Mrs. Blood (1970), where the protagonist also attempts to write women into history through the experience of her body. Like Alice, Isobel discovers that her body cannot be relied upon to tell the "truth" about her "femaleness". Although she re-writes patriarchal narratives with her own blood, staining the white sheets with her own bleeding, she is also the blank page on which the story is written. Her "traitor body" (102) confines and punishes her, and she regards her eventual miscarriage as the just consequence of an earlier abortion. In spite of her efforts to transcend discourse, then, she remains either "Mrs Thing" or "Mrs Blood", inescapably situated in the discourses of the wife and the mother.

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Resolution test chart showing patterns of vertical and horizontal lines with numerical values ranging from 1.0 to 4.0.

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