INSURRECTION IN RED INK: THE LITERARY MURDER OF

A 20TH CENTURY GODDESS

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INSURRECTION IN RED INK: THE LITERARY MURDER OF A 2OTH CENTURY GODDESS

Katharyn M. Privett

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INSURRECTION IN RED INK: THE LITERARY MURDER OF

A 2OTH CENTURY GODDESS

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Katharyn Michelle Privett, daughter of Marshia Hewitt and Carl Smith, Jr., was born on April 4th, 1966, in Athens, Alabama. She graduated from Auburn University with a Bachelor of Arts in English degree in August, 2000, and graduated from Auburn University with a Master's Degree in English in December, 2002. She graduated in August, 2006, from Auburn University with a Doctor of Philosophy degree, and specializes in 20th Century American Literature, Feminist Theory, and Rhetorical Theory. Her research is primarily focused upon maternal issues and goddess iconography. She has taught English courses at Auburn University since the Fall of 2000, and became an instructor in the English Department in the Fall of 2005. Katharyn has three children, ages 10, 14, and 20 years, who have inspired her both academically and spiritually.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

INSURRECTION IN RED INK: THE LITERARY MURDER OF

A 2OTH CENTURY GODDESS

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The 20th century literary archetype of the Maternal Goddess had its most locatable beginnings in the late Victorian landscape of poetry and prose. Although goddess imagery had been historically manipulated to serve Victorian sensibilities, its morphology can be traced back to the rise of Christianity and patriarchy. Victorians, such as Coventry Patmore and John Ruskin, reappropriated the Maternal Goddess image to include angelic and queenly characteristics, specifically within the domestic sphere. Yet, by inscribing the Maternal Goddess upon the written page, these authors opened up the archetype to further interpretation within the early 20th Century.

Modern authors, both English and American, worked to disengage the Maternal Goddess from the physicality of womanhood by situating the maternal essence of femininity as an unviable, and even detrimental, state of being. Negotiating between foundational truth systems, the writers of the early 20th century laid bare the binary relationship between maternity and creativity. The later authors of the Modern period fragmented those conditions within the unitary frame of womanhood, creating a new and radical amaternal female within fiction which reflected a specifically patriarchal anxiety at the demise of the Maternal Goddess.

As the later 20th century gave way to Postmodernism, the women writers of the time effectively overthrew the reign of the Maternal Goddess. Depicting maternal essence to be a dystopic and phantasmatic myth of institutionalized motherhood, these authors lay to waste the romanticized mythology of the Maternal Goddess. As Postmodern authors were also in literary conversation with the opposing premises of feminism, specifically essentialism and constructivism, the late 20th century became a site of contestation over the feminine body. In effect, both literature and theory became the markers of the end of an era that valorized the Maternal Goddess and policed women as her rightful commonwealth. The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries have resurrected, through the forum of popular culture and feminist theology, the goddess archetype in pre-patriarchal forms. This resurrection is evidence of a possible renaissance in culture, literature, and theory that reclaims the feminine body as both sacred and powerful for the women of the 3rd millennium.

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The author insures that no children were harmed in any way during the construction of this dissertation.

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INTRODUCTION: BACK TO THE BEGINNING

"Mine is a tale about the Goddess as she was in ages past, as she continues to be in many parts of the world today, and as she is reemerging in late twentieth-century Western Culture." Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, 1989.

This study takes up the legacy of a historically misappropriated Maternal Goddess in literature, and traces her demise to the writing subjects of the Twentieth Century. What is a Maternal Goddess? The answer is as complicated and ambiguous as the definition of "patriarchy," for within the term there lies history, religion, politics, and complex ideologies that never quite agree with each other. Yet, the amorphous nature of the Maternal Goddess myth does not erase its existence. Elinor W. Gadon, in her work *The Once and Future Goddess*, speaks to the difficulty of defining the deity, finding that "When I tell people that I am writing about the Goddess, they inevitably ask, Which one?" While Gadon admits the cryptic nature of her work, she is adamant about the validity of goddess study, finding that "While the Goddess has indeed had many names, many manifestations throughout human history, she is ultimately one supreme reality."[1] Early mythologies of goddess cults can be found literally everywhere: India, Egypt,

[1] Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), xii.

Africa, and even Native America. Late Paleolithic communities participated heavily in goddess worship, evidenced in the discovery of sacred female icons that link woman to the power of the earth.[2] In her varied forms and fabulously diverse images, the Goddess represented death and life, creator and caretaker of the earth, yet was always aggressively sexual, and that sexuality was irrefutably sacred.

Indelibly bound to the earth, pre-Indo-European goddesses defined the world through their bodies, and those bodies were celebrated through the physical processes of menstruation, childbirth, and intercourse. Conversely, unlike the Christian Madonna, sex did not mark out the maternal, but more intriguingly, the maternal was not defined simply in terms of reproduction. Rather, Mother Earth goddesses, such as the Hindu Goddess, Shiva, or the Greek Goddess, Demeter, were interpreted as maternal in terms that eclipsed mere mortal motherhood: they were understood primarily as sources of all wisdom, intellect, and creativity.[3] One of the last, yet best known, pre-Christian deities was the Egyptian Goddess Isis, referred to in ancient Egyptian scripture in eerily Christian tones: "In the beginning there was Isis, Oldest of the Old."[4] Often historicized as the model on which the Madonna Mary was constructed, Isis's influence stands as the most potent of all goddess myths, and one with which an emerging Christianity took

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[2] One of the most famous of these is the Earth Mother of Willendorf, a limestone figure of sexuality and power dating back to ca. 30,000-25,000 B.C.E. Austria. For a thorough investigation of the global history of goddess cults, see: Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row), 1987; Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (London: Penguin, 1993). First published by Viking, 1991; Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1976); and Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2001).

[3] Gadon 19 and 144. My emphasis.

[4] Marvin W. Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 159.

great offense. Gadon locates the degradation of *sacred* female sexuality within the rise of Christianity, finding that:

> The power of the Goddess was not denied in Christianity; she was given a new name. However, in the translation of pagan ways to Christian, the united vision that included the *sacredness* of human sexuality was shattered . . . So the perfect Virgin is a flawed and far from perfect model for her sex. Her asexuality and virgin motherhood make it impossible for any woman to be virtuous, powerful, and sexual at once and the same time. In Christianity the power of the womb/vulva has been co-opted to serve the interests of a misogynist theology and no longer symbolizes the embodied life force of the Goddess.[5]

And so, the myth that had once held so much power and autonomy had been stripped, redressed, in the sexually-innocent sheaths of a patriarchally-policed maternity. Yet, does the rearticulation of a myth necessarily solidify its position in culture?

Drawing from history the multitude of permutations of Goddess archetypes, this work investigates the status of the Maternal Goddess in the late 19th and 20th centuries, perpetuated by Christian religion and the entrenchment of a patriarchal power, and her resulting fall from grace in the hands of the literary women of the 20th century.[6] As Victorian principles engaged in the perpetuation of the Maternal Goddess, those principles stood in diametric opposition to 20th century advances in women's rights. Adrienne Rich locates within the 20th century an "institution of motherhood," an

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[5] Godon 207-208. My emphasis. The significance of a sacred sexuality will be explored in the Conclusion.

[6] My use of the term "Maternal Goddess" will heretofore refer to the goddess archetype that arose within Christian ideology, and was furthered by a Victorian ideology of angelic and maternal femininity.

oppressive propaganda of an increasingly desperate patriarchy that would insist that the writing woman betrayed her allegiance to the state. Recognizing the maternal figure as dangerously real, Rich points to the institution of motherhood as "lash[ing] us to our bodies," forcing all female production into the realm of alienated labor an exclusionary practice that positions the woman who would sell her labor as the prostitute to her maternal body.[7] It this institution of motherhood, then, that the Maternal Goddess represented in the 20th century. Yet, in the form of fiction, the Maternal Goddess was rendered vulnerable to reinterpretation as women took up the pen.

Mikhail Bakhtin's pivotal work on the novel, *The Dialogic Imagination*, investigates the impact of fiction upon the lived reality of the individual subject. Bakhtin posits that, as a genre, its "influence can be precisely established and demonstrated, it is intimately interwoven with those direct changes in reality itself that also determine the novel and that condition its dominance in a given era."[8] Although Bakhtin works primarily with the rise of the novel, dating back to Ancient Greece through the 18th century, his work on the genre is immensely useful in 20th century fiction studies. Bakhtin's rigorous investigation of novel chronotopes defines them to be functions of the real transverse of time on the written page. Further, Bakhtin contends that: "Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible, the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins."[9] As such, the chronotope

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[7] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*: *Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 13.

[8] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 7.

[9] Bakthtin 250.

of the Maternal Goddess became a real manifestation upon the page, yet as the novel touched upon the "genres of ordinary everyday life(s)" of women, this "zone of contact with inconclusive present-day reality" created a bridge between literature and life – dissolving patriarchal control over the rhetorically-constituted body of the Maternal Goddess.[10]

The novel, therefore, was a fertile landscape for the construction of a Maternal Goddess, yet as such, was also a space in which she could be deconstructed through rebellious speech. Michel Foucault writes in *The Order of Discourse* of the constructed materiality of words and their referents, arguing that "discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized."[11] Therefore, the translation of the Maternal Goddess in literature both asserted and made vulnerable the ideology which had created her, and as a patriarchal discourse, opened itself up to insurgency by inscribing a goddess in fictional terms. One particular element of Foucault's theory of discourse, his principle of division and rejection, operates to exclude noninstitutional speech, or the "opposition between reason and madness."[12] His example of this principle is the speech act of the madman, that which "cannot have the same currency of others," yet Foucault finds that "strange powers not held by any other may be

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[10] Bakhtin 39 and 383.

[11] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* 2nd ed (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 1461. First printed in: *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

[12] Foucault 1461.

attributed to the madman's speech: the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naiveté what the others' wisdom cannot perceive."[13] Foucault's discussion of logophobic institutions and principles of discursive prohibitions and exclusions are quite useful for a feminist study, and are often cited in gender studies as the foundation for constructivist feminist theory.[14]

One such feminist is Judith Butler. [15] Primary to this study, Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble* rests heavily on Foucaultian principles of constructivity, most evident in

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[13] Foucault 1461.

[14] While Foucault's works encompass more than the study of the materiality of language, this dissertation focuses primarily on his theories of logophobia and the policing of discursive rebellion. Foucault is best known for his work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, which theorizes on the modern penitentiary efforts to relocate torture and punishment within the soul. See: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977). For an indepth examination of how institutions perpetuate and govern sexualities, see: *The History of Sexuality*, Translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). The latter disrupts normative uses of the category of sex, positing instead its fictitious, yet pervasive, use against the signified. For a more rigorous analysis of feminist terminology, see footnote 15.

[15] Butler's feminism has been classified as constructivist, post-structuralist, third-wave and even Postmodern. The effort to define different categories of feminism is often thwarted by disagreements within the various camps. Perhaps the most clear definition of the three waves of feminism was constructed by Stacy K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar:

> Feminist activism is often discussed as a series of 'waves.' The first wave is thought to begin in 1848 at the women's right convention in Seneca Falls, New York and culminated on or about 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment . . . The term 'second-wave' is used to describe the resurgence in feminist awareness and activism that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s . . . The term 'third-wave' feminism first appeared in 1992 in an essay by Rebecca Walker in Ms. Magazine, and was used to describe a new kind of feminism that was born out of the second-wave but also adapted to the needs of a new generation of feminists.

Those needs focused on, among other things, individuality and diversity. Although the attempt to locate essentialist and constructivist feminist theories remains a thoroughly subjective exercise, and is often motivated by personal and political allegiance, this dissertation finds essentialism's rise within the second-wave. Specifically, French feminists such as Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva have impacted and participated in essentialist theory. Yet, others, such as the French feminist Monique Wittig, have participated in both essentialist and constructivist theories as her work progressed through the second and third-wave in the 20th Century. Kristeva, having written across the end of a century of feminism, represents both second-wave politics as well as third-wave theories of the body/mind split, individual determinism, and constructivist questioning of gender. Postmodern feminists are most often coupled with third-wave ideology, as are Goddess feminists and eco-feminists. The cornucopia of feminist allegiances and

her claim that gender, rather than existing as an ontological, natural condition, is rather a continuously revised performance of identity. In her own words, *Gender Trouble* represents a "dogged effort to 'denaturalize' gender" born of a "strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality."[16] Inverting categories such as "natural" and "maternal," Butler suggests, much like Foucault, that language itself has produced conceptual identities that work to police and nullify anything outside of hegemonic, heterosexual discourse. Further, Butler argues that:

> The law that is said to repress the semiotic may well be the governing principle of the semiotic itself, with the result that what passes as 'maternal instinct' may well be a culturally constructed desire which is interpreted through a naturalistic vocabulary. And if that desire is constructed according to a law of kinship which requires the heterosexual production and reproduction of desire, then the vocabulary of naturalistic affect effectively renders that 'paternal law' invisible.[17]

By the act of concealment, that law takes on an immutable legitimacy, cleaving the maternal to the body of woman as its ontological right. Butler's discussion on the "redeployment" of the categories of identity furthers the case against natural gender,

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affiliations conflates the need for new discussion, new interrogation, of what feminism means in a 21st century world. See: Stacy K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar, "The Rhetorical Functions of Consciousness-Raising in Third-Wave Feminism," *Communication Studies* 55(4) (Winter 2004), 549.

[16] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xx. First published in 1990.

[17] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 116.

offering a radical rejection of the signifier through the conception of the self-construed, self-performed, body. [18]

Butler's later work, *Bodies That Matter*, reconsiders the terrain of the body in terms of its materiality and ponders the "bodily life that could not be theorized away.[19] Questioning her previous work in many ways, Butler revisits her theories of the constructive nature of gender yet refutes the assertion that bodies, in all their flesh and blood, are created and interpreted strictly through the rhetoric of words.[20] Butler further questions the cost of Poststructuralism, taking up its "dissolution of *matter* as a contemporary category."[21] Butler engages in the late 20th/early 21st century debate between feminisms, asking: "If everything is discourse, what happens to the body? If everything is a text, what about violence and bodily injury?"[22] If her work in *Gender Trouble* dislodged gender as a foundational premise, *Bodies That Matter* problematizes and destabilizes the matrix of the feminine flesh, while reinvigorating feminist theories by positing the indissolubility of the material body. In her latest work, *Undoing Gender*, Butler clarifies her claim for the performativity of gender and her subsequent call for an interrogation of bodily boundaries, noting that: "My effort was to combat forms of essentialism which claimed that gender is a truth that is somehow there, interior to the

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[18] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 162 and 179.

[19] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), ix.

[20] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* x.

[21] Poststructuralist theory and feminist constructivist theory collide and connect indeterminably. Chapter IV and the Conclusion will discuss constructivist feminism in greater detail. Also see footnote 14.

[22] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 28.

body, as a core or as an internal essence, something that we cannot deny, something which, natural or not, is treated as given."[23] Drawing the act of speaking back to the body, Butler interrogates the validity of a body outside of language and questions the violence (or ecstasy) of becoming "undone," both physically and linguistically, by language. [24] In her questioning of maternal essentialism, her "undoing" of gender as a natural state, and her theories of performativity as identity, Butler's body of work stands as the foundational theoretical perspective for the study of the demise of a culturally-constructed Maternal Goddess.

Donna J. Haraway's work, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," questions organic theories of the body, and argues against the phantasmatic myth of ontological innocence. Haraway offers the analogy of the cyborg as a "hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction."[25] Disabling paternal histories and legacies, the cyborg is one step removed from the physical world, especially in its ignorance/rejection of gender and sexual reproduction. Although Haraway's theoretical perspective problematizes the reclamation of the body (a move that Butler's work, *Bodies That Matter*, resists), her imagined cyborg is critical to this study of the interrogation of a maternal mythology. Positing cyborg technology to be the act of writing, Haraway disengages gender, race, and all other signifiers from their power to identify the cyborg

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[23] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 212.

[24] Butler, *Undoing Gender* 2 and 19.

[25] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991), 149.

body. Presumably, the cyborg is capable of self-coding, as they "are actively rewriting the texts of their bodies and societies," they also resist cultural determinism as a "disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self."[26] Embracing partial and fractured identities, Haraway calls for a feminism that resists myths of unity or wholeness, as such totalarian concepts of femininity inevitably lead back to essentialism and oppression. Haraway, in her later work, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium,* reinvents her cyborg as a vampire, arguing vehemently for a myth that disconnects all identity from the affinity of bloodlines and their legacies.[27] As an influential participant in constructivist theory, Haraway's impulse to evacuate the fleshed body (and its corresponding genders) is indicative of a Postmodern impulse to resist essentialist thinking.

Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva represent the backlash of the constructivist impulse to abandon the body, reintroducing in their epistolary collection, *The Feminine and the Sacred*, an element of the sacred into feminist studies. Written in often anthropological terms, Clement and Kristeva work to disengage the sacred from the prescriptive and often restrictive language of religion, repositioning the sacred as traversing through the female form. As such, the sacred becomes the sexual, a space where "the unconscious perception the human being has of its eroticism: always on the borderline between nature and culture, the animalistic and the verbal, the sensible and the

[26] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 163 and 176-177.

[27] Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium. FemaleMan©_Meets_*OncoMouse™: *Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 265.

nameable," accessed through the body yet infused with a transitory meaning of its own.[28] In loosening the sacred from the boundaries of the body, Clement and Kristeva construct the body as a vessel, necessary and viable, yet no longer determined by any clear biological essence. Their work underlines the importance of an individually-determined sacred, finding that any public interpretation of the sacred is "murderous" in its violently essentializing, and sacrificially motivated, potential. Arguing for a "permanent questioning" of the feminine, Clement and Kristeva consider the sacred in its alternative connotation, the French explicative "sacré," as a revision of a religiously-coded sacred. As the sacred "always goes in reverse," Clement and Kristeva's theory reinvigorates third-wave feminism with a disruptive notion of blasphemous body theory, inviting feminism to take back the flesh in order that the sacred may traverse through it "in a boundlessness without rule or reservation, which is the trait of the divine."[29] *The Feminine and the Sacred* posits that the sacred, while not incorporated within the skin, has the recuperative power to give the body new meaning—an intriguing counter argument to cyborg theorists who would desert the gendered body for its rigid determinability. Clement and Kristeva provide a necessary theoretical reclamation of the body as sacred ground to any critical feminist endeavor.

This study will work, therefore, to trace the rise and fall of a myth in literature, spanning across an entire century of writers. Locating the height of Maternal Goddess mythology to be the late Victorian period, this work also attempts to navigate distinctive

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[28] Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva, *The Feminine and the Sacred*, Trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), 14.

[29] Clement and Kristeva 30.

periods in history and politics through the analogy of the goddess, as well as the corresponding shifts in literary and rhetorical feminist theories. As women took up the pen in greater numbers in the early 20th century, those concepts of femininity that had been set forth to sustain a patriarchal empire began to teeter. More than a simple analogy for the state, the Maternal Goddess constituted an amalgam of goddess myth, had been bled of early matriarchal autonomy and power, redressed as an angel, and de-sexed as a Madonna. Yet, years of deconstructing the Maternal Goddess have ironically led to a recent attempt at reincarnating the myth in its original form, perhaps evidence of what Gadon has called "one supreme reality." Goddess feminism, as a term, has risen primarily in theological studies, although academics have, since the 1990s, co-opted the term in limited numbers. The fact that the two fields are warily in conversation with each other is primarily due to Goddess feminism's recent success in religious theory, a phenomenon that Juliet Wood speaks to in *The Concept of the Goddess*. Wood finds that "the last ten years have seen an upsurge in the study of the feminine aspect of the sacred," and contends that "religion and society are linked in a very direct way; the assumption being that where 'goddesses' are worshiped, women are empowered with a status equal if not higher than that of men, and, further, that feminine power is ecologically harmonious and pacifistic."[30] Certainly, it appears that theologians have worked light years ahead of contemporary feminisms in goddess theory, yet that gulf is quickly closing in the 21st century.

[30] Juliet Wood, *The Concept of the Goddess* (London: Routledge, 1996), 8 and 9.

Carol P. Christ's article, "Whose History are We Writing?," explores the palatable surge toward Goddess feminism, arguing that: "Though it has no institutional funding and little academic support, the feminist spirituality or Goddess movement has hundreds of thousands of adherents in North America, Great Britain, continental Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and elsewhere across the globe."[31] Christ claims that "radical feminism" was the precursor to Goddess feminism, the latter often being aligned with essentialism, the former more politically charged, but less aligned with a genitally-inscribed female state and instead focused upon psychic/spiritual femaleness.[32] In other words, feminist theologians have come to understand Goddess feminism in ancient terms, before the "maternal" came to signify the essence of physical motherhood. Specifically, Christ "reenvision[s] the standard theological topics of authority, history, divinity, humanity and nature from the standpoint of Goddess spirituality," a "profound metaphoric shift" from patriarchal to matriarchal thinking that disrupts and exceeds normative perceptions of the feminine as flesh."[33] Christ poses two critical questions for

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[31] Carol P. Christ, "Whose History Are We Writing? Reading Feminist Texts with a Hermeneutic of Suspicion," *Feminist Studies in Religion* 20.2 (Fall 2004): 59(24). Also see: *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan,) 2003; and: Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2003). Academic studies in Goddess Feminism include: Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994); Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism: Ritual, Gender, and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London: Routledge, 2002); Kathryn Roundtree, *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-Makers in New Zealand* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Kristy Coleman, "Matriarchy and Myth," *Religion* 31, No. 3 (2001): 247-263.

[32] Christ 69 and 70.

[33] Christ 72. Also see Christ's full discussion in "Feminist Theology as Post-Traditional Theology," *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, Susan Frank Parson, Ed. (Cambridge: Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, 2002), 81-94.

feminist theory in all its forms, asking: "Does the new triad of postcolonialism, feminism, and religion suggest a way beyond these impasses?" and if so, "What is it about the Goddess that makes the antipathy toward her reemergence in Western cultures run so deep—even among feminists?"[34] As a theory, Goddess feminism weds the reclamation of the body for which essentialists have longed, and yet surpasses the body in its assumption of a sacred, pre-patriarchal force that re-codes the feminine outside of the sexed flesh. Evidenced in the music and literature of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the sacred feminine and its metaphor of the Goddess has emerged as a possible renaissance in feminist thinking. As Madonna's sacré imagery emerged within the late 80s, reinvesting the sacred with eroticism, Meredith Brooks followed almost a decade later and presented a late 20th century "Bitch" Goddess as the duplicitous, noninnocent amalgam for femininity.[35] Much like pop culture, religion, and politics, academic feminist studies very well may be heading back to the beginning to a time when the goddess was more than maternal.[36] This study investigates emergent Goddess feminism, and its corresponding conversation with pop culture, as the end result of a history of an institutionalized worship of the Maternal Goddess.

Chapter One will investigate the manner in which the Victorian ideology of the maternal woman produced a cultural goddess.[37] As perhaps the most potent writer in that

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[34] Christ 81 and 82.

[35] The particular songs that the Conclusion will investigate will be Madonna's "Like a Prayer" (1989) and Meredith Brooks's "Bitch" (1997), both of which were released under album titles of corresponding titles.

[36] Gadon xii.

[37] As I see, as Gadon does, a plentitude of various constructions of the goddess myth, the Victorian "Angel in the House" stands as precursor to the Maternal Goddess of the 20th century literature. See footnote 6.

production, Coventry Patmore effectively solidified the essentialized, mindless female in his lauded poem, "The Angel in the House."[38] Patmore's Honoria became the archetype for desexualized, submissive maternity—an icon of femininity that stabilized the myth of a Maternal Goddess and grounded it in Christian, upper-class sensibility. On his heels, John Ruskin further developed the angel trope in his work, "Of Queen's Gardens," a study in royal womanhood that incorporated angelic origins into an ordained, yet servile, femininity.[39] Yet, in investing a ruling power (however perfunctory) into the Angel Goddess myth, Ruskin's construction of the housewife-queen effectively complicated, or even infected, the Angel Goddess with a sovereign power heretofore unknown. In his suggestion that his housewife-queen take up literature, Ruskin (perhaps inadvertently) disrupted the necessary feminine servitude to a purely maternal identity, a ruptural shift in identity that Modernist women writers would fight to repair. One such author would be Virginia Woolf, who, insisting that she had murdered Patmore's angel with her pen, called for women to write despite of—or perhaps in rebellion of—their duties as wives and mothers.[40] Woolf was assured of the death of the Angel in the House as a personal victory, claiming: "She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her," yet alludes to the possibility of the Angel's rematerialization within the minds of

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[38] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House Together with The Victories of Love*, Introduction by Alice Meynell (London: George Routledge & Sons, Limited, 1903).

[39] John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (New York: The Kelmscott Society Publishers, 1865).

[40] Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, Ed. and Introduction by Michele Barrett (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1979). First printed in *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1929).

women.[41] Allowing that: "Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe," Woolf admits the strength of the phantom, and does not claim its phantasmatic demise outside of her own liberated psyche.[42] Rather, depicting her own battle with the Angel in the House as a model for liberation, Woolf called the woman writer to the act of literary murder, noting: "But it was an experience that was found to befall women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.[43]

Yet, despite Virginia Woolf's call to battle, the Maternal Goddess myth remained, as myth often does. As the Goddess was, in fact, invested with a "fictitious nature," she had grown formidable in the minds of her subjects.[44] Chapter One will also argue that, in Woolf's efforts to liberate women from a passive/aggressive angel, she ignored the historicity of the goddess myth and its reappropriation through patriarchal institutions. Chapter One offers one such myth, the Egyptian goddess Isis, as a possible reinterpretation of Patmore's angel, a blasphemous female entity that held enormous power to reshape both her body and the world. If, indeed, Patmore's "Angel" and Ruskin's "housewife-queen" were only reconfigurations of a matriarchal goddess, and if her assimilation into a phallic femininity had been affected through literature, then it would be the task of 20th century writers to disrobe a myth.

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[41] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 60.

[42] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 60.

[43] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 60.

[44] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 60.

In Chapter Two, I will argue that the Modernist struggle of women's writing grappled with the discursive materiality of language: although women authors worked to compromise oppressive binary positions of the maternal body, their work continued to nod to the foundational a prior ontology of motherhood.[45] The early feminist battle over the Maternal Goddess lies in her direct opposition to cultural production: "mother" could never incorporate the identity of "artist" if the latter obliterated the former. Twentieth-century Modernist writers such as Kate Chopin and Katherine Mansfield offered rich rhetorical landscapes upon which the maternal figure is always already trapped in her body – although this metaphysical cage did not negate the female artistic desire. It is here that the epideictic genre, a form of rhetorical appeal, was utilized by women writers to uncover traditional patriarchal ideals of motherhood as catastrophic to the female mind. Takis Poulakos investigates the epideictic genre as the impetus for social conflict, finding that it:

[45] One notable marker of Modernist literature is its assumption of foundational truth and strong nostalgia for the past. I refer to Kate Chopin and Katherine Mansfield in terms of their participation of an early (if not preemptive) Modern impulse to locate truth in binary terms, an impulse that led to a radical rejection of maternity for both authors. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* defines Modern as:

> A revolutionary movement encompassing all of the creative arts that had its roots in the 1890s . . . a transitional period during which artists and writers sought to liberate themselves from the constraints and polite conventions we associate with Victorianism. Modernism exploded onto the international scene in the aftermath of World War I, a traumatic transcontinental even that physically devastated and psychologically disillusioned the West in an entirely unprecedented way.

The most clearly defined Modernist movement in literature is located in the 1920s and 1930s, and was depicted in symbolic and mythological patterns. Also, Modern authors tended to perceive their world as "fragmented," yet also articulated in literature a belief that "they could help counter that disintegration through their works." See: *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, Editors (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1998), 220-221.

> [the work] refers to distinct arrangements of the social order only to expose them as unsatisfactory conditions of human existence, two forms of valuation in conflict with one another. Endorsing neither valuation, the work points to the tension between them as the condition for its production as well as the condition for the imaginary production of other possible valuations.[46]

Working under the radar in the form of literature, the epideictic mode was capable of commenting upon inequities in society while, at the same time, manipulating its audience to perceive their own valuations as present in the text. Such a rhetorical maneuver fit nicely into Modern literature, as it always referred to the foundational truth systems of the past while resituating that past as incompatible with current ideologies. Both Kate Chopin and Katherine Mansfield, respectively, utilized the epideictic mode to expose the "opposition between [the] actual and [the] possible," eulogizing the maternal as an actual, yet archaic, state of womanhood.[47]

Virginia Woolf, however, represents a decidedly *Post*modern move in her ability to unhinge Victorian notions of female normativity and physicality in a Modern world.[48]

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[46] Takis Poulakos, "Isocrate's Use of Narrative in the Evagoras: Epideictic Rhetoric and Moral Action," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (August 1987), 161.

[47] Poulakos 161.

[48] Although Woolf wrote within the Modern period of literature, her work predicts the Postmodern movement in her refusal to write the female condition in binary, biological terms. A working definition of Postmodernism is:

> A term referring to certain radically experimental works of literature and art produced after World War II . . . generally refers to the revolution in art and literature that occurred during the period 1910-1930, particularly following the disillusioning experience of World War I. The postmodern era, with its potential for mass destruction and its shocking history of genocide, has evoked a continuing disillusionment similar to that widely experienced during the Modern Period. Much of postmodernist writing reveals and highlights the alienation of individuals and the meaninglessness of human existence. Postmodernists frequently stress that humans desperately (and ultimately

The binary struggle of mother versus artist is thrown into relief as she presents the metaphysicality of womanhood as part fiction "attached to life at all four corners" and reinvents female bodily sustenance as being dependent upon the processes of writing, or the "food [that] we feed women artists upon."[49] Woolf's insistence upon incorporating artistic work *into* the female physical frame refused the Modernist split, a split that she saw as suicidal as "destroying the tree at its heart."[50] Her theory rejected an essentialism grounded in the myth of female subjugation; it was a radical solution that would not be tested by women writers until well after WWII. However, it is the Modernist writer's representation of the Maternal Goddess as a dangerous truth that created riotous potential for maternal dissent.

The struggles between foundational images of motherhood in literature created the social tensions upon which Postmodern writers thrived. By reappropriating the Victorian image of the essentialized maternal body as socially constituted, women writers were able to re-present "mother" as a rhetorical figure rather than real—and thereby render that figure vulnerable to deconstruction, both in literature and in real life. Motherhood, especially in Postmodern works, became the nemesis to the autonomous self, the patriarchal lie that women have been told will make them goddesses. Yet, it is

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unsuccessfully) cling to illusions of security to conceal and forget the void on which their lives are perched.

Further, Postmodernists reject the allegory of myth within literature, which is a critical departure from Modernist writers. See: *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary*, Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, Editors. (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1998), 297-298. Chapter IV will investigate the ways in which Postmodern writers rejected the myth of the Maternal Goddess in greater detail.

[49] Woolf, *Women* 41.

[50] Woolf, *Women* 38.

clear that a goddess cannot be simultaneously omnipotent *and* a servant of the state. By reversing the concept of the essential (maternal) for the nonessential (artistic), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* was able to enact what Foucault has called "throwing off the sovereignty of the signifier" through literary acts of maternal rebellion.[51] Often villianizing their own womankind, as Katherine Mansfield does in her collection *In A German Pension*, these writers worked against biological identities that second-wave feminists such as Helene Cixous saw as liberating when she called for women to "write in mother's milk."[52] It is evident that many women recognized the irony of writing from a maternal body that eclipsed the artistic mind: after all, white ink simply does not show up on paper. Resisting invisibility, these women authors methodically attempted to murder the Maternal Goddess with an ink of a darker hue – a premeditated and deliberate literary assassination of a phantom made real.

In Chapter Three, I will investigate the rise of the amaternal female, a division of the identity of woman from the ideology of motherhood. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* situates the good mother, Mrs. Ramsay, as hiding within herself a secret, sacred identity that existed ignorant of maternal essence.[53] Juxtaposed against the figure of Victorian motherhood, Woolf also positions Lily Briscoe as the amaternal artist, and invests her character with masculinist drives that disrupt the interpretability of the

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[51] Foucault 1470. Also see: Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Chicago & New York: H. S. Stone & Company, 1899.)

[52] Helene Cixous," The Laugh of the Medusa." Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. (*Signs* 1, 1976), 881. Also see: Katherine Mansfield, *In a German Pension* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1926).

[53] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1981), 58. First published in 1927.

feminine body. As Woolf sets up the essential female self to be amaternal, many male writers of the Modern period expressed, whether through the voice of patriarchal panic or pained relent, literary anxiety toward the demise of the Maternal Goddess. Two authors in particular, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, represent a withering Modernist conception of the Maternal Goddess in their constructions of motherhood, most notably in the works of *The Great Gatsby, Tender is the Night, A Farewell to Arms*, and *The Sun Also Rises*.[54] Their anxious engagement with the withering institution of motherhood is crucial to this study, often providing images of deformed motherhood marked by madness, maternal disconnect, or simple (yet ghastly) carelessness. Despite authorial intentions, Modernist male writers constitute a critical participation in the cultural deconstruction of the maternal mythical body through the fictional representation of that figure as wholly undetermined by gender.

In Chapter Four, I will trace the Postmodern reaction of women authors to the essentialist movement. If the literary destruction of the goddess began in the Modernist era, Postmodern women writers such as Alice Walker, Margaret Atwood, and Toni Morrison clenched her fate through binary (if not extreme) representations of the maternal body in fiction.[55] While Chopin and Mansfield reveal the Modernist struggle between binary, foundational truths, Walker, Atwood, and Morrison worked within alternate binaries to expose these 'truths' as constructions, a Postmodern move that

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[54] See F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925); and *Tender is the Night* (New York: Scribner, 1934). Also see: Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to* Arms, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929): and *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Modern Library, 1926).

[55] The specific works that Chapter IV will deal with are as follows: Alice Walker, *Meridian* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); Margaret Atwood, *A Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986); and Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, Random House, 1987).

denies the maternal as a substansive, stable position. Revealing the maternal to be a rhetorical, rather than ontological, anthropology, late 20th century women writers actively subverted and reappropriated motherhood through literature. In an effort to unlash the female body from the maternal, Postmodern women authors refused negotiation within the social contract (unlike their Modern mothers) through the rhetorical (albeit sardonic) submission to an essentialized motherhood, or a blasphemous refusal of it altogether. In a supreme effort to un-lash woman from her body, these authors echo the sentiment of Kate Chopin by reversing the essential (maternal) as nonessential – a rhetoric of self preservation that echoes across the 20th Century in the form of fiction.

It is here, in the literary grappling of gender-based maternity, that we can locate a radical new rhetoric emerging: a rhetoric of a democratized autonomous gender, a hybrid of essentialism and constructivism, born in the space between literature and theoretical feminist rhetoric.[56] The Conclusion will explore the assassination of the Maternal Goddess, birthed by a cultural materialism that assigned a woman's identity to her body, but whose historically layered image could not survive the very real contact between actual women's lives and fiction. The body, problematic as it may be for women resisting those sociopolitical institutions that have trapped it in categories of gender, cannot be ignored altogether in the making of a viably political feminist rhetoric. Helen Cixous points out in "The Laugh of the Medusa": "A woman without a body, dumb, blind can't possibly be a good fighter," a premise that begs the body back to the site of

[56] The term "democratized autonomous gender" is my own, developed more fully in the Conclusion.

theory.[57] Other literary/rhetorical feminists such as Judith Butler and Donna J. Haraway have offered radical options in their theories of the body performing gender and the body as cyborg, both reinvesting the body with a certain agency that is not disabled by categories of gender. It is interesting to note that Virginia Woolf, early in the century, suggested such a rhetoric when she described the female writing body as defined by the production of writing, not children, thereby *decentering* the maternal body as a natural ontology and replacing it with a technology of artistic creation.

In the Conclusion, I will argue that, even as cyborg theory remains problematic in its assumption of a physically-free subject, it offers reentry into mythology as a self-coding, anti-Christian analogy within feminist theory, in all of its forms. Donna J. Haraway places the cyborg and the goddess into conversation, although she ultimately finds the two myths incompatible, stating in her manifesto: "Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess."[58] The Conclusion will consider the possibility that the two mythical tropes are not necessarily diametrically opposed, as both are invested with anti-patriarchal, pre-Christian ontologies. Clement and Kristeva notably divorce the sacred feminine from religion and cleave it, instead, to goddess mythology, finding that "sacrilege befits a goddess" as she is always created "without the support of a clergy."[59] It is intriguing to note that the resurgence of interest in the sacred feminine similarly disaligns itself with Western concepts of ontology, and as

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[57] Cixous 880.

[58] Haraway, *Simians* 181.

[59] Clement and Kristeva 127 and 129.

these theories collide, what might be produced is a 21st century mythology of a "sacred cyborg goddess."

And so, perhaps Postmodern women writers had been rather hasty. Despite her decayed and offensive state, the Maternal Goddess might have not been slaughtered in the end, but resurrected instead in her original form. Isis, as the ancient author of the great "I AM," represents an ontology of self determination, the writer of histories, and a deity who refused the stability of a unitary physical shape. She was a cyborg who wrote upon the world, disabled, mythologized and appropriated in order to keep her mortal descendants in line. It was, therefore, only the diseased reflection of the goddess myth that haunted the 20th Century – a fiction of motherhood that had forgotten its origins – that needed killing. Whether or not literature reincarnates the goddess again remains to be seen.

CHAPTER I: THE COUP D`ETAT OF A GODDESS

I don't want to be a queen, because queens are oppressive.

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*

For the question is not at all what a mythological figure meant in its origin; but what it became in each subsequent mental development of the nation inheriting the thought.

John Ruskin, *Ethics of the Dust*

One of the most intriguing literary phenomenon that takes place in the 20th Century is the death of the Maternal Goddess. On the heels of the late Victorian era, both female and male writers were struggling with the figure of the mother: her body, her sexuality, and even her place in the realm of cultural production. Furthered by WWII, the literary construct of motherhood became increasingly Postmodern as many authors become disillusioned with traditional literary paradigms and began to reinvent those paradigms as constructs rather than preontological representations. Motherhood, as an ideal, was one such construct.

Many authors (predominantly male) became panicked by the separation of a woman from her domestic/reproductive duties, while others (predominantly female) alternately reveled in or bemoaned that separation. As a result, the essentialized "mother" position became one of literary contestation within this century in ways that both reflected upon and impacted the real lives of 20th century women. As the

suffragette gave up her throne for Rosie the Riveter, and her descendents became the artists of the second wave, motherhood came into direct conflict with cultural production. The literary figure of maternal embodiment, therefore, became a persuasive trope that worked to expose (rather than reinforce) the socially constructed nature of motherhood.

It is the exposure of the phantasmatic Maternal Goddess that left her wasted and vulnerable to unmitigated assassination, but it was the nature of her conception that ultimately assured her Postmodern demise. Cultural production created the figure of the Maternal Goddess in form of writing, founded upon the assumption of real women, and as such created a fiction that claimed to replicate a foundational truth.[60] Although the image of the Maternal Goddess is not a new one, the goddess that emerged out of the 19th century was unprecedented in her power and influence over the next century. This early maternal ideal was spawned at a crucial time in history: although there were other queens before Victoria, every woman to inherit the throne before her had been childless. Queen Victoria bore not one, but nine children who all lived to be married off to every major monarch of England – a very public maternal accomplishment that elevated motherhood (while restricting sexuality) in ways that would become notoriously patriotic. Sharon Aronofsky Weltman writes in *Ruskin's Mythic Queen* of the impact of her reign, stating that "by mid-century Victoria had erased the image of profligacy and aristocratic decay that had been associated with royalty" yet all the while "she [Victoria] projected herself

[60] Coventry Patmore's inspiration for his poem, "The Angel in the House," was based on the aesthete Alice Meynell, who in all actuality was anything but the angel, often locking herself in the bathroom to write while her children pounded on the door.

and her family as approachably domestic."[61] The encroaching imagery of royal domesticity governed by a maternal queen was not without affect in the literary world.

The advent of a maternal domestic angel in literature was perhaps inevitable: never before had maternity been so politically celebrated as during Queen Victoria's reign, nor had sexuality ever appeared to have had so little to do with female reproduction. Rather, the Victorian model of femininity had become the antithesis of a goddess: devoid of power, and much like the bloodline of a queen, ordained, determined and governed by a Christian god. Coventry Patmore's narrative poem "The Angel in the House" epitomized feminine virtue as sexless, yet entirely maternal, and ascribed the origins of the perfect wife and mother as being entirely born of God. In his bride-to-be, Honoria, Patmore infuses both the Victorian ideals of submissiveness and purity with images of Christian passivity and innocence, creating a literary image of the Angel as a servant of God's will: "Because, though free of the outer court / I am, this Temple keeps its shrine / Sacred to Heaven; because, in short, / She's not and never can be mine." [62]

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[61] Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture* (Athens: Ohio University P, 1998), 105.

[62] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House Together with The Victories of Love*, Introduction by Alice Meynell (London: George Routledge & Sons, Limited, 1903), 184. The poem was presented in two parts in 1854 and 1856 and was subsequently heavily revised. Alice Meynell's thorough critique of Patmore's poetry was for the most part generous, as she notes: "Words are fresh creatures when Coventry Patmore uses them in poetry, but they have also there the ancient freshness of a paternal tradition." Perhaps Meynell held her tongue slightly to her cheek in her praise. Yet, Meynell also nodded to the power of poetry to become part of life, to change it and feed off of it in ways that transgressed the written page. At the end of the introduction, Meynell muses that his was the work of a "great poet," and that of his shorter works: "All are living. After all, the image of life is the measure and the proof of poetry. Then is poetry alive when a reader, moved and shaken like Leontes, looking on the figure of Hermione, having beheld her colour, her light, her age, knows her indeed, and confesses her at last, by another sign—'Oh! she's warm!'" Indeed, Patmore's Angel in the House would be palpitant with life for many, many years to come. Quoted in: Patmore 7 and 26.

Yet, even as Patmore gives unto God what is *His*, the poem makes clear that the Angel is, in fact, a gift of heaven, and thereby rightfully owned by man: "Ah, still unpraised Honoria, Heaven, / When you into my arms *it gave* / Left nought hereafter to be given / But grace to feel the good *I have*."[63] Once owned, this angelic wife remains simple, devoid of personal pride, only allowed to revel in that of her offspring as praise "fill'd her kind large eyes with joy, / By patting on the cheek her child, / With, 'Is he yours, this handsome boy?"[64] Honoria (true to her name) is an angel, sexless, without physical desire, invested singularly in the reproduction of her master's image. Yet, it is in an earlier passage that the Angel's earthly demeanor is enlikened to a queen, passionless and physically elusive:

> Why, having won her, do I woo?
> Because her spirit's vestal grace
> Provokes me always to pursue,
> But, spirit-like, eludes embrace;
> Because her womanhood is such
> That, as on court-days subjects kiss
> The Queen's hand, yet so near a touch
> Affirms no mean familiarness.[65]

Evoking images of translucent spirits, Patmore's Honoria becomes a vessel of God, innocent as a child with a "vestal grace" and revered only for her heavenly services here

[63] Patmore 190. My emphasis.

[64] Patmore 191.

[65] Patmore 183. This particular passage is from Canto XII: Husband and Wife, Preludes.

on earth. His use of "vestal," which refers to the goddess Vesta who controlled the domain of hearth and home, stands as a reference both loaded with Roman idolatry yet still in conversation with Victorian English sensibility: a "vestal grace" spoke to eternal notions of virginity and nobility.[66] Patmore's fusion of angel and myth conquers feminine free will, for in female form, an otherwise celestial being is brought into submission. She is myth incarnate, yet castrated of her powers, as Vaughn's wife is named: "You, Sweet, his Mistress, Wife, and Muse," and pondered "'Were you for moral woman meant? / 'Your praises give a hundred clues / 'To mythological intent!" The Angel/Wife, while serving the heavens, must serve first as "Mistress, Wife" and exists as Muse only in subjection to her earthly consort. Even as Patmore's Honoria is enlikened to a goddess, she exists in that ethereal realm within the confines of his consciousness: "While she from all my thoughts arose / Like Venus from the restless seas!"[67] This Angel is, in essence, both mortal and immortal, captured and bled of all disputatious consciousness, for she is: "Marr'd less than man by mortal fall, / Her disposition is devout,/ Her countenance angelical."[68] In his construction of the Angel in the House as ethereal and holy, Patmore invested the early form of the Maternal Goddess with an impenetrable immortal quality – one that may have survived the Postmodern literary era if it had not been for his contemporary, John Ruskin.

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[66] All women who served the temple of Vesta, or any temple of a goddess, had to remain virgins. In this way, Patmore thoroughly captures his angel's sexuality, entombing it within the shrine of marriage.

[67] Patmore 138. This passage is from Canto IV: Love in Idleness, Preludes.

[68] Patmore 51. This passage is from Canto IV: The Morning Call, Preludes. For more on Patmore's Angel, see: John Maynard, "Coventry Patmore's Angel: A Study of Coventry Patmore, His Wife Emily and The Angel in the House," *Victorian Studies* 36 (Spring 1993); and Elaine Hartnell, "'Nothing but Sweet and Womanly: A Hagiography of Patmore's Angel," *Victorian Poetry* 34 (Winter 1997).

Against the Victorian proper literary landscape a more cogent feminine entity was emerging in the 19th century. Investigating Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens" of *The Queen of the Air*, Weltman juxtaposes Patmore's domestic Angel against the fresh image of the "housewife-queen," finding that the revised image is based in part (if not altogether) upon Queen Victoria. By melding the "idea of Queen Victoria" to the core myth of a Queen Mother, Weltman contends that Ruskin effectively "provides a figure of such moral and political authority that his exhortation of average women to become mythological goddess-queens takes on a seductive aura of possibility."[69] Although Weltman provides some valid argument for a feminist reading of Ruskin, the creative move she investigates as "helping to inaugurate the new career of social work for women" is deeply grounded in the cultural meaning of a queenship that answered to Parliament. Even as Ruskin's Queen "takes on more power and greater responsibility than Patmore could imagine for his Angel," that power is limited by law and public concept in ways that both enthrone her and bind her.[70] In fact, Ruskin's work "domesticates the sovereign" in the Queen, a move that points to traditional patriarchal methods of control.[71] Yet, as Weltman points out, it is in the introduction of the goddess as queen that Ruskin was able to revolutionize the image in ways that surpassed Patmore's innocent Angel, for a goddess is never innocent, nor ever controlled.

Although Ruskin's construction of the housewife-queen was generous for his time, the power he foresaw for her was: "for rule, not for battle, -- and her intellect is not

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[69] Weltman 104.

[70] Weltman 109.

[71] Weltman 109.

for invention or creation, but for the sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision."[72] This function was, as always, subject to the "commonwealth," and was grounded in a "personal work or duty, relating to her own home, and a public work or duty, which is also an expansion of that."[73] Ruskin critically demarcates the powers of a queen as passively defenseless, "not for battle," suggesting a figurehead without military support. What is left is no more than a castrated queen, one who might "arrange" and "decide," yet never project her authority outside of the mundane trifles of her castle walls. In his expansion of a woman's sphere, Ruskin ingratiates upon each new liberty a queenly duty, always in answer to her country, yet affords the female ego relief in the form of crowns, thrones, and noble respect. Particularly, Ruskin ascribes those duties as naturally ordained, ascribing them to a "queenly dominion" and inciting feminine passions by insisting:

> And whether *consciously or not*, you must be, in many a heart, enthroned: there is no putting by that crown; queens you must always be: Queens to your lovers; queens to your husbands and your sons; queens of higher mystery to the world beyond, which bows itself, and will for ever bow, before the myrtle crown and the stainless scepter of womanhood.[74]

Speaking to a perceived feminine egotism, Ruskin notably disregards any free will for the queen/woman, for as powerful as she may be, she is often too dim to realize her place in

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[72] John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (New York: The Kelmscott Society Publishers, 1865), 59.

[73] Ruskin 71-72.

[74] Ruskin 74. My emphasis.

the natural world. Ruskin ordains his housewife-queen through the bloodline of her sex, locating within her "heart" the iron grip of a crown she cannot refuse, and naturalizing a myth as a pseudo-biological feminine ontology. Effectively engendering a queen, Ruskin's impulse represents an institutional projection of patriarchal desire, a social function of the state that necessarily solidified and reified the housewife-queen as a natural state.

Judith Butler speaks of the regulation of gender as strategic manipulation, finding their enactment to be born of "compulsory systems." Further, Butler explains those systems as simultaneously producing and naturalizing gendered positions, a phenomenon that subsequently hides or makes invisible those manipulative processes and legitimizes its claims. Specifically, Butler finds a punitive function embedded in the projection of gender roles, arguing that:

> Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress.[75]

[75] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 178.

Gender construction's concealment, therefore, protects it from critical examination, thereby validating the policing of its subject on natural grounds. Ruskin's creation of the housewife-queen rhetorically manipulates the female subject by naming her the rightful heir to the feminine throne. By articulating womanhood in terms of royalty, Ruskin replicates phallic desire as the reflection of feminine desire, effectively postponing resistance or rebellion in his mythic queen.

Ruskin weaves a magical dream of reverence for the female mind, tempting it with mythology, shining scepters, and the possibility of an almost immortal inscriptional space of womanhood. Subtly subordinating women to the state, Ruskin strives to excite a gendered patriotism while articulating that subjection as privileged, asking women: "Will you not covet such power as this, and seek such throne as this, and be no more housewives, but queens?"[76] But it is here, in his highly manipulative quest to entice English women to queenliness, that he makes the move toward the mythic goddess that will eclipse Patmore's Angel with an almost pagan magic. Weltman points out that such an incorporation of the mystical was critical toward: "invent[ing] a queen of the night," and "mythologizing his Queen in such elevated and magical terms [so that he] creates an image of ideal womanhood" that could sustain both the interior walls of domestic life as well as the exterior gardens of society.[77] As he encourages his housewife-queen to leave her private gardens, Ruskin draws a seductive scenario in which the Queen virtually takes those gardens with her, promising protection from "bitter herbs and thorns; and only the

[76] Ruskin 71-73.

[77] Weltman 112.

softness of their feet will be of snow."[78] As those feet touch upon the earth, and if she is good, she can be assured that "the path . . . is indeed strewn with flowers; but they rise behind her steps, not before them . . . the harebells should bloom, not stoop, as she passes."[79] It would seem that the Angel had abandoned her house, and the Queen had taken to walking her countryside. What may appear to be an extraordinarily progressive stance to women's rights is partially illusory: in his endeavor to invest all external female activity with queenly duty, Ruskin's creation was most probably intended to control both female spheres, public and private, with a socially-sanctioned nobility. The problem with goddesses, however queenly, is their uncanny resistance to mortal restraint. Ruskin gave his queen-goddess a path, and the path she took was right into the 20th century.

In his efforts to encourage middle class women to take up the crown, Ruskin's "Of Queen's Gardens" makes a crucial distinction in the development of women: unrestricted reading. The Queen-goddess had evidently progressed, even within her own domestic cage, to wandering upon endless gardens of literature—a world in which she could govern herself. Ruskin's faith in a "noble girl" is undaunted by the perils of literary freedom, rather he insists that: "The chance and scattered evil that may here and there haunt, or hide itself in, a powerful book, never does any harm to a noble girl; but the emptiness of an author oppresses her, and his amiable folly degrades her."[80]

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[78] Ruskin 76.

[79] Ruskin 76.

[80] Ruskin 66. Although Ruskin argues here for female entry into the world of books, it is not clear that he foresaw that permission as a *mea culpa* for Victorian feminine oppression. In a letter referring to his own wife, Effie, by noting: "I am accustomed to regard an unpromising character even in horses and asses—I look for meekness and gentleness in women." Their marriage was later nullified on the grounds that it had not been consummated, and hinted at the possibility of impotency. For more on Ruskin and marriage, see: Phyllis Rose, "Ruskin's Power," *The American Scholar* 72.2 (Spring 2003), 92.

Containment of her mind is folly, as Ruskin points out that "you cannot hammer a girl into anything," a conjecture that does not seem to resonate in all of its implications for the author. [81] What is most pressing for Ruskin is that women should grow to be intelligent, educated guides for English mankind—what he misses is the self-autonomy he has granted his domestic Queen. If, indeed, the myth of a housewife-queen had its origins in literature, allowing access to the written word empowered the female subject with the very implement of her own oppression. The housewife-queen had, in effect, joined the dialogue of Victorian culture. Michel Foucault interrogates the static state of the linguistic statement (here "woman is a queen"), arguing that: "The rule of materiality that statements necessarily obey is therefore of the order of the institution rather than of the spatio-temporal localization; it defines *possibilities of reinscription and transcription* [sic](but also thresholds and limits), rather than limited and perishable individualities."[82] Foucault specifies the rules of repetition within literature to be distinctly separate from that of the speaking subject, finding that, once on paper, a statement is rendered vulnerable to reinterpretation, and the original "institutional" meaning may be revoked, neutralized, or reworked. The statement, then, of a supine, natural-born domestic queen is indelibly subject to destabilization—especially as it appears in print as a myth.

Yet, the language of the natural is a hard one to resist, as it necessarily implies that any meaning outside of its carefully drawn boundaries is one of deformity and thereby subject to ostracization. Certainly, Ruskin warns against feminine subordination,

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[81] Ruskin 67.

[82] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* 2nd Ed (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 1458.

marking off the realm of invention and philosophy as forbidden ground as he states: "There is one dangerous science for women—one which they must indeed beware how they profanely touch—that of theology." Naming feminine intrusion into theology as "profane," Ruskin suggests such intrusion to be unnatural, unholy, writing off that activity as "Strange, and miserably strange."[83] Worse, such an act is blasphemous. Whereas the female mind is naturally incapable of knowing God, Ruskin rails against those women who "think to recommend themselves to their Master (God)," finding them to be capable of deforming "The Household Gods of Christianity into ugly idols of their own."[84] Aligning the natural to the holy, and the unnatural to the idolatrous, Ruskin effectively sanctions the female mind to a queen's chambers and a household library, and deems all other intellectual activity as monstrous. Ruskin's prescription for female development is heavily marked with the language of the natural, often citing his reader for a degradation of faith and "use of the power of nature," yet never quite addressing that power as ungovernable.[85] Ross Elliot Eddington argues in "Millet's Rational Error" that Ruskin acknowledged that feminine power, finding that: "Ruskin was a man who aligned himself most clearly with the female mind, and who supported and justified feminine powers and abilities in his thought and writings."[86] Even so, Ruskin was clear

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[83] Ruskin 64. Ruskin uses the adjective "Strange" five times in this passage, a notable conviction against female dabbling in theology.

[84] Ruskin 64.

[85] Ruskin 70.

[86] Ross Elliot Eddington, "Millet's Rational Error: Kate Millett's Critique of John Ruskin in Sexual Politics," *Hypatia* 18.3 (Summer 2003), 193. Eddington argues for the use of John Ruskin's representations of the ruling feminine, especially toward a feminist interpretation of his work "Of King's Treasures" from Sesames and Lilies (1865), Ethics of the Dust (1866) and The Queen of the Air (1869). Finding a kinship between Ruskin and maternal feminisms, Eddington situates Ruskin's concept of

on the gendered limits of intelligence, arguing only for an incorporation of feminine thought into male development: "Not but that it would often be wiser in men to learn things in a womanly sort of way . . . in such branches of study as will be afterwards fittest for social service," yet foreclosing the possibility of the reverse for the female mind. Particularly, Ruskin allowed for a dually-gendered range of linguistic prowess for men, yet found "while a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his friends."[87] As the intellectual allotment of skill for women was to be deployed primarily through "social service," Ruskin's vision of the housewife-queen subjugated feminine service to the state, in both body and mind. Although it is evident that Ruskin acknowledged an ordained power in queenship, it is also clear that he postulated that power within the prohibitive structures of a governing parliament. And yet, once offered up to the world as a character on a page, Ruskin's feminine monarch was vulnerable to radical reinterpretation.[88]

One such reinterpretation, ironically enough, would be Ruskin's own. In *Sesames and Lilies*, Ruskin casts a unangelic mythological figure as the model of womanhood, an impulse marked by what Dinah Birch as noted as "his earliest attempts to define a new and non-Christian form for the fixed spiritual truths to be discerned in art."[89] If his work

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feminine power in cultural and historical terms and argues for a recovery of his work for feminist purposes. Also see: Dinah Birch, "Ruskin's Womanly Mind," *Essays in Criticism* 38 (1988) and *Ruskin and Gender* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

[87] Ruskin 65.

[88] For further study on John Ruskin and gender, see: Dinah Birch, *Ruskin and Gender* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[89] Dinah Birch, "Ruskin's Womanly Mind," *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 38 (October 1998), 317.

Of Queen's Gardens was invested in a Christian authority, one that ordained women as housewife-queens, *Sesames and Lilies* sought out "the myths of pre-Christian peoples—the ancient Egyptians and Greeks."[90] Turning away from his earlier rhetoric that prohibited feminine theology, Ruskin instead "found a female divinity," a radical departure from his queen who was not suited for battle. Rather, Ruskin cleaves to a goddess, as he hypothesizes an ancient model for spiritual authority, and explains:

> [that] great Egyptian people, wisest then of nations, gave to their Spirit of Wisdom the form of a Woman; and into her hand, for a symbol, the weaver's shuttle; and how the name and form of that spirit, adopted, believed, and obeyed by the Greeks, became that Athena of the olive-helm, and cloudy shield, to faith in whom you owe, down to this date, whatever you hold most precious in art, in literature, or in types of national virtue.[91]

As the Goddess of Wisdom, Athena serves dual purposes for Ruskin's work: she is both muse and warrior, and heretically male in nature. Born from Zeus's head, she is simultaneously motherless, childless, and degendered by normative Victorian standards, although Birch perceives Athena as "suggesting an alternative religion that is in some [some] ways matriarchal."[92] More than an angel, the Goddess Athena disrupts Christian

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[90] Birch 317.

[91] John Ruskin, *Sesames and Lilies: Three Lectures* (Chicago : Donohue, Henneberry, 1871). It is important to note that the reference to the weaver's loom had little to do with domestic servitude; rather, in Athena mythology, it referred to the weaving of men's lives, and time itself.

[92] Birch 317. Birch's primary argument rests on the premise that Ruskin was sexually-ambivalent, and finds his depiction of the housewife-queen in *Of Queen's Gardens* to be evidence that he was "writing across gender [and] writing of himself." If so, his model of womanhood in *Sesames and Lilies* provides relief for any anxiety of masculinity his earlier work may have suggested.

myth, as Birch points out, for she was "born fully armed" of a male deity, she was a "goddess of war," and given to fits of violent rages.[93] Finding the mythological goddess to be intrinsically androgynous in nature, Birch further contends that, as she "combined male and female qualities in her defense of order, control and reverence," Athena became "an authoritative expression of the sexual ambivalence in his own work, translated into power, and removed into the distant and culturally prestigious world of Greek literature and art."[94] Ruskin's depiction of a pseudo-masculine goddess, therefore, is not textually innocent in its ontology.

Although his earlier work had been a Christian compilation, an amalgam of institutional and patriotic femininity, *Sesames and Lilies* subverts and reappropriates the housewife-queen in a most intransigent manner. The Goddess Athena, after all, is also male—a suggestion of reincorporated sexuality, thereby legitimizing her right to battle. Further, the myth of Athena dissolves female prohibition into the legacy of a patriarchy, as legend depicts her as stating: "There was no mother who gave me birth; and in all things, except for marriage, wholeheartedly I am for the male and entirely on the father's side."[95] Ruskin's model of authority is female, yet patriarchal, sexed, yet "fit for battle," unlike his domestic queen, yet importantly a champion of the married woman. If his

[93] Birch 318.

[94] Birch 318.

[95] Philip Vellacott, *The Oresteian Trilogy: Agamemnon; The Choephori; The Eumenides* (New York: Penguin Classics; New Impression edition, 1956), 734. This passage further historicizes this speech, explaining that "Athena presided the first court which tried a case of homicide, the murder of Clytaemnestra by her son Orestes 2, establishing a permanent tribunal in Athens. This goddess, who generally prefers to see most things from a *manly* point of view, acquitted Orestes 2, for she deemed Clytaemnestra's crime, killing her husband, to be greater than that of Orestes 2, killing her mother Clytaemnestra in order to avenge his father Agamemnon." Vellacott 734.

interpretation of Athena is indeed an abjection of feminine servitude, it also serves a certain reinvigoration of masculinity to include feminine attributes. If, as Judith Butler contends, "The culturally enmired subject negotiates its constructions, even when those constructions are the very predicates of its own identity," Ruskin effectively reworks the feminine as masculine in his utilization of the Goddess Athena as a model for spirituality and leadership.[96] Birch further contends that:

> In *Ethics of the Dust* [Ruskin] develops a more assertive concept of this formidable female divinity. Athena is now defined, not only in opposition to the maleness of patriarchal Christianity, but also against the maleness of patriarchal science . . . The goddess he creates for himself out of the old images of Athena is opposed to both. She is a goddess of natural fact rather than abstract theory, of quick-tempered emotion rather than cool reason, and her function is to sustain life.[97]

Ruskin's newest goddess is, then, refigured and naturalized as a source of power that is decidedly *matriarchal*, yet maternal only in her function "to sustain life." His rearticulation of the goddess is anarchistic, as it reworks female essence with the characteristics of the male, and interprets patriarchal institutions of religion and science as unnatural. Athena is, for Ruskin, a model eroticized through masculine attributes, hierarchally resituated as an unmaternal, wise, and wrathful goddess. Butler finds a certain social permeability in the disruption of sexual essences, arguing that: "Those sexual practices in both homosexual and heterosexual contexts that open surfaces and

[96] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 182.

[97] Birch 318.

orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines."[98] Closing down the goddess's sexuality as reproductive, while opening up her gender to include attributes of wisdom and aggression, certainly resists Victorian systems of gender exclusion.

Yet, Ruskin's development of Athena in *The Ethics of the Dust* also subtly endows the goddess with a pre-Christian legitimacy, as he sets up the forces of mythology as having a real impact upon future cultures. Ruskin notes that: "Every heathen conception of deity" has three characteristics that mark it, "It has physical character," then "It has an ethical character," and finally, "It has a personal character." [99] Further noting Athena to be: "physically, the air; morally, the breathing of the divine spirit of wisdom," Ruskin laments the diminishing effects of time upon the deity, arguing:

> Each inquirer usually takes up one of these ideas, and pursues it, to the exclusion of the others; no impartial effort seems to have been made to discern the real state of the heathen imagination in its successive phases. For the question is not at all what a mythological figure meant in its origin; but what it became in each subsequent mental development of the nation inheriting the thought. Exactly in proportion to the mental and moral insight of any race, its mythological figures mean more to it, and become more *real*.[100]

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[98] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 169.

[99] John Ruskin, *The Ethics of the Dust* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1894), 217.

[100] Ruskin, *The Ethics of the Dust* 218. My emphasis.

Ruskin, therefore, posits the mind of a nation to be the home of a goddess, and denotes that space as harboring mythology, feeding it and rethinking it until its image becomes palpitant with life. The myth of a goddess, as a psychic concept reconceived through the minds of a nation, becomes a chronotope of time itself. By noting that myth as having an ontology outside of a nation's memory, Ruskin critically defines the Goddess Athena to possess an "origin," a proposition that assumes Victorian conceptions of the goddess to be historically motivated and misappropriated. Further, Ruskin notes the dangers of unequivocal acceptance of Christian history and its myths, warning his young female student, Lucilla: "That abandonment of the mind to religious theory, or contemplation, is the very thing I have been pleading with you against."[101] Perhaps the most intriguing of his lessons for the young woman is in his repositioning of Greek mythology as an ancient truth, as he suggests that: "The whole heart of Greek mythology is in that; the idea of a personal being in the elemental power . . . and of its presence everywhere, making the broken diffusion of the element *sacred*."[102] Finding within Greek mythology a forgotten passage to the sacred, Ruskin situates a divine femininity within the myth of Athena—a revolutionary concept of woman for a Victorian mind. As such, Ruskin's Athena usurped his housewife-queen as the "divine spirit of wisdom," and points to his own transgressions as a writer by noting: "And no study can be more interesting, or more useful to you, than that of the different meanings which have been created by great

[101] Ruskin, *The Ethics of the Dust* 222.

[102] Ruskin, *The Ethics of the Dust* 225. My emphasis. Ruskin's location of the sacred in Greek mythology predicts the late 20th century revitalization of Goddess feminism in theology. See the Conclusion for a complete discussion on the sacred. Ruskin's use of a "broken" sacred warrants further research in feminist theory.

nations, and great poets, out of mythological figures given them, at first, in utter simplicity."[103] It would appear here that Ruskin, however subconsciously, also reconsiders the writings of a colleague, the "great poet" who had created The Angel in the House, Coventry Patmore.

Through his reconsideration of the domestic female as a queen, and his subsequent rendering of that queen to be merely a rhetorically-disabled Greek goddess, Ruskin's work revealed both myths to be nothing more than the production of a masculinist economy. Ruskin's Greek Athena aggressively revoked his earlier rendition of femininity; therefore, in his assertion of an ancient, transgendered deity, Ruskin opened a literary space for further reinterpretation of a Maternal Goddess. As literary images often do, the image of an ancient goddess would eventually reach beyond the page, irrevocably marking the world as it had marked her. Increasingly, as the novel rose to voice the concerns of a new century, the life experiences of women were played out on the printed stage. Inscribed by the ideologies of patriarchal norms, as well as the belief systems of religion and culture, the female characters of the 20th century novel became the fictional representations of socio-political tensions, capable of displaying the realities of a gendered society in a way that transgressed mere commentary or verbal debate. Mikhail Bakhtin describes this potential as being unique to the novel as a genre, finding that: "From the very beginning the novel was structured not in the distanced image of the absolute past but in the zone of direct contact with the inconclusive present-day

[103] Ruskin, *The Ethics of the Dust* 219.

reality."[104] It is in this re-presentation of the "inconclusive" that reality is cracked open, reconsidered, and reflected back upon the reader. Throughout this process, the lines between what is real and what is text become blurred, as "the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and nonliterature and so forth are not laid up in heaven."[105] Certainly for the 20th century woman writer, heaven held no such authority. By tracing the Maternal Goddess back to and through the image of a Victorian angel who was ordained a queen, those boundaries are clearly marked by the reality that created her, and left women authors of the next century gasping for their literal and literary breath.

A Queen of Her Own Writ(ing)

In the early 20th century, Virginia Woolf would be the first to openly attempt the murder of the Angel and the regicide of the Queen. Clearly marking the distinction in separate short works, "Professions for Women" and "Royalty," Woolf comes dangerously close to naming the two images as one.[106] In the earlier essay, she writes: "In those days – the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its Angel," clearly noting

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[104] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 39.

[105] Bakhtin 39.

[106] Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, Ed. and Introduction by Michele Barrett (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1979). First printed in *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1929). For more on this particular essay, see: Cornelia D.J. Pearsall, "Whither, Whether, Woolf: Victorian Poetry and *A Room of One's Own*," *Victorian Poetry* 41.4 (Winter 2003), 596(8). For further discussion on Woolf and Modernism, see: Nicolette Pirredu, "Modernism Misunderstood: Anna Banti Translates Virginia Woolf," *Comparative Literature* 56.1 (Winter 2004), 54-76.

that the Angel depended on the Queen – or at least marking them as codependent.[107] As she deals with her angelic demon, becoming a spirit-shape, a "phantom" almost alive as: "The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room . . . And she made as if to guide my pen."[108] Angelic as this intruder may be, her dress is not a flowing robe, but "skirts" dense enough to cause a commotion fit for a Queen's gown, and her hand (it would seem) has transformed into a physical substance intended for rule. Even so, Woolf never clearly delineates this Angel as a queen – finding her true nature to be a literary creation of the patriarchy and therefore vulnerable to destruction as she claims:

> She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe . . . But it was an experience that was found to befall women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.[109]

But what of this situational death? Clearly each and every woman who wished to write would be faced with the same battle, would be incited to murder the same Angel upon reaching for their pen. It would seem that Woolf had come closest to the crux of the problem and the source of the Angel's immortality when she points to her adversary's

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[107] Woolf clearly notes that she has named her "phantom" after Coventry Patmore's "heroine." See: Woolf, *Women and Writing* 58-59.

[108] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 59.

[109] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 60.

"fictitious nature," that phantasmatic essence which could never be clearly murdered without the spillage of blood. And die, she must, for the Angel was deadly to the woman writer in her self sacrifice, for in her refusal to "never [have] a mind or a wish of her own" this heavenly image of woman infected the female pen with fear, inferiority, and shame.[110] The murder of the Angel, for Woolf, was necessary for the author's very physical survival as she claims: "I acted in self-defense. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing."[111] Writing, therefore, was living for Woolf, the beating core that transcended physicality and merged with the printed page – blurring, as Bakhtin has told us, fiction with lived reality until the boundaries are only imagined. Perhaps Woolf's understanding of her own multidimensional existence explains her death-dance with the Angel and her assurance that she had, in fact, killed her . . . yet all the while warns of the Angel's ability to resurrect herself at the shoulder of every woman writer.[112]

The Angel, for Woolf, could be ominously physical, and yet never quite identified as queenly in "Professions for Women." Conversely, in her review of *The Story of My Life*, written by Marie, Queen of Roumania (1934) Woolf's "Royalty" draws her reader to an anomaly of nature: a queen who could write. Her astonishment at this phenomenon is quite profound, as she describes a queen who virtually comes to life as "she has opened

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[110] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 59.

[111] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 59.

[112] Virginia Woolf spoke of the blurring between fiction and reality, citing the novel as "note hung upon a nail and festooned with glory, but on the contrary, walks the high road, alive and alert, and brushes shoulders with real men and women." Quoted from "Dorothy Richardson," a novel review in *The Literary Supplement* (13 February, 1919). The Angel's capacity for resurrection is an intriguing notion, and one that is discussed more fully in the Conclusion of this work.

the door of the cage and sauntered out into the street. Queen Marie can write; in a second, therefore, the bars are down."[113] In her discovery, Woolf subtly aligns the image of queen with the Angel who would stop the female pen, claiming Queen Marie to be a: "freak of fate, which Queen Victoria would have been the first to deplore, her granddaughter . . . has been born with a pen in her hand. Words do her bidding."[114] It is crucial to note the disparity Woolf creates between Queen Victoria, who controlled a commonwealth of living souls, and Queen Marie, who ruled over the realm of language and wielded the magic of the word. Here is the true power of woman for Woolf: an author who claims a life centered around words, that can create realities out of imagination, as she claims in *A Room of One's Own* that "fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners."[115] Fiction, therefore, feeds off the dust of reality's doorways, taking sustenance and space from a lived world, cluttering up that world's corners through its own intricately woven minicosmos.

Woolf clearly understood fiction to be a potent force, yet she did not distinguish between the power of fiction and the power of other writings: they were one and the same. In her assessment of a writing queen, Woolf claims Marie to be "a freak," a sharp delineation from the crippled writing hand of a natural queen. Furthering the divide between the old royal guard and a literate, female upstart, Woolf postulates that:

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[113] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 194. Reviewed by Woolf in *Time and Tide* (1 December, 1934).

[114] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 195.

[115] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1981). First published: (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929). The original essay was a compilation of two papers presented and read to the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtaa at Girton on October 1928.

"between the old Queen and the English language lay an abyss which no depth of passion and no strength of character could cross . . . words would not come to her call."[116] As Woolf divorces the image of a queen and the image of a writer, she virtually dethrones Ruskin's housewife-queen, claiming that to be a queen a woman must have "an inability to express herself."[117] Citing her proof as Victoria herself, Woolf manipulates the image of a queen into that of a living death, known only to her subjects through the "primitive little machine" of her writing. Hers was a commonwealth that "came to feel that only a woman immune from the usual frailties and passions of human nature could write as Queen Victoria wrote. It added to her royalty."[118] To be royal, or to be a queen, meant to be incapable of the art of writing. Woolf deeply carves the gulf between Victorian queenliness and literary prowess, citing the products of Queen Victoria to be "non-writing."[119] Further, Woolf posits the disabled literary function of the Victorian queen to be critical to her identity, claiming that she "owed much of her prestige to her inability to express herself."[120] By positioning the identities of a specifically Victorian queen and a writer as binary significations, Woolf disrobes both Patmore's and Ruskin's Victorian goddesses and marks them off as ignominious, illiterate models of femininity. Noting that

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[116] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 194-195.

[117] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 195.

[118] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 195.

[119] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 194. The writing Woolf is referring to is primarily the politically-focused literary housekeepings of the state, defined by Woolf as: "descriptions of celebrated people," and other notations of queenly duty. Woolf notes that Queen Victoria: "was forced by the exigencies of her profession to fill an immense number of pages, and some of these have been printed and bound between covers." See page 194-195.

[120] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 195.

royalty is always "abnormally stimulated in some ways, suppressed in others," Woolf speaks to the fictional production of royal mythology, finding that as royalty is "worshipped," its subjects become victim to the "superstition that there is something miraculous about these people shut up in their cage."[121] Radically denying a queen the honor of a female commonwealth, Woolf resituates the Queen Marie as the model for a Modern age, asking a post-Victorian world: "But what will be the consequences if this familiarity between them [queens] and us increases? Can we go on bowing and curtseying to people who are just like us?"[122] Woolf does not attempt to murder Ruskin's housewife-queen; after all what would be the point? Queen Marie had broken the spell, had strutted into the street, and in doing so "by virtue of her pen [she] has won her freedom. She is no longer a royal queen in a cage. She ranges the world . . . And if she has escaped, so too, thanks to her, have we. Royalty is no longer quite royal."[123] And so, if words are the means of escape, as well as the means of imprisonment, there is no cause for bloodshed, nor any need for Woolf to revisit her murderous account of an Angel. Ruskin's housewife-queen, once given unlimited access to a man's library as well as to the gardens of the world, had ceremoniously thrown down her crown, put aside her scepter, and taken up the pen. Yet, in Woolf's last words on the subject of royalty, an ominous prediction remains for the Postmodern world to come: "Words are dangerous

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[121] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 193-194.

[122] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 197.

[123] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 197. Woolf describes Queen Marie's writings as personal accounts, nonfictional prose that exist as "sharp little words" and portraits in which "lives grow and change beneath our eyes." See pages 194 and 196.

things, let us remember. A republic might be brought into being by a poem."[124] A poem did not, in fact, appear to be interested in altering the reality of an English constitutional monarchy in Woolf's time. It conjured instead an ancient goddess.

In order to understand the power of recreating myth, especially in literature, it is useful to revisit Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope within the novel. As Woolf narrates and navigates between the very real moments of queenly lives and the lives of their subjects, the spatial boundaries between the written page and daily life are transgressed. Bakhtin suggests that such maneuvering is enabled by the chronotope, finding them to be "organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel," but more importantly, "Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible, the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins."[125] By laying bare the life and daily writings of Queen Victoria and banishing them as a relic of the past, Woolf creates a corporeal space for the present. Conversely, by depicting Queen Marie in action, walking her out into the street as an author, Woolf carves a spatial and representational field upon the page, made possible through her manipulation of the chronotope "materializing time in space." Further, Woolf collapses the physical and imagined space between the reader and the writing queen, inscribing her in material terms as "a complex contradictory human being, wearing floating veils and a motoring cap."[126] Conceiving Queen Marie in live motion through her writings, Woolf creates a shared voyeuristic vision as:

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[124] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 198.

[125] Bakhtin 250.

[126] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 196.

> *We* see her posing in bed under a top light; dramatizing herself melodramatically, luxuriating in the flattery of sycophants; declaiming poetry through a megaphone to ships at sea; waving a napkin to grazing cows whom she mistakes for loyal subjects—deluded and fantastic, but at the same time generous and sincere. So the picture shapes itself, until all the different elements are shown in *action*.[127]

The "chronotopicity" of this scene serves to open time and space, much like Patmore's description of an angel patting her son's head, and dissolves the temporal boundaries between the text and daily life.[128] Bakhtin finds the chronotope to be "a force giving body to the entire novel . . . all of [its elements] gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work."[129] If the chronotope is capable of creating myth, which is the incorporation of fiction and folklore into daily life, then it is also capable of reconstituting myth, imprinting the "flesh and blood" of the writing woman onto the image of a queen. Bakhtin offers such a possibility, arguing that: "Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships."[130] Myth, therefore, exists as a chronotope as a carrier of time, history, and religion. Myth is a text, and in this case, a tale of institutionalized femininity, yet when myth is reflected in print, that text opens and

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[127] Woolf, *Women and Writing* 196. My emphasis.

[128] Bakhtin 251. See my discussion of Coventry Patmore's poem in the beginning section of this chapter.

[129] Bakhtin 250. My use of Bakhtin's chronotope is expanded to include poetry and prose, as I find it functioning in all types of literature. Bakhtin himself vacillates between the designation of the chronotope in the novel, text in general, and literature.

[130] Bakhtin 251.

expands to take on new meaning, they "enter into the realm of culture and . . . into the realm of literature," reflected indeterminably by shifting ideologies and socio-historical dialogues.[131]

ReWriting the Goddess

If every myth has its kernel of truth, the myth of the Maternal Goddess was grounded heavily in those female deities who, throughout time, have been symbols of our culture's deepest fears, our desires, and our political aspirations. Since ancient Greece, those goddesses answered to male gods and served the maternal functions ascribed to them by the images of their earthly sisters: birthing, suckling, caring for and rearing generations of offspring. Grecian goddesses gave birth to Roman ones as a new government demanded them, and Roman goddesses were subsumed and consumed by early Christianity as Pagan maternal figures disappeared into the image of the virgin Madonna. Shari Thurer writes in *The Myths of Motherhood* of the mythical mother, investigating the goddess's evolution as being marked by a steady leeching of her powers. Arguing that the original legend of "mother" eclipsed all male images of rule, both heavenly and earthly, Thurer contends that:

> God used to be a mother who worked outside the home. For thousands of years – from the Old Stone Age to the closing of the last goddess temples, about A.D. 500 – She did it all. The Great Mother, as She has come to be called, gave birth, underwent transformations, death, rebirth, and everything in between, and She

[131] Bakhtin 251.

> caused mortals to do the same. This maternal goddess was the oldest of all the gods, the original deity, and She was all-powerful. She made all the rules.[132]

An original deity, she was, but as the world gave way to patriarchy, she was dressed by the words of each encroaching culture, throned but disempowered, haloed yet transformed into a vessel for male gods, male desires, and male myths. Arguably, her various forms might trick the egos of history into a false understanding of myth: that each goddess was unique, backed by the socio-political origin story of a particular place in time. Yet, language has its own memory, as Michel Foucault points out in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> The statement, then, must not be treated as an even that occurred in a particular time and place [it is] an act of memory . . . Too repeatable to be entirely identifiable with the spatio-temporal coordinates of its birth . . . too bound up with what surrounds it and supports it to be as free as a poor form . . . it is endowed with a certain modifiable heaviness, a weight relative to the field in which it is placed . . . the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status . . . is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced.[133]

This memory is ingrained upon the word, then, in ways that are quite profound. Bakhtin speaks to the phenomena of language in much the same way, claiming that there is an eternal "echo of the generic whole that resounds in the word," the grain of its inception

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[132] Shari L. Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 1.

[133] Foucault 1459.

and identity that carries over throughout time. Because of language's utter plasticity, it is subject to partial takeover and its images and signifiers become vulnerable in ways that allow us to "assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate" the word to do our bidding.[134] Yet, if it is true that the echo of meaning remains, the Maternal Goddess of the 20th Century was invested with more than the reappropriations of a 19th century poet; her memory is tied to a time before men and the riveting power of the phallus. She is, in her pre-Christian form, Isis.

Despite Woolf's claim that she, indeed, murdered the Angel in the House and witnessed a queen abdicate her throne, the echo of a goddess remained. For, although an Angel will answer to her lord, and a queen to her country, one of the earliest and most powerful goddesses answered to no one. Theologians have uncovered the myth of the Egyptian goddess, finding her to be "capable of bending reality and overriding the laws of physics."[135] More importantly, Isis embodied intelligence and the power of words, as legend depicts her as: "A clever woman . . .more intelligent than countless gods . . She was ignorant of nothing in heaven and earth." Egyptian myth holds that Isis was "strong of tongue," understanding all words "which she knew with correct pronunciation, and halted not in her speech, and was perfect both in giving the command and in saying the word."[136] It would seem that Isis, much like the woman writer, had the power to make reality a fiction, and fiction a reality. Other scholars have endeavored to prove Isis to be

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[134] Bakhtin 421.

[135] Graham Hancock, *Fingerprints of the Gods* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995), 391.

[136] Quoted in Hancock 290-291. This passage originates from the Chester Beatty Papyrus in the British Museum. See: Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1901).

the basis for the myth of Mary, mother of Christ, as historically: "Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria, had openly embraced the cause of Isis, the Egyptian goddess, and had anthropomorphized her into Mary, the mother of God."[137] Historians reveal Isis to have infected even the first transcriptions of the Bible, locating her voice in the Book of Solomon as saying: "Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon."[138] But, perhaps more heretical than all other sightings of her, Isis has been credited as the original author of the great "I am" statement, a move that would plagiarize God Himself. The Nag Hammadi Library in Egypt holds authenticated scrolls that depict the goddess as addressing her subjects through the prelude "I AM," marking each new address by first asserting her power. The goddess of rebirth, able to transform into many animal shapes (such as a hawk), Isis was most often presented in both statues and drawings in fully extended golden wings, the physical evidence of her power and glory. Perhaps when Woolf speaks of "the shadow of wings" upon her page, it is not an angel that has visited her room, but an Egyptian goddess, redressed and castrated as a Christian angel.

If it can be established, then, that history does not hold multiple goddesses, but has only echoed through time versions that encapsulate dominant ideologies, Woolf and those who would later take up her sword were only slaying a fantasy of the patriarchal mind. The pervasive mythology of the goddess as real, and therefore a mortal adversary, essentialized and realized the female image even further, for it is in the blurring between

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[137] H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, Vol. II (Pasadena: Theosophical UP, 1988), 41.

[138] The King James Bible, Song of Solomon 5.

fiction and reality that new truths are spawned. And if it is language, itself, that can manipulate the real, then it has been men who have historically controlled that reality. Michael Foucault writes of the prohibitions that maintain and monitor language, claiming that: "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade is ponderous, formidable materiality."[139] Therefore, to gain mastery over language is to gain mastery over lived reality – a maneuver that ensures both the longevity of a prohibitive myth *as well as* the right to alter that myth to suit institutional order. Woolf speaks to the creative power of language when she cites the Angel's "fictitious nature" as being almost impenetrable, yet it is a fiction which she attributes to her own culture and time. In fact, the mythical goddess had taken on years of meaning, sheaths of historical skins that had each claimed to enshrine and define her – and locate her female subjects as belonging to those particular ontologies. Foucault uncovers those ontological myths of language as "eliding the reality of discourse . . . [a] a logos [that is] only a discourse that has already been held," a discourse that is "little more than the gleaming of a truth in the process of being born to its own gaze."[140] This linguistic manipulation, Foucault contends, is born of a "profound logophobia," the fear of discursive materiality ungoverned by civilized men. Embedded in the closing of his essay, Foucault offers the only way out of the vortex of discourse: "We must call into question our will to truth, restore to discourse its

[139] Foucault 1461.

[140] Foucault 1470.

character as an event, and finally throw off the sovereignty of the signifier."[141] Regretfully, it would be decades after Woolf walked away from fiction and into the water before the Maternal Goddess, infused with an ancient materiality, was finally called into question as a truth.

As the late Victorian world yielded to an early Modern one, the Maternal Goddess would be taken up by female authors as a formidable, and therefore deadly, reality. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, predicting the Modern conception of foundational truth systems, would attempt to slice the maternal essence out of woman in the character of Edna. Yet, Chopin's creation would not adapt well to a late Victorian ideology that worshiped the institution of motherhood. Sending Edna to the sea to save her soul, Chopin's novel interrogated biological womanhood through the physical existence of maternal deviation, and by doing so, created a certain tension between culturally-constructed norms and ontological states of femininity. Conversely, Katherine Mansfield's *A German Pension* serves as an anthropological study in female sexuality, in all of its forms, and provides a critical lens through which the lived reality of women is considered to be neither romantic nor wholly innocent. Mansfield's women are often the victims of their biological reproduction systems, and when they are exempt from them, remain victims of an idealized feminine modernity. Unlike Mansfield's work, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* resisted the external separation of a woman's life, instead examining the female psyche as the internally-enslaved self, enacting a corporeal reversal of the primacy of the soul over the maternal body. All authors, in one way or another,

[141] Foucault 1470.

negotiated between a cultural desire for the Maternal Goddess and the stark realities of daily life, and by doing so, began a conversation that would echo throughout Modern literature. It was, in effect, the beginning of an insurrection of a goddess.

CHAPTER II: ESSENTIALLY SPEAKING

"I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself." Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

As the 19th century gave way to a new era of women writers, the Maternal Goddess became a location of contention as Modernist concepts began to clash with economic realities. In an attempt to create a literary crisis between motherhood and the autonomous self, Modernist women writers worked to negotiate and mediate the female position within the foundational concepts of their time. Nature, as an assumed governing reality, had not yet been usurped – and the Maternal Goddess had gathered power from her Victorian benefactors. Yet, as women began to question the validity of a life that refused all artistic expression in favor of one that bowed to the maternal duties of the patriarchy, literature became a site of female dissention. However immediately ineffectual that dissention, early Modernist women writers laid the groundwork for the rebellion to come. By revealing the definitions of mother and artist, wife and individual, as binary and incompatible, these authors laid bare the unsustainability of a maternal identity. It was, in the deepest sense, the beginning of constructivist feminism – a feminism that would not allow a goddess myth any bearing upon a lived reality.[142]

[142] Constructivist feminism is a theoretical response to essentialism. Refusing physical categories such as "maternal," finding them to be disabling and oppressive, constructivist feminism disassembles patriarchal labels as it works rhetorically to re-define gender roles and theories of physicality as cultural and linguistic constructions. The Conclusion discusses the implications of constructivism for 21st century feminism.

A Fallen Angel

At the end of the 19th century, Kate Chopin, then widowed and penniless with six children to support, turned to writing in order to save herself and her family from economic ruin. She did quite well for almost a decade, and then abruptly ended her career in 1899 with the publication of her last novel, *The Awakening*. Scandalized for treating women as if they were passionate, marriage as if it were a prison, and motherhood as an abstract concept, her career was virtually ended five years before her death.[143] Censured for her rhetoric of the domestic goddess as being virtually asleep to her own needs, Kate Chopin's pivotal work touched upon an issue that still troubles feminists today: the essentialized woman.[144] In many ways, Chopin's work questioned

[143] Although she did put together another collection of short stories entitled *A Vocation and a Voice*, it was rejected for publication in 1900. She suffered a cerebral hemorrhage on August 20, 1904, and died two days later. Her erotic short story, "The Storm," was written only one year before *The Awakening*, though she never sought publication for it.

[144] One review put it simply: "It is a brilliant piece of writing, but unwholesome in its influence. We cannot commend it." See: "Literature," *The Congregationalist* (24 August 1899), 256. The overall surge of moralistic reviews was overwhelming, yet few cited Chopin for her lack of skill, focusing primarily upon the dangers of an unleashed feminine will. One such review revels in the suicide of Chopin's protagonist, noting that "we are well satisfied when Mrs. Pontellier deliberately swims out to her death in the waters of the gulf. See: "Book Reviews," *Public Opinion* 26 (22 June 1899), 794. Also see "Fiction," *Literature* 4 (23 June 1899), 570; "Fresh Literature," *Los Angeles Sunday Times* 25 (25 June 1899), 12; and "Recent Novels," *The Nation* 69 (2 August 1899), 96. Women also found Chopin's writing to be superb, yet her subject to be disputable in character. Willa Cather, under the pseudonym of "Sibert," wrote: "A Creole *Bovary* is this little novel of Miss Chopin's . . . She writes much better than it is ever given to most people to write, and hers is a genuinely literary style; of no great elegance or solidity; but light, flexible, subtle, and capable of producing telling effects directly and simply." Yet, Cather takes Chopin up on her choice of themes, lamenting that "next time I hope that Miss Chopin will decote that flexible iridescent style of hers to a better cause." See: "Books and Magazines," *Pittsburg Leader* (8 July, 1899), 6. Signed "Silbert" [Willa Cather]. Such negative reviews did not unanimously represent *The Awakening*'s reception, as one review contends that: "There may be many opinions [that] touch other aspects of Mrs. Chopin's novel "The Awakening," but all must concede its flawless art . . . [Edna] was not a great sinner but by and by she became a poor, helpless offender, which is the way of such persons—not good enough for heaven, not wicked enough for hell . . . It is sad and mad and bad, but it is all consummate art." See: C. L. Deyo, "The Newest Books," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (20 May, 1899), 4. Also see: Lucy Monroe, "Chicago's New Books," *Book News* (March 1899), 387.

the Maternal Goddess as real – although Chopin never openly spoke Her name. Rather, in the character of Edna, Chopin brought to life a creature whose very existence questioned the maternal essence, and by doing so, contested the goddess/woman contract on grounds of incompatibility.

In her defense of *The Awakening*, Chopin separates herself from the character of Edna, making her literary creation all the more real by claiming:

> Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the day was half over and it was then too late.[145]

Enacting the horrified speech of Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, Chopin becomes both creator and victim of a character run amuck, and she invests enormous autonomy into Edna in the bargain. Yet, even Edna is devoid of malicious intent: her awakening is purely accidental, as if Nature had gone awry, de-evolving and dissolving into itself despite civilization and all good mortal intentions.

Chopin develops the character of Edna Pontellier as a woman awakening to her own innate desires, and identity, regardless of her position as wife and mother. From the beginning, her husband is troubled by her new attitude toward her children, worrying himself over: "her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a

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[145] From "Aims and Autographs of Authors," *Book News* 17 (July 1899), 612.

mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?"[146] Leonce's pained speech bemoans what seems to be a perversion of Nature, a mother disconnected from the product of her womb. What is clear about Chopin's Edna is that *this is* Nature working from within, an unexpected and unwarranted disruption in her very soul – a move that would question the very essence of maternity as a biological truth. Chopin's development of Edna increasingly resists the mystified, romantic role of motherhood in a manner that is marked by a semiotic reversal of maternal instincts as unnatural rather than natural. Her "awakening" becomes a crippling act of self-discovery as Chopin depicts Edna refusing to be obedient in her role, rather "a certain light was beginning to dawn dimly with her—, the light which, showing the way, forbids it."[147] Edna's new knowledge is simply this: she is not, nor will ever be again, just a mother, for "she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions."[148] Chopin's rhetorical construction of this awakening works to lay bare the *fallacy* of what is essentially female, as well as what is essentially male. Disrupting the notion of the embodied mother, Edna's husband Leonce becomes the mouthpiece of the dominant ideology as he complains: "the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family," to which, shockingly, Edna curtly replies: "I feel like painting."[149] The rhetorical suggestion

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[146] Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1994), 7. First published by Chicago & New York: H. S. Stone & Company, 1899.

[147] Chopin 14.

[148] Chopin 14.

[149] Chopin 55.

seems to be that the two activities are in discord, as they constitute dualities that *cannot*, as long as they stand in opposition, remain static. In fact, for Chopin, they could not – but for an early Modern world, steeped in a belief system that operated on biological truths, Chopin had stomped upon forbidden ground.[150] In her refusal to incorporate a ruling maternal essence in the character of Edna, Chopin's novel articulated an alien discourse of feminine autonomy in a late Victorian world. Edna, in essence, became a creature without a category.[151]

Monique Wittig writes in "The Straight Mind" of the categories employed by "The Structural Unconscious" (the dominant ideological structure), finding them to be products of a dominant heterosexual discourse that creates a reality for the oppressed.[152] This reality, however, is a contingent one: once the "contract" is broken, the oppressed have the unique potential to reshape their reality. First and foremost, Wittig finds that the oppressed must "produce a political transformation of the key concepts . . . for there is another order of materiality that of language."[153] In other words, "mother" and

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[150] Chopin's work, although published at the end of the Victorian era, was decidedly Modern in its conception. For instance, there is an element of foundational truth woven throughout her text, an either/or presumption of the state of things both physical and spiritual. Jennifer B. Gray writes of this phenomenon in her work, claiming that: "Though Chopin presents more than one option . . . through her female characters, each role is either a singular and limited expression of identity or ultimately an impossibility beneath the pressures of hegemonic society." See: Jennifer B. Gray, "The Escape of the 'Sea': Ideology and *The Awakening*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 37.1 (Fall 2004), 53(21). For further commentary on Chopin's early form of feminism, see: Jules Chametzky, "Edna and the 'Woman Question,'" *The Awakening: A Norton Critical Edition*, Ed. Margo Culley (New York: Norton., 1994), 221–222; and Margit Stange, "Personal Property: Exchange Value and the Female Self in *The Awakening*," *Contexts For Criticism,* Ed. Donald Keesey (Mountainview: Mayfield P, 1998), 505–516.

[151] For a Nietzschean reading of *The Awakening*, see: Patricia L. Bradley, "*The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Awakening*: Influences and Intertextualities," *Southern Literary Journal* 37.2 (Spring 2005), 40-61.

[152] Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon P, 1992), 30. Forward by Louise Turcotte.

[153] Wittig 30.

"goddess" can be exorcised from their ordained connotations, and by doing so, one might find a space outside of the political and heterosexual realm of reality. And it is here, outside of those semiotics and categories, that one might also refuse the "fixed discourse of eternal essences."[154] This is, in fact, the rhetorical maneuver that Chopin enacts as she breaks with her narrative long enough to turn to her audience and pronounce: "he could not see that she was becoming *herself* and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world."[155] Edna has discovered her fictitious self, the self that might be usurped simply by declaiming it as a viable category. What could not be usurped, however, was Chopin's own reality: against the Structural Unconscious of her time, Edna's voice sounded only the erratic echo of a madwoman.

As Edna continues to awaken to her new self, the affect of her metamorphosis upon the men of her world is dramatic. When Leonce summons the Doctor to study Edna's seemingly erratic behavior, his diagnosis is marked by a sense of awe as he detects: "a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known into a being who . . . seemed palpitant with the forces of life . . . She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun."[156] What is interesting about the Doctor's response is his lack of a semiotic category in which to place this new "being," for Edna was operating *outside of* the legitimate discourse of her time. Wittig

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[154] Wittig 31-32.

[155] Chopin 55. My emphasis.

[156] Chopin 67.

sees such a self-imposed ostracization to be liberating, finding that when a woman refuses the category of "woman," she is no longer trapped within the sociopolitical language – rather, she becomes something new. A radically subversive move such as this places the individual, as Wittig states, outside of the "heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems."[157] Certainly Chopin's work attempts to set the character of Edna free from the confines of "heterosexual systems" and semiotic control. Yet, as Edna becomes an emerging identity outside of those systems, Chopin allows the good Doctor no adequate language to describe Edna, rather, she has simply become "a being."[158] Shaken by his unnatural discovery, the good Doctor laments that "he did not want the secrets of other lives thrust upon him."[159] It would seem that Edna had disturbed the peace of what Wittig calls the Straight Mind, as Dr. Mandelet perceives Edna inner world as a violent intrusion, a "thrust" upon his understanding of a symbolically ordered world. Wittig's theory invests enormous freedoms in refusing semiotic categorization, yet envisions such an act as a retreat, claiming that: "When the general state of things is understood (one is not sick or to be cured, one has an enemy) the result is that the oppressed person breaks the psychoanalytical contract."[160] It is intriguing to note Dr. Mandelet's response to Edna's dissolution of that contract as defensive, which in turn positions his patient as the aggressor. To one extent, Edna

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[157] Wittig 32. For more discussion on Kate Chopin and the disruption of gender, see: "'*Si tu savais*': The Gay/Transgendered Sensibility of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," *Women's Studies* 33 (2004), 145-181.

[158] Chopin 67.

[159] Chopin 68.

[160] Wittig 24.

represents the oppressed and bound patient whose discourse is acted upon by the "unrelenting tyranny" of psychoanalysis.[161] Conversely, Edna's lack of compliance to Dr. Mandelet's tenuous offer of psychoanalytic services further distances her from the gendered position of hysteria, for, despite her inner turmoil, she exudes the calm fortitude of a willing exile. Upon the doctor's advances, Edna replies simply: "Some way I don't feel moved to speak of things that trouble me. Don't think I am ungrateful or that I don't appreciate your sympathy. There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my own way."[162] Edna has become her own therapist, and such a constitution undermines the hegemonic logic of the fragile female psyche.

Edna's doctor cannot imagine how she will now exist independently from the identity of wife and mother, conceding that the maternal ideal "seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost"[163] It is society's *concept* of Nature, the ultimate essentialism, that has come to rest on Edna's shoulders, and she must choose between what culture sees as arbitrary (her identity as individual) and what it sees as essential (her identity as mother). Unfathomable to those around her, Edna defies the assumed maternal identity of her peers, for:

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[161] Wittig 25.

[162] Chopin 105.

[163] Chopin 105.

> In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. [164]

It is evident that mother-women are essentially first *mothers*, a delineation that Chopin sharply carves out as subsuming and governing their gender. Paradoxically, these "ministering angels" first and foremost must invest in the worship of their offspring, representing a marked shift from John Ruskin's housewife-queen as the recipient of worship. Chopin navigates motherhood from the necessary sacrifice of the female mind to the manifestation of an alien, selfless angel, a frightening yet physical transformation culminating in the growth of wings.[165] Something more is at stake, therefore, than simple autonomy, for to become an angel, a mortal must first experience the death of a soul.[166] Motherhood, as the permanent severance of free will, equaled such a death for the character of Edna Pontellier.

As Edna creates a space for herself, in a home that she supports by herself (and without her children), she becomes increasingly disconnected from her prior life –

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[164] Chopin 9.

[165] Chopin links the growth of wings to the evolution of the good mother, which is strikingly reminiscent of Coventry Patmore's Honoria in "The Angel in the House." See Chapter I for a full discussion.

[166] Chopin's use of a "ministering angel" is intriguingly similar in situation to William Shakespeare's use of the image in *Hamlet*. After Ophelia has committed suicide, and gone quite made, Laertes swears over her unhallowed grave that "a ministering angel shall my sister be when thy liest howling." See William Shakespeare, "Hamlet," *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 4th ed., Ed. David Bevington, (New York: Longman, 1997), 1065-1116.

feeding her art and her sexuality rather than her offspring.[167] Assuming such freedom, however, is not without its consequences, as Chopin interrupts the consummation of Edna's affair with Robert with the impending labor of her friend, Adele. Chopin subtly (if not somewhat maliciously) aligns the sexual climax of the novel with childbirth, a scene that demonizes Nature and narcissizes the Maternal Goddess. As the scene unfolds:

> Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread . . . She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an *awakening* to find a little new life to which she had given being . . . With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture.[168]

Once "awakened" in the throes of childbirth, Nature becomes the watchdog of dogmatically patriarchal institutions, while the essential self is "deadened" by the chloroform that erases all memories of the act. As this Nature, for Chopin, is ultimately the agency of a maternal ideology, it is also the force that will demand payment for sexual gratification, within or outside of the marital sphere. Thus, while Edna's affair could work to deprivilege her from the very Maternal Goddess identity that threatened to consumer her, the symbolic law of Nature would silently ensure her financial, social, and physical doom in the bargain. Remarkably, Chopin identifies an alternative force of

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[167] In the character of Mademoiselle Reisz, Chopin creates the only female alternative as the childless and secluded artist. Although Chopin may appear to be simply reinscribing the notions of the dominant culture, it is in the rhetorical statement, in this splicing of a woman, that we hear Chopin's condemnation of such a separation.

[168] Chopin 104. My emphasis.

Nature to regulate the mind, reterritorializing the ownership Edna's body by subjecting it to an awakened, female consciousness. It is *this* Nature, alien and fierce, that Edna will fight to protect. As Chopin works to separate a female existence from a maternal ideology, it is evident that such a separation is unintelligible for her time—for even Edna gropes at the idea through ambiguous terms: "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me."[169] As the consummate mother-woman, Adele understands that life to be the sacrifice of the elusive internal self, and commends her friend as one winged angel to another: "I don't know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by the unessential . . . but a woman who would give her life for her children could do not more than that – your Bible tells you so."[170] Her words disavow the irreducibility of Edna's self-awakening, but predict her last and most aggressive attempt to communicate her autonomy.

In what would seem to be the only natural answer to the dilemma, Edna chooses death. As she swims out too far into an ocean, she thinks once more of her children, but "understood now clearly what she had meant . . . that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children."[171] Herein is the immutable sacrifice, for Edna had located a self outside of the symbolic order of motherhood, a self that articulated desire in such a way that drowned out all other claims upon her body and

[169] Chopin 46.

[170] Chopin 46.

[171] Chopin 108.

mind. In a futile attempt to negotiate within the unbearable realities of her time, Chopin sacrifices her heroic protagonist for a rhetorical statement on *what cannot be*.[172] By disrupting the natural teleology of a mother's life, *The Awakening* articulates the natural as a socio-cultural fiction signifying a patriarchal desire for the maternal woman. In doing so, Chopin draws the line in the sand between motherhood and the self, imagining a materiality that could circumscribe maternal duties to the margins of a woman's life. Giving up the unessential, as Chopin's rhetorical mother tells us, is never the problem. Becoming unessential, however, is quite another matter.

A Method to Madness

Although the problem Chopin tackles in *The Awakening* is clearly maternal essentialism, her method, or rhetorical maneuvering, is much more difficult to analyze. Chaim Perelman writes in *The New Rhetoric* of the complicated nature of the epideictic genre, finding that: "The orator's aim . . . is not just to gain a passive adherence from his audience but to provoke the action wished for or, at least, to awaken a disposition to act."[173] This provocation deepens the definition of epideictic: no longer a simple rhetorical value judgment (what is good, what is bad), epideictic rhetoric takes on riotous

[172] Not all critics have read the end of *The Awakening* as literal suicide. Robert Treu contends in "Surviving Edna: A Reading of the Ending of *The Awakening*," that: "even if we do infer Edna's drowning, it does not follow that her death is necessarily a suicide." Treu argues for a Bakhtian approach to dialogic narratives, finding that through its lens, Edna's drowning might articulate a "heteroglossia, rather than Edna's psychic confusion," and finds a "language of rebirth and rebellion" in her swim out to sea that does not necessitate suicide. For more, see: Robert Treu, "Surviving Edna: A Reading of the Ending of *The Awakening*," *College Literature* 27.2 (Spring 2002), 24-36.

[173] Chaim Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* 2nd ed (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 1388.

potential, as Perelman illuminates in the literary example of *Julius Caesar* which "opens with a funeral eulogy . . . and ends by provoking a riot that is clearly political."[174] Seeing this end as not being grounded in pure praise and blame, Perelman finds a persuasive function in the epideictic genre, as "its goal is to intensify an adherence to values, to create a disposition to act, and finally to bring people to act."[175] Chopin, therefore, creates a unique position through the use of the epideictic method: the values to which her rhetoric speaks do not belong to that of her own sex, but rather the belief systems and physical desires of men.

Indeed, what the character of Edna wants most desperately is the unessentialized male position: to be a parent, but also (and most critically) to enjoy one's career, art, freedom, sex . . . all without the cost of social sanction. Her statement to her male audience becomes one of camaraderie: you understand me, we share the same needs, we have the same values. In a scene that depicts Edna as fiercely commanding a dinner party, Chopin describes her "attitude . . . her whole appearance . . . which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone."[176] Aligning her vision of Edna with that of a queen, a vehicle of ultimate power, Chopin speaks to the desires of a male audience. Yet, this is an American Queen: no longer inherently domestic, Edna has taken a house without children, yet kept her housekeeper. Chopin's queen no longer labors under the shadow of Queen Victoria: she answers to no constitutional Parliament, clearly violating John Ruskin's early prescription of "be no

[174] Perelman 1388.

[175] Perelman 1388.

[176] Chopin 84.

more housewives, but queens."[177] Rather than representing the domestic, Chopin's queen has thrown off her consort, taken up court with friends and lovers, and refused all heirs. Edna's maternal essence, if she is allowed one at all, is one of a physical and emotional lack of any attachment to her offspring. In yet another moment, when Edna must leave her children to attend to her art, she finds that "the glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui."[178] Her language is that of a bachelor, resisting the trappings of the domestic sphere without maternal regret or resignation. It is the language of a man. Most intriguingly, the married women in the novel do not share Edna's desires or values, but see her as outside of their identity as women, as Madame Ratignolle explains to Robert (the sexual object of Edna's desire): "She is not one of us, she is not like us."[179] And, much like the father who must leave for work or play, Edna responds to her children in such a way that the male mind could understand: "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way . . . Their absence was a sort of relief . . . It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her."[180] Chopin has, in refusing the essentialized position of women, taken on the role of the unessentialized man: *physically independent* of his offspring, invested in the desires of the body, political power, and domestic freedom. And it is in this highly manipulative move that Chopin creates a

[177] See Chapter I for a complete discussion of Ruskin's housewife/queen.

[178] Chopin 54.

[179] Chopin 20.

[180] Chopin 19.

tension, however subtle, between the institutionalized roles of the sexes and the reality of the lives that they attempt to police.[181]

Takis Poulakos investigates the epideictic genre as functioning as an unobtrusive, yet effective, producer of conflict. Finding in his work on *Evagoras* that:

> [the work] refers to distinct arrangements of the social order only to expose them as unsatisfactory conditions of human existence, two forms of valuation in conflict with one another. Endorsing neither valuation, the work points to the tension between them as the condition for its production as well as the condition for the imaginary production of other possible valuations. (Poulakos 160)

In is in the space of conflict that the rhetorical persuasion to act is born, as Poulakos points out:

> Exposing actual social and economic relations as human valuations, epideictic oratory discloses the capacity that participants of a society have to become social agents by articulating their own versions of the social order. It is this opposition between actual and possible valuations that frames the question of epideictic's relation to society.[182]

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[181] Bruce McComiskey discusses the use of the epideictic mode in Postmodern terms, finding that "postmodern epideictic rhetoric . . . does not praise the socially constructed virtues that characterize a ruling class ideology; instead, graffitic immemorial discourse represents what has been left unrepresented (what has been repressed by the hegemonic logics of dominant-class ideologies), counter-representing memorialized representations, creating subversive memorials and immemorial subversions; it shifts and fragments sociotextual contexts, subversively placing dominant signs into contradictory settings and arranging contradictory dominant signs into subversive collages." As such, Chopin's collage of the unmaternal mother's life participates in an immemorial discourse against the dominant sociopolitical ideologies of her time. See: Bruce McComiskey, *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric* (Illinois: Southern Illinois U, 2002), 93.

[182] Takis Poulakos, "Isocrate's Use of Narrative in the Evagoras: Epideictic Rhetoric and Moral Action." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* (August 1987, v73), 161.

And so, in setting up the character of Edna, Chopin does in fact "expose" the impossibility of the essentialized woman. Allowing Edna to first awaken to *and then* live the life she desires, Chopin does, indeed, invent an "imaginary production of other possible valuations," but it is in the author's refusal to realize the alternative (for Edna) that we find the tension, that "opposition between [the] actual and [the] possible." [183]

Yet, this opposition is even more complicated once it is examined as a constitutive reality. Indeed, Chopin's work subtlety accuses the phantasmatic embodiment of maternal essence of being rhetorically constructed in the first place. Edna has simply refused to play her part in a hegemonic world, preferring instead to ad-lib monstrously unfeminine desires. Such a move, however marginalizing, denaturalizes the symbolic order and destabilizes the rhetoric of a gendered ontology. Michel Foucault writes in *The Order of Discourse* of the "provisional theater" in which we all operate, our limited space of discourse mediated by "the order of laws" set upon it by society, specifically that of its institutions. In that space reside prohibitions that limit discourse, set in place as a response to a subconscious fear, or "logophobia," of the possible realities such language can create. One of the most intriguing prohibitions Foucault investigates is that which would silence the "madman" who speaks against all reason . . . yet it is the speech of the madman that causes the greatest disquiet. For there, in those unreasonable ramblings, we might find: "the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naiveté what the others' wisdom cannot perceive."[184] Even more terrifying

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[183] Poulakos 161.

[184] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* 2nd ed (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 1461.

is the possibility that this mad discourse operates despite sanctioned divisions, perhaps even "working differently along other lines, through new institutions, and with effects that are not at all the same." It matters not if this discourse is true, it only matters that it can be – for it is a discourse that puts dominant society "on the alert," and lays the groundwork for another, heretofore unrealized, reality.[185]

And what if that reality is that *women are not essentially mothers?* It is a suggestion that certainly places the domestic sphere at risk, marriage and all other institutions which have controlled women's lives in jeopardy. The *logos* of the essentialized mother is invested in its discourse, which, once understood as the very creator of that reality, can be ultimately usurped and made over. Therefore, Edna's articulation of possible alternate realities becomes the ramblings of a madwoman. Yet, such a discourse renders visible the vulnerability of an institution, that which "supposes that at the very basis of experience . . . there were prior significations . . . wandering around in the world arranging it all around us and opening it up from the outset to a sort of primitive recognition."[186] In other words, setting up this "originating experience" of motherhood as already real, Chopin is able to rhetorically disable that reality with its nemesis – which, of course, will cost her license to speak. Foucault points to the danger of testing logocentric institutions, suggesting that such an act taps into an underlying fear that *logos* itself is "only a discourse that has already been held, or rather it is things themselves . . . which imperceptibly turn themselves into discourse as they unfold the

[185] Foucault 1462.

[186] Foucault 1470.

secret of their own essence."[187] It would seem Chopin had uncovered the only essential truth: that language can create temporal truth, and that which creates may also destroy.

Although censured by her critics, the rhetoric of Chopin's novel remains as evidence of an emergent voice refusing the identity prescribed for women.[188] Raymond Williams provides the foundation for this phenomenon in his work, "Literature in Society," defining culture in literary terms: " I think we have to recognize a category that I would call the pre-emergent, where the recognition of new experiences, new possible practices, new relations and possible relations is apprehended but not yet articulated."[189] Emergent cultures, and pre-emergent ones, by their very nature work in this way. The roots of pre-emergency often lay in the original definitions of any culture, in their "intentional potential imbedded in them."[190] This potential, according to Bakhtin, allows for "reaccentuation," therefore treating the word "woman" as text, and thereby locating "embodied mother" as its original definition, what might emerge is *dis*embodied. In his *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin explains this process: "New images in literature are very often created through a re-accentuating of old images, by translating them from one accentual register to another."[191] These images, constructed through discourse, can

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[187] Foucault 1470.

[188]The *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, June 25, 1899 stated: "there are sentences here and there throughout the book that indicate the author's desire to hint her belief that her heroine had the right of the matter and that if the woman had only been able to make other people 'understand' things as she did she would not have had to drown herself in the blue waters of the Mexican Gulf." This, apparently, was heresy.

[189]Raymond Williams, "Literature and Society," *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 36.

[190] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Ed. Michael Holquist, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981), 421.

[191] Bakhtin 421.

transform, or at the very least disrupt, reality as a society understands it. For, if we see literary images as discursive reality (as Foucault does), and also understand these images to be utterances that "originate at the point of contact between the word and actual reality," (as Bakhtin does), then we have on our hands not just a novel, but a rhetoric capable of carrying with it the power to re-create culture.[192]

Chopin's rhetoric of the disembodied mother preempts feminism as we know it, perhaps standing alone as the pre-emergent structure of feeling to come in the later 20th century. At the precise moment in the text when Edna claims, "I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself," Chopin separates the body of a woman from the bodies of her children, and motherhood becomes a decisive act one chooses to do rather than a state in which one lives. This abstract idea of "self" as the signifying reality of a woman usurps all previous meaning, and motherhood has been reaccentuated, reappropriated, as a constitutive alternative that is, paradoxically, essentially nonphysical. Working from a position that Wittig would call "break[ing] off the heterosexual contract," Chopin effectively "undermined" preconceived categories, put into conflict the role of mother versus woman/artist, and refused to speak only to a female audience.[193] In many ways, her rhetoric of motherhood works through the seemingly solid layers of discursive reality, laying bare new possibilities, new realities. The *abstraction* for the character of Edna is, of course, the alternate life-style without her children, but the *re-presentation* of Edna's reality is her suicide, a rhetorical statement in itself. It is the

[192] Bakhtin 421.

[193] Wittig 32.

place of the strongest and most aggressive refusal to choose between polar identities for a woman.

Struggling against a phallocentric world, Chopin depicts Edna again as a "being" unknown and unknowable to her world, as "The present alone was significant, was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded."[194] Further, Chopin questions the reality of that world by allowing it, rather than Edna, to be unfathomable, as she opens her eyes to "an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic."[195] This redescription of the real was remarkable for a early Modern author, although Chopin does allow that "alien world" to encroach upon her protagonist's existence – situating the tormented figure of Edna as doomed for her transgressions. And yet, those transgressions, against all culturally intelligible norms, occur within almost evolutionary and natural stages that answered not to society but rather to "the animalism that stirred impatiently within her."[196] This "animalism," although intoxicating, does not fit well into a polite and civilized society. Chopin's world is strewn with women "asleep" to the truth of their natural existence, perhaps the safest means to maneuver oneself through a life that, for Edna, was only "a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation."[197] Only by awakening does Edna begin to live, unlike her blind and

[194] Chopin 44.

[195] Chopin 51.

[196] Chopin 75.

[197] Chopin 56.

wormlike sisters, but to choose life means, inevitably, to choose death. At the very least, it was a death taken by the hand, eyes wide open.

At its finale, *The Awakening* comes full circle as Chopin, after decisively separating Edna in two, seeks to put her back together again. And it is here, as Edna swims purposefully too far into the ocean, that we hear the author refuse the split, as Edna: "thought of Leonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul."[198] Tragically possessing herself, Edna disavows the foreclosure of motherhood upon her life, finding her children to be "antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery."[199] Her embrace of the sea radically denies that of the parasitic child who would enslave her "body and soul" as a maternal being. A funeral elegiac in itself, Chopin's fictional account of the life and death of Edna Pontellier works as a discourse of the epideictic genre, rich with riotous potential: it is the persuasive yet audible call for the unessential mother, critics be damned. Kate Chopin never published again.

Academic feminist studies revived Chopin's work in the mid 1970s. To date, however, her work has been most often regarded as a site of domestic resistance rather than a rhetorical statement of opposition to the identity of the embodied mother. Chopin's work rebuked the notion of maternal essence as a viable existence, finding it, instead, to be a specifically disabling ideology to the woman/artist. Her repudiation of

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[198] Chopin 109.

[199] Chopin 108.

the maternal warns of the subject position inherently preserved within the masculinist ideology of motherhood. Later essentialist feminists would attempt a recovery of the maternal identity, presuming immunity from the cultural determinism that Chopin passionately denounced in *The Awakening*. Helene Cixous, in an effort to empower the feminist state, *re*identifies women writers as maternal beings, claiming that a woman "writes in white ink," a metaphor for breast milk[200] Further, Cixous locates a transgressive materiality in writing from the locus of the feminine, finding that "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes" simply by investing that language with maternal essence.[201] In that same vein, Cixous states that we must "render obsolete the former relationship [between man and woman] . . . to consider the launching of a brand-new subject, alive with defamiliarization."[202] The crux of this argument, however, bears upon the assumption that woman's locus of power is located within the body – a maneuver that cannot be seen as revolutionary, and is in no way "defamiliar[ized]." Even as Cixous argues for an *empowered* essentialized woman, she risks reinscription by a dominant culture that has long understood the female body to be dominated, weaker, and tied to the domestic sphere by her reproductive function. Chopin's work clearly sought to undermine the myth of female essence, disrupting those

[200] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen (*Signs* 1, 1976), 881. First appeared in print under the French title: "Le Rire de la Medusa" in *L'Arc* in 1975.

[201] Cixous 886.

[202] Cixous 890.

regulatory fictions that, once in place, both naturalize and subsequently hide themselves within a culture.

What is intriguing about Chopin's turn of the century novel is its suggestion, no matter how subtle, that the maternal might be a corporeality that could be shed as naturally as a snake sheds its skin. By situating the character of Edna against the ethereal and utterly Madonnaesque Madame Ratignolle, Chopin reveals the maternal to be a choice (as it is with the latter) or a forced performance (as enacted briefly by the former). By incorporating both models of motherhood, Chopin enacted a gender theory decades before her time. Judith Butler writes in *Gender Trouble* of the difference between "identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation," finding that:

> In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of *signifying absences* that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts . . . are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.[203]

Therefore, Chopin's Edna decidedly suggests an ontology of difference, as her "signifying absences" replaced those maternal impulses that had somehow evaporated under a Louisiana sun. By performing Edna as constituting her own reality, Chopin

[203] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 173. My emphasis.

alludes to the possibility that any identity that preceded her metaphysical awakening was only a brilliant performance. By locating the maternal as a possible fiction, Chopin's work, though temporarily silenced, left the first noticeable cracks in the Maternal Goddess's marbleized throne. There is, after all, nothing more disabling to a goddess than to consider her as a fiction.

A Goddess in Pieces: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Twelve years later, Katherine Mansfield would echo Chopin's maternal dissent in her collection of short stories, *A German Pension*. Like Chopin, Mansfield deals with binary (as well as foundational) definitions of motherhood: enslaved as mother or free as individual. Yet, while Chopin's Edna is forced to abandon one identity in order to possess another, Mansfield's short stories constitute an amalgam of a woman living under the reign of a Victorian goddess. Crucial to any understanding of the Modern woman writer's plight is the significance of foundational truths: for the Modern writer, there exists a governing structure in the literature. While that structure may be questioned, struggled against, or even cursed, it remains the impetus for any real meaning in the work. It is interesting to note that, while Chopin writes from an either/or perspective in the search for Edna's identity, Mansfield toys with a fragmented concept of what constitutes the female condition. Although those fragments remain part and parcel of a whole, in her exploration of the multiplicity of woman Mansfield anticipates the definitively Postmodern move toward an alienation from the governing locus of a foundational ontology. Reacting to the unsustainability of the goddess myth, Mansfield's

work uncovers woman to be anything but a unitary being, and female gender to be either a ridiculous game or a deadly reality.[204]

"The Modern Soul" stands as a wry commentary on the constructed nature of gender, the normative and sexualized state that Judith Butler interprets as a repeated cultural performative action rather than a necessary circumscription of ontology. Finding that, while "gender is the mechanisms by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized," it is also often "the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized"[205] The Fraulein Sonia is a prime example of Butler's theory, for even as she professes a marvelous modernity, her rhetoric is hinged upon the assumption of gender roles that both produce and deny a stable female ontology. As Sonia wittily states that she is "curiously sapphic," considering herself to be heiress to the great writers of history and vulnerable to the "curse of genius," she just as easily slips into a monologue of domesticity.[206] Vacillating between an enlightened modern woman and a "sensitive" young lady who "think[s] the solution lies in marriage," Sonia echoes the sentiments of the Herr Professor who assures our narrator that her "innate feminine

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[204] For further discussion on Katherine Mansfield and maternity and/or feminism see: Patricia Moran, "Unholy Meanings: Maternity, Creativity, and Orality in Katherine Mansfield," *Feminist Studies* v17.n1 (Spring 1991); Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy, "Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss,'" *Papers on Language & Literature* 35.3 (Summer 1999), 244; and Sydney Janet Kaplan, "Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19.1 (Spring 2000).

[205] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 42.

[206] Katherine Mansfield, *In a German Pension* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1988), 28. First published: (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1926). One reading of this passage could ignore any lesbian significations, and focus rather on the poetic and oratory capabilities of Sappho. On the other hand, Sonia is a much younger woman attempting to impress an older one, allowing for some speculation that she may, in fact, be flirting with everyone at hand.

delicacy" hinders her from any intellectual discussion.[207] While Sonia's performance assuredly cites the social norms of Mansfield's day, it is through the lens of a skeptical narrator that her performance becomes a rather ridiculous parody. As such, Sonia's hyper-femininity represents the unctuous nature of cultural norms. While Butler points out that: "Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation," it is in our author/narrator's inner commentary that separation is possible. Finding gender to be "always and only tenuously embodied by any particular social actor," Butler contends that, inevitably, a "norm governs the social intelligibility of action," although always separable from the action.[208] Although Sonia's actions may be socially intelligible to the characters of the Pension, Mansfield constructs a narration that refuses that intelligibility, and in turn, denaturalizes Sonia's gender performance. As the Fraulein dramatically points to the place that she intends to faint, the frustrated narrator insists that she "please hurry over it."[209] Of course, this self-professed "modern soul" is wearing a Victorian undergarment that the professor will not touch to even to revive her, representing the material evidence of the Fraulein's feminist hypocrisy.

For Mansfield, hypocrisy took many rhetorical forms. In "The Advanced Lady," Mansfield introduces what at first might seem to be the antithesis of a maternal goddess: a woman who is both mother and writer. Yet, the Advanced Lady is instantly at odds with the identity of mother, as Fraulein Elsa interjects that: "she is writing a book! I

[207] Mansfield 27 and 33.

[208] Butler, *Undoing Gender* 41-42.

[209] Mansfield 33.

suppose that is why she . . . has so little time for her husband and the child!"[210] In contemplating this Advanced Lady, the narrator wryly muses that former "had never succeeded in kindling the flame those sparks of maternity which are supposed to glow in great numbers upon the altar of ever respectable female heart."[211] Dramatically divorcing maternal instinct from female gender, the narrator clearly refuses to align the absence of maternity with the presence of artistic creation, a move that surpasses Chopin's either/or rhetoric of female identity. Remarkably, this modern enigma's writing interest is invested in "the ideal [that] woman is nothing but a gift," a supposition that would not be in contest with mothering. As the Advanced Lady professes her work to be "upon the Modern Woman," her revelations upon the subject are markedly infected by gender normativity, as she refuses to be: "not one of those violent creatures who deny their sex and smother their frail wings under . . . the lying garb of false masculinity!"[212] In her representation of the hypocritical Advanced Lady, Mansfield wryly reconstitutes the wings of the female writer as "frail," a supposition that the author clearly denotes as absurd caricature. As delicate as the wings of the Angel in the House, those that grow from the female writer must do so from the protection of their sex – and anything else becomes, for the Advanced Lady, a lie.[213] Her speech echoes that of the institution of motherhood, one that would remind women that their "intellectual or aesthetic creations

[210] Mansfield 61.

[211] Mansfield 62.

[212] Mansfield 66.

[213] This passage appears to defer to Virginia Woolf's vision of the Angel in the House, yet reappropriates the angelic wings to the body of the female writer. Mansfield's suggestion seems to be that, in the context of a woman writer, nothing need be frail.

were inappropriate, inconsequential, or scandalous, an attempt to become 'like men'" in any real literary endeavor.[214] In the Advanced Lady's lavish performance, gender has become something that can be crushed or suffocated – a supposition that gives Mansfield's narrator little cause for concern. What *does* worry her narrator is the Advanced Lady's definition of a "true woman," one who would know that "we are the glad sacrifice of ourselves," to which the narrator replies simply: "How extremely dangerous."[215] In her ominous assessment of female sacrifice, Mansfield exposes the irony of those who cannot refuse the cost of a patriarchally-defined, and too often woman-sanctioned, gender.

What may seem at first to be only a harmless anecdote on the performing femme instead becomes an insidious cultural mindset for those women who cannot afford the rhetoric of an empty liberation. Yet another story, "Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding," critiques the image of the happy wife and mother who attends the wedding of a dishonored young woman. Embedded within the story is the plight of the bride, Theresa, already a mother out of wedlock and victim to a culture that would see to it that "every wife has her cross."[216] Hence it is Theresa who jolts the Frau out of her momentary happiness, just as "she forgot her five babies and her man and felt almost like a girl again."[217] As the bridegroom presents his betrothed with a coffee pot holding a bottle and tiny replicas of the babies that will dictate her captivity, the Frau feels an

[214] Rich 40.

[215] Mansfield 66.

[216] Mansfield 24.

[217] Mansfield 25.

intense moment of alienation and humiliation as she identifies with Theresa. On the walk home, in a moment of total resignation, the Frau laments to herself that "now they had five babies, and twice the money, but! Always the same . . . but God in heaven, Stupid," a curse on her life that she repeats as she awaits her drunken husband's descent into their bed.[218] Revealing the darker side of a lesser goddess, Mansfield tears at the angelic cloaks of everything and anything mindlessly maternal.

Finally breaking the first person narration, Mansfield draws "The Child Who Was Tired" as a young orphan forced to care for three children to get her bread. Markedly unnamed, "The Child" epitomizes everything unromantic about motherhood: the exhaustion, the lack of personal time or space, the unacknowledged sacrifice. Standing in for a mother remarkably unpossessed by a maternal impulse, except for the "maternal duties" of a nightly beating, "The Child" looks upon her charge "with terror."[219] And when The Child violently ends her maternal slavery with infanticide, Mansfield allows for her a simple peace, one born of a dream of walking down a road to nowhere, as the only way out. Even as Mansfield creates a "mother" who did not give birth to her charge, "The Child" is still based upon some foundational truth: she is imprisoned by her reproductive capacities – regardless of whether or not those capacities have been fundamentally (or willingly) engaged.[220] Mansfield's construction of The Child is a paradox of female sexuality: refused an identity outside of her domestic duties, bound to childrearing by her own "free-born" birth, she is drawn in shame and selflessness,

[218] Mansfield 25-26.

[219] Mansfield 55 and 59.

[220] The title "The Child" appears to refer to both the antihero/protagonist as well as her charge, a dual commentary on the inescapability of the reproductive matrix of a woman's life.

sexualized before her body has known the act of sex itself. Mansfield pushes the point as the orphaned girl cannot escape her enslaved female state, innocent as she may be. Desperate to survive, The Child cannot comprehend suicide (as Chopin's Edna does), but instead escapes her body in a dreamlike state, a surreal fantasy that denies her physical bondage through the relief of madness. Rich points to such a maneuver as one of misguided liberation, finding that: "The body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit."[221] Yet, for an early Modernist writer, it was a maneuver that at the very least resisted surrender to a Maternal Goddess.

Mansfield paints a painful image of the female state, and when her focus is elsewhere, it is upon those women who exemplify patriarchal concepts of femininity: women who are silly, faint, flirt, but never comprehend the depth and destruction that the old games reek on womankind who are enslaved by those concepts. Motherhood, for Mansfield, is understood as the epitome of that enslavement, wholly unromantic, totally devastating to mind and soul, and perhaps best explained in "Frau Fischer" when the narrator brazenly states: "but I consider child-bearing the most ignominious of all professions."[222] This simple link of motherhood to profession is quite profound (although sarcastic) as it reveals the maternal figure as worker, a crucial move, as Adrienne Rich points out, toward a new rhetoric of motherhood. Rich further posits that upon the Industrial Revolution: "For the first time, the productivity of women (apart from

[221] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*: *Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 40.

[222] Mansfield 19.

reproductivity) was seen as a 'waste of time, a waste of property, a waste of morals and a waste of health and life.'"[223] Mansfield's image of motherhood as a profession (albeit one of humiliation) aligns reproductivity with economic labor – a revolutionary move that denies *natural* maternity as anything but a cultural construct. Contesting traditional romantic myths of female sexuality, Mansfield reveals the image of the Maternal Goddess as a dangerous aspiration for real women. In "At Lehmann's," Sabina experiences the male gaze (apparently for the first time) with "a curious thrill deep in her body, half pleasure, half pain."[224] Later the next day, the Young Man will return to fondle her breasts against the background music of her Frau's birth agonies, and it is only at the sound of a "thin wailing of a baby" that Sabina retreats from the rendezvous.[225] Weaving through this scene of sex and birth is the undeniable message that, for woman, the two are not entirely separable – contained by its own natural processes, female sexuality is not a thing to take lightly. Although Mansfield unflinchingly depicts woman and her burden, the ending of this short story remains oddly absurd: smacking of Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, one cannot help but see the wry wit behind "The Child Who Was Tired." It depicts, after all, the reality of the daily life of mothers everywhere, "half pleasure, half pain."[226]

Finally, Mansfield creates the nemesis to feminists everywhere: the tease. In "A Blaze," Elsa will torment and control her suitor (and her husband) with the promise of her

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[223] Rich 49.

[224] Mansfield 37.

[225] Mansfield 40.

[226] Mansfield 37.

body, all the while considering it to be her "nature."[227] Most shockingly, she proclaims to her victim: "I'm born out of my time. And yet, you know, I'm not a *common* woman. I like men to adore me – to flatter me – even to make love to me – but I would never give myself to any man."[228] Snakelike, and insidiously manipulative, Elsa becomes everything that denies respect to the female state. While claiming to be fabulously liberated, she is only a wheel in the cycle of female oppression as she uses her sexuality as entertainment, then smiles at her husband and benefactor innocently.[229] As Mansfield has painted what Elsa would consider "common" womanhood to be a tedious battle against the walls of their own flesh, this last vixen becomes an insult to the struggle of all women. Stoutly feminist, and painfully realistic, Mansfield's collection of short stories cannot help but be read as a pre-emergent Postmodern work as long as her vision of the female situation resists any comforting answers. They are altogether the products of a woman disillusioned with the female condition – and wholly unimpressed with the Maternal Goddess.

As much as Chopin utilized the epideictic method in an attempt to identify with and create a metaphorical conflict for her male audience, Mansfield worked to do the same for a female public. For, in her depiction of suicidal maternity, Mansfield created a certain "immemorial discourse," a critical function of the epideictic mode that Bruce McComiskey describes as focusing upon "its primary goal [to] subvert dominant-class

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[227] Mansfield 82.

[228] Mansfield 82.

[229] Mansfield 83.

hegemonic discourse."[230] The use of immemorial discourse is not antithetical to Aristotelian conceptions of the epideictic genre, rather, it is a reappropriation of the mode, as McComiskey argues that: "Epideictic rhetoric does not always represent dominant values; in subcultural contexts, the possibility of promoting subversive values always exists."[231] Finding this radical redeployment of the epideictic method to be in conversation with sophistic ethics, McComiskey furthers his argument, claiming that: "In addition to their potentially subversive quality, sophistic epideictic speeches were also written and delivered in a variety of rhetorical situations; thus, the sociopolitical contexts of delivery determined their meaning as much as their referential content."[232] Hence, Mansfield's "The Child Who Was Tired" presents a commentary on the lived reality of a maternal body, while providing sociotextual relief in the form of fiction. Such a delivery manipulates the audience past socially accepted institutions, such as embodied motherhood, toward new belief systems that speak to common values. By seizing upon the *kairos* of early Modern culture, Mansfield effectively redetermines the referential maternal subject as abhorrent to Modern value systems, and in doing so, immemorializes the maternal woman as a figure that cannot exist in a progressive culture.[233]

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[230] Bruce McComiskey, *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern UP, 2002), 91. McComiskey focuses primarily upon the Postmodern use of epideictic rhetoric, yet his theories are here applicable to Mansfield's method.

[231] McComiskey 92.

[232] McComiskey 92.

[233] McComiskey offers the traditional use of the term "kairos," defining as "the right or opportune moment." His example is drawn from early sophists, elaborating the term as "Prior to Gorgias, the term *kairos* was applied to the waver's ability to thrust a thread through a momentary opening in the loom and

The figure of the childless woman in "Frau Fischer" represents an insertion into a clearly marked space of *kairos* in her Mansfield's collection. Situated between tales of enslaved maternity and subjugated femininity, the "Frau Fischer" stands as the only tale in which the narrator is clearly also the subject. She is notably "exceedingly healthy," determined to remain outside of the conversation of maternal women, and a writer of letters. As an alien being to the Frau's depiction of natural womanhood, the narrator must construct a fantastical identity as the dutiful wife, morphing that image in tune to the Frau's conception of womanhood until: "The husband that I had created for the benefit of Frau Fischer became in her hands so substantial a figure that I could no longer see myself sitting on a rock with seaweed in my hair, awaiting that phantom ship for which all women love to suppose they hunger." [234] In her construction of a fantasy, the narrator loses artistic license over her creation as it becomes the fantasy of a dominant ideology. Yet, it is not one she will squabble over, for it is a dangerous fantasy that necessarily presumes as its thesis the role of the maternal wife. The narrator is undone by the Frau's revision of the husband fantasy, to which she had tacked on "handfuls of strange babies," an incorporation that the narrator notes as "something of a risk," prompting her to "wreck [her] virgin conception" as it threatens an already stable identity.[235] As an epideictic rhetorical statement, Mansfield's "Frau Fischer" reconceptualizes marriage, and its restrictive and aggressive maternal significations, as

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the archer's ability to exploit the minuscule opening in space that would guide and arrow to its target." Gorgias would later reinterpret the term as a useful function of logos. See: McComiskey 92-93.

[234] Mansfield 19.

[235] Mansfield 19 and 20.

the phantasmatic desires of an outdated society, positing the autobiographical narrator as a traveler, a writer, and a socially-aware citizen. As such, the story participates in sophistic rhetoric, locating the institution of maternity as mere folklore and the cultural adoption of fantasy. Susan C. Jarratt writes of the nature of sophistic rhetoric in *Rereading the Sophists*, finding that "An emphasis on habit and practice, on historical contingency, and the rejection of essence all characterize the rhetoric of the sophists." Further, sophistic rhetoric enacts a disruption of myth, or *mythos*, instead employing "*nomos*, a self-conscious arrangement of discourse to create politically and socially significant knowledge."[236] The use of nomos, then, is depicted in Mansfield's story as the lived unmaternal condition of its narrator, critically theorizing the husband fantasy, and its assumption of a coordinating wife/mother, to be a product of habitualized femininity. Moreover, Mansfield's juxtaposition of a road-weary, childless, single woman and an imagined, romanticized wife create a textual tension, representing the sophistic "emphasis on *dissoi logoi*—contradictory propositions—as the anti-foundation of knowledge."[237] By "wrecking" the fantasy, Mansfield's narrator rejects the essentialized female myth, and suggests it to be a phantasmatic sedimentation of a patriarchally-induced psychosis. Her manipulation of that fantasy further comments upon the unnatural state of maternity, and represents an epideictic maneuver that immemorializes the Maternal Goddess as a fiction of the past.

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[236] Susan C. Jarrett, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991), 60 and 70. Jarrett further defines her use of *nomos* as "in its most comprehensive meaning stands for order, valid and binding on those who fall under its jurisdiction; thus it is always a social construct with ethical dimensions." See: Jarrett 60. Sophists, as McComiskey has also noted, were noted for their radical use of the epideictic method, employing *nomos* and *kairos* rather than *logos* as its commentary on societal value systems. For more on the epideictic method, see Chapter II, footnote 40.

[237] Jarrett 70. The Greek term literally meant "different words."

Fragmenting the female life into all its possibilities, Mansfield's characters constitute the whole of a Modern woman: sexual/chaste, maternal/unmaternal, innocent and devious, and utterly anything but a goddess. If the myth of the Maternal Goddess rested upon the faith of her subjects, these Modern writers attempted to pull the curtain aside, a feat that only their Postmodern literary daughters would finally accomplish. What they would find behind that curtain of angels, queens and goddesses was not the great Oz, but only a man weaving woman out of myth. It would take the woman who first acknowledged an angel to discredit the production.

The Wife Who Cried Woolf

In 1925, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* introduced the character of Clarissa, a wife and mother outside of herself. Fabulously out of context, Clarissa's first musings constitute an internal alienation as she considers "this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown . . ." [238] It would seem that this unaffected vertigo was entirely due to her marital state, and her lack of identity stemming from: "this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway."[239] Yet, Clarissa's apparent catatonic state is only the skin pulled tightly over the soul of something violently alive:

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[238] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Ed. Morris Beja. (Oxford: Shakespeare Head P, 1996), 10-11. First published: (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1925).

[239] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 11.

> It rasped her, though to have stirring about in her this brutal monster/ to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love! this hatred![240]

This Mrs. Dalloway, invisible and numb, has stopped to consider the boiling pot of another identity, somehow inside of her, somehow more physical than the "light, tall, very upright" appropriate young wife buying flowers . . . and names its home her soul.

It is in this construction of Clarissa that Woolf breaks ground that Chopin and Mansfield could not: Clarissa does not choose to be one identity or another, nor is she fragmented into multiple characters, but is a woman possessed, fragmented *within* herself.[241] More importantly, in Woolf's Clarissa there existed a being incompatible with the Angel in the House that she strove to undo—a monster that, while unbidden, held residence as naturally as if it had grown there. The natural state of things is thereby

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[240] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 12.

[241] There was a significant relationship between Woolf and Mansfield, which was rich with respect and a strong sense of competition. Woolf has been noted as saying of her friend, with tongue in cheek: "She dressed like a tart and behaved like a bitch . . . She seems to be an unpleasant and utterly unscrupulous character. She's gone every sort of hog since she was seventeen ... and she stinks like a civet cat that has taken to streetwalking." See: Karen Hansen, "Katherine Mansfield," *British Heritage* 21.2 (Feb 2000), 10. For further discussion, see: Walter J. Strachan , "Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield: Facets of a Relationship," *Contemporary Review* 256.n1488 (Jan 1990); and Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woof: A Public of Two* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1999).

infected by what is identified as both "self love" and "hatred," a paradox that appears to hinge upon Clarissa's self-denial of her true identity. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write of the monstrous double in *Madwoman in the Attic*, stating that often the woman writer: "conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be."[242] As diligently as Woolf worked to kill the Angel in the House (an entity that attacked from the domestic perimeter) the monster that rears its thorny head in the heart of Clarissa quite nearly slipped past her pen. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that " a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her . . . women must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been 'killed' into art."[243] As if through literary osmosis, the angel had absorbed the monster in Woolf's fiction, both existing within one skin. Yet if what is produced by such an unholy union is, indeed, what Gilbert and Gubar have termed the "dark double," the duplicity of such an internal split uproots the all-encompassing Maternal Goddess myth.[244]

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[242] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale U P, 2000), 78.

[243] Gilbert and Gubar 17.

[244] This reference speaks to the patriarchal mythical constructions of a submissive goddess. In later chapters, the Maternal Goddess will be reinvestigated as viable only in her original and ancient forms, which were capable of both benevolence and wrath.

Woolf's was a crucial move toward disabling the pervasive power of literary essentialism. Toril Moi also writes in *Sexual/Textual Politics* of the dark author's double, citing Gilbert and Gubar's theory that:

> Through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double's violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained.[245]

The monster residing within Clarissa certainly represents violence, at it crashes through the brush of her soul, "scraping" her psyche, inflicting "physical pain," and shaking her daily domestic life at its foundation.[246] By incorporating the dark doppelganger into the exegesis of the identity of woman, Woolf denudates binary categories of gender-based determinations altogether, a move that Chopin and Mansfield attempted only through mediation or fragmentation of external identities. Moi, in agreement with Gilbert and Gubar, finds this to be a "critical approach [that] postulates a *real* woman hidden behind the patriarchal textual facade," and claims that it is "the feminist critic's task to uncover her truth." It is the monster, therefore, that becomes the "real," more so because of its capacity to experience pain within the "façade" of a carefree, and emotionally insentient, Mrs. Dalloway.

Woolf portrays the tensions between the outer and the inner life of Clarissa as being the product of her own ascension to the plastic existence of the good wife. If

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[245] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 1989), 61.

[246] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 12.

Chopin's Edna was victim to her circumstances, Clarissa is victim to her own choices, acknowledging that:

> It was her life, and bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself . . . how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are . . . must one repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it.[247]

As Mrs. Dalloway kneels to her prison of domesticity, her language is anything but reverent, for the moment is one of "darkness," and the significance of a husband trails behind the significance of "dogs and canaries." Woolf's schizophrenic doubling of the identity of the ominous Clarissa within the heart of the proper Mrs. Dalloway reflects an internal metamorphosis of woman, an incorporation of the dark and the light, in a way that Chopin's and Mansfield's characters could not conceive.

Manifest within the character of Clarissa is a locus of control unparalleled by Modern writers. The mad inner voice Woolf creates for her protagonist threatens to usurp her outward conditions for survival, yet paradoxically is invested in truth. Foucault writes of this phenomenon as being product of "a principle of exclusion," a regulatory system born of an institutional fear that: "strange powers not held by any other may be attributed to the madman's speech: the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naïveté what the others' wisdom cannot perceive."[248] If Clarissa's inner being was indeed monstrous, its ontology was born of her choice to disown it—a

[247] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 29.

[248] Foucault 1461.

process that disconnects her from reason, rather than curing her from madness. In her fractured state, Clarissa cannot recognize her face in the glass, but contemplates the reflection as "her self—pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman . . ."[249] And so it is her centre, the monstrous self that clawed for recognition, that must be drawn into submission – yet it is this centre that remains the primary caretaker of what Foucault names a "hidden truth." The real woman, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, resides beneath the patriarchal text of Mrs. Dalloway. Although Peter will lament the "death of her soul," Clarissa's inner discourse is anything but dead, rather it is one dangerously brimming with life, if:

> Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush . . . and it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some presence of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed.

Yet, these are the orgasmic reflexes of the madwoman within that Clarissa will deny, an abnegation of her love for a woman that veils the "inner meaning" in the abyss of her soul. In her struggle to overcome her monstrous soul, Clarissa slips into the skin of the

[249] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 32.

wife, the hostess, the Mrs. Dalloway, but always: "she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another."[250] The self, for Woolf's Clarissa, was unmaternal, feverishly homosexual, blasphemous in its restlessness, and seething with life. It was a self that understood suicide (for the illustrious Mrs. Dalloway would never fathom it), finding that Septimus had somehow grasped life in his death, saved the "thing there was that mattered." For, in a refusal to accept a half-life, death became "an attempt to communicate" if only with oneself. And if, as Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out, the artist must kill "the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been 'killed' into art," Woolf's angel/monster woman provided the first viable victim.[251]

Woolf's move to incorporate the monster inside the Angel in the House violated a myth and its stronghold on the cultural image of woman. In Woolf's autobiographical "Sketch of the Past," a sinister childhood memory captures a glimpse of an internal monster, as she confesses that:

> I dreamt that I was looking in a glass when a horrible face—the face of an animal—suddenly showed over my shoulder. I cannot be sure if this was a dream, or if it happened. Was I looking in the glass one day when something in the background moved, and seemed to me alive? I cannot be sure. But I have

[250] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 171.

[251] Just as Chopin's Edna understands mother-women to be "ministering angels," for Edna to become such a creature, through the submission to the maternal, was certain death. The similarities between Edna and Woolf's Clarissa are striking, as Peter laments the demise of her soul in order that she be the consummate wife and mother. Gilbert and Gubar's discussion on the angel's dual existence between life and death contextualizes Chopin's and Woolf's use of the angel trope, as they contend that "it is the surrender of her self—of her personal comfort, her persona desires, or both—that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven." See: Gilbert and Gubar 25.

always remembered the other face in the glass, whether it was a dream or a fact, and that it frightened me.[252]

This memory suggests another self, animalistic and allusive, but certainly a monstrous double as it looks over her shoulder, and culminates into a projection of the fragmented, yet unified, self. Judith Butler's discussion on the Lacanian "Mirror Stage" provides further insight into Woolf's early encounter with a looking glass, positing that: "this idealized totality that the child sees is a mirror image.[253] One might say that it confers an ideality and integrity on his body . . . this mirroring transforms a lived sense of disunity and loss of control into an ideal of integrity and control ('la puissance') through that even of specularization."[254] Therefore, in order to dispel the angel myth within herself, Woolf confronted, if somewhat trepidatiously, the existence of "an animal" within. In doing so, the dual versions of the internal land external self are introduced to each other, dissolving the divide that would traumatize and alienate the ego of a young woman. Butler furthers this argument by suggesting that: "the ego cannot be said to identify with an object outside itself; rather, it is through an identification with an image, which is itself a relation, that the 'outside' of the ego is first ambiguously determined, indeed, that a spatial boundary that negotiates 'outside' and 'inside' is established," constituting a radical negotiation between external signifiers and internal ones.[255] The contradictions

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[252] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 2nd ed. (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1985), 69.

[253] Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage is defined as "not simply a moment in development. It has an exemplary function, because it reveals some of the subject's relations to his image, in so far as it is the *Urbild* of the ego." For a full discussion, see: Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," *Ecrits: A Selection*, Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 79 and 94.

[254] Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 75.

[255] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 74.

that occur in the space between the image and the body are absorbed, therefore, rather than rejected—and "woman" is liberated from institutionally-generated images of femininity.[256]

Such is also the case for Woolf's Clarissa. Although similar to Chopin's animalistic awakening in the character of Edna, a self that had somehow remained unconscious to its hosting body, Clarissa's aberrant inner id is violently awake – representing an original voice that has been, in effect, muzzled by Mrs. Dalloway. It is a self that has never been ignorant of its host, a fact that lends the monster a certain ontology that, when ignored, renders the external and social self insidiously unrecognizable for Clarissa. Woolf delineates between these separate identities when Clarissa separates the pronoun "herself," carving a gulf between "her" (Mrs. Dalloway) and "self" (Clarissa). As she "drew the parts together" for the eyes of the world, Clarissa alone understood the catalyst for her fragmentation to be society's demand for a unitary "centre," a socially intelligible being that did not disrupt the essence of woman.

Yet, it is in through fractured wholeness of female identity that Woolf invalidates the myth of femininity, as Clarissa, while female, owns a soul devoid of any allegiance to the heterosexual matrix of gender. Moi finds this to be a necessary delineation of terms,

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[256] Some scholars have seen Virginia Woolf's use of interior and exterior consciousness in her literature as distinctly connected. Liesl M. Olson aligns Mrs. Dalloway's outer life with the "ordinary" and her interior one with the "traumatic," yet finds that Woolf's use of the latter contains and nullifies the former. Arguing that: "the narrative drive of *Mrs. Dalloway* . . . represents an affirmation of the ordinary, not the traumatic," Olson finds "the power of the everyday to trump trauma" somehow eclipses the interior subconscious, governing its injuries. This study reverses Olson's theory, finding that, within the character of Clarissa, the exact opposite is truer. For more discussion, see: Liesl M. Olson, "Virginia Woolf's cotton wool of daily life," [sic] *Journal of Modern Literature* 26.2 (Winter 2003), 51 and 56. Also see: Jane Lilianfield, "Accident, Incident and Meaning: Traces of Trauma in Virginia Woolf's Narrativity," *Virginia Woolf: Turning the Centuries* (New York: Pace UP, 2000).

for as "patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women," it is done so "precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*."[257] Further, any construct of woman outside of the understanding of socially-sanctioned gender becomes unnatural, perhaps even monstrous. Moi claims that locating these ideologically-bound categories is crucial to a feminist cause as: "It is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused."[258] Although women are undoubtedly female, the state of being female has no prerequisite of femininity. It is in the latter that the danger resides, as Butler contends, for the assumption of a natural, preontological gender is never innocent. Moi posits that, to regain any autonomy, the feminist "must be able to account for the paradoxically productive aspects of patriarchal ideology," a Foucaultian position that maintains that the institutions of any society produce and govern the structures of language in order to police the signified.[259] Given the discursive materiality of language, the impetus to create a mythical *feminine* is one born of the fear of an ungoverned, unsignified woman. Foucault investigates this fear as symptomatic of an institutional anxiety, claiming:

> Yet it seems to me that beneath this apparent veneration of discourse, under this apparent logophilia, a certain fear is hidden. It is just as if prohibitions, barriers, thresholds, and limits had been set up in order to master, at least partly, the great proliferation of discourse, in order to remove from its richness the most dangerous

[257] Moi 65.

[258] Moi 65.

[259] Moi 64.

part, and in order to organize its disorder according to figures which dodge what is most uncontrollable about it. [260]

Woolf, in her construction of Clarissa, revealed "the most dangerous part" of woman: the unangelic, uninnnocent self. It was a maneuver that belied any "true" ontology of feminine gender, and one that threw into question the origins of the patriarchally-produced Maternal Goddess.[261]

Finally, the Modern period became an increasingly unstable space for literary myth. Although Chopin, Mansfield, and Woolf wrote from a foundational perspective, each disrupted any unitary comprehension of the maternal, feminine woman. As Chopin split the female life in two, and Mansfield scattered woman into all her unromanticized multiplicity, Woolf worked to uncover the myth of Mrs. Dalloway to reveal the sexual, acrimonious Clarissa within. If Woolf chose to leave the monster alive in its den, it was not for lack of courage, but only a statement on the constructed and illusory fallacy of the essentialized woman. Coming closer to the myth of the autonomous Isis, these women writers created the female figure as a heretic to the Maternal Goddess, a representation that would haunt future male writers and infect their text with unmaternal mothers and unwomanly women. As Ernest Hemingway invents the emasculating Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*, his colleague and friend will mourn the detachment of motherhood in *The*

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[260] Foucault 1470.

[261] Esther Sanchez-Pardo Gonzalez writes in "What Phantasmagoria the Mind Is" of Woolf's "conceptualization of androgyny" in her work, *Orlando*. Gonzalez finds *Orlando* to depict "a parodic contestation against the late Victorian sexual codes prescribed and enforced upon individuals in the first decades of the twentieth century." Further, Gonzalez discusses the inherent instability of gender invested in the character of Orlando, and argues that "Woolf's fantasized utopia of androgyny" is critical toward understanding her specific conceptualization of gender. See: Esther Sanchez-Pardo Gonzalez, "'What Phantasmagoria the Mind Is': Reading Virginia Woolf's Parody of Gender," *ATLANTIS* 26.2 (December 2004), 75 and 85.

Great Gatsby and *Tender is the Night*. Both authors reflect the tensions of a society considering their women, and finding them to be neither angels nor goddesses.

CHAPTER III: ON THEIR KNEES-THE RISE OF THE AMATERNAL

So many smart men go to pieces nowadays.
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*

She got to look like a Roman Emperor and that was fine if you liked your women to look like Roman Emperors.
Ernest Hemingway, *A Movable Feast*

In the late 1920s, women began to do disconcerting things. Their hair often shrunk into bobs, their skirts shrunk up above the knee, and as they learned to dance with multiple partners and hold cigarettes in silver, the role of motherhood slid dangerously into the background. Women, it would seem, had overthrown Victorian definitions of womanhood for a little harmless sexuality, a move that placed the influence of the Maternal Goddess into a state of vertigo. Adrienne Rich points out that, for the maternal to exist, there must be a definitive sexual absence, finding the "divisions of labor and allocations of power in patriarchy [to] demand not merely a suffering Mother, but one divested of sexuality."[262] Yet, if the dimensions of the term "mother" police and define the physiological truth of a woman, the boundaries they create are always permeable. They are, as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have pointed out, only the socio-linguistic creations of a logophobic culture.[263] Rich, however, investigates those signifiers as

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[262] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*: *Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 183.

[263] Judith Butler leans heavily upon Michel Foucault's theories in her foundational work, *Gender Trouble*. Utilizing Foucaultian principles of temporal linguistic materiality, Butler's work focuses on a

concrete imperatives, finding that: "If motherhood and sexuality were not wedged resolutely apart by male culture, if we could *choose* both the forms of our sexuality and the terms of our motherhood or nonmotherhood freely, women might achieve genuine sexual autonomy."[264] Although Rich's theory is bound in the foundational truths of male control (*if* they would only let us choose), it is from within these semiotic exclusions that many male authors of the early 20th Century found relief from the chaotic feminine, however temporary. Butler, evoking Foucault, questions the anxiety that arises when the terms of a culture begin to metamorphose, and asks: "Why is it that we sometimes feel that if a term is dislodged from its foundational place, we will not be able to live, to survive, to use language, to speak for ourselves? What kind of guarantee does that foundational fix exercise, and what sort of terror does it forestall?"[265] As the term "mother" became unmoored, it took on not only a new sexuality but also a new ontology: no longer wedged firmly within the identity of woman, the term began to take on the connotations of a performance.

The Woolfian caricature of the female dark double posed a troubling question in literature: what if the secret self within a woman was not inherently maternal? In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf juxtaposes what many critics have understood to be opposing

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feminist/cultural materialist view of language and its power to insert sociopolitical norms into cultural realities. See: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[264] Rich 184.

[265] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 181.

feminine roles into an aesthetic conflict.[266] Eve Sorum, in "Masochistic Modernisms: A Reading of Eliot and Woolf," argues for such a conflict, finding that: "Lily Briscoe, a spinster painter, stands in for the modern artist who must deal with the beloved, but overwhelming presence of Mrs. Ramsay—a representative *par excellance* of Victorian mores."[267] Arguing for an artistic self-sacrifice realized through pain, Sorum further contends that Lily struggles against both the angelic maternal essence harbored by Mrs. Ramsay, as well as the prohibition of the Angel in the House, articulated by Charles Tansley's admonishment that "Women can't paint; women can't write."[268] Locating both Mrs. Ramsay and Charles Tansley as the impetus for Lily's psychic pain, Sorum argues that her: "Negotiation of these constraints displays the roots of an aesthetic masochism—one in which art can be created only when restrictive influences and stifling life stories are destroyed or rewritten, even when that destruction involves the mother figure she adores."[269] Certainly, Woolf temporarily aligns the image of Victorian motherhood with that of Mrs. Ramsay, as she pans over a scene in which Mrs. Ramsay "stood quite motionless for a moment against a picture of Queen Victoria," yet it is critical to note that

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[266] For further discussion, see: Mark Gaipa, "An Agnostic's Daughter's Apology: Materialism, Spiritualism, and Ancestry in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 26.2 (Winter 2003), 1-41. Also see: Jane Lilianfeld, "'Where the Spear Plants Grew': The Ramsays' Marriage in *To the Lighthouse*," *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, Ed. Jane Marcus (Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1981), 148-69.

[267] Eve Sorum, "Masochistic Modernisms: A Reading of Eliot and Woolf," *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.3 (Spring 2005), 38.

[268] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1981), 58. First published in 1927.

[269] Sorum 38.

this voyeuristic scene is observed by Mr. Tansley himself.[270] He is seduced by what his mind perceives is a Maternal Goddess, awe-struck by a vision of Mrs. Ramsey:

> With stars in her eyes and veils in her hair, with cyclamen and wild violets . . . Stepping through fields of flowers and taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen; with the stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair—He took her bag.[271]

It is the patriarchal desire for a goddess, therefore, that conceptualizes Mrs. Ramsey as the "mother figure" adored. In stark contrast to Sorum's claim of a perceived conflict between the two women, Lily Briscoe understands this adoration to include herself, as if by osmosis: "She took shelter from the reverence which covered all women: she felt herself praised."[272] Further, Lily observes Mr. Bankes's adoration of Mrs. Ramsey to be a form of worship, noting its origins to be "love that never attempted to clutch its object; but like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain."[273] Rather than situating an oppositional femininity, the character of Lily Briscoe aligns itself, instead, to an identificatory impulse of male worship to an ideal feminine, as she thinks to herself "that no woman could worship another woman in the way he worshipped."[274] Lily emerges in this scene not as the disparaged unmaternal woman, but instead the

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[270] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 14.

[271] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 14.

[272] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 48.

[273] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 47.

[274] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 47.

reterritorialized amaternal feminine; her reverence constitutes, in her own worship of Mrs. Ramsey, the masculinist "love" of the feminine symbol, yet she does not possess it herself.

Such a worship of the feminine does not require its destruction in order to create art, as Sorum suggests, but rather inspires it. Lily Briscoe understands herself to be an "exemption from the universal law" and pleads for Mrs. Ramsay to understand that "she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for *that*."[275] Positioning herself as the masculine subject to Mrs. Ramsay's image, Lily is exempt from the feminine prohibition into the temple of sacred womanhood, as she approaches its image and wonders to herself, "But into what sanctuary had one penetrated?"[276] Even as she transgresses the borders of that sanctuary, Lily remains a permanent exile of the body of a goddess, as she prostrates herself, her arms wrapped "round Mrs. Ramsay's knees, close as she could get," and notes that:

> Mrs. Ramsay would never know the reason of that pressure, she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, 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.[277]

In her rapture, Lily struggles to find the connection to the sacred feminine, and ponders:

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[275] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 50. My emphasis.

[276] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 50.

[277] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 50-51. Note the use of the word "sacred," a term to be discussed more fully in the Conclusion of this work.

> What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming . . . one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? Or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? For it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee.[278]

It is suggested here that there is a language unknown to men, possessed and protected within the mind of a goddess. Lily, therefore, "penetrates" the sanctuary of the divine feminine, but cannot penetrate the "secret chambers" of her goddess's heart. It is perhaps a lesbian endeavor, as Lily's desire to penetrate the feminine aligns itself with the psycho-sexual drive of the phallus. Judith Butler writes in *Bodies That Matter* of the phallus as a "transferable phantasm," arguing that the "cultural conflicts over the idealization and degradation of specific masculine and feminine morphologies will be played out at the site of the morphological imaginary in complex and conflicted ways."[279] Lily, therefore, presents the bodily ego of the masculine within the fleshly frame of the feminine, enacting the "degradation of a feminine morphology, and imaginary and

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[278] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 51.

[279] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 87.

cathected degrading of the feminine" that allows for a "lesbian phallus" that desires penetration, yet simultaneously disaligns itself with the phantasmatic feminine body.[280]

Lily's sexuality is further complicated by her rejection of the dehumanizing effects of heterosexual marriage, as she thinks to herself that "she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle."[281] If, indeed, Lily harbors the signification of the lesbian phallus, her refusal to expose her sexuality to "dilution" is realized by what Butler has called the "morphological imaginary," a repositioning of "the tree" between the boundaries of feminine and masculine gender identifications.[282] The imagery of the tree as the materiality of a woman's body is significant, as it recalls Woolf's reconstitution of the writing/creative female frame as a tree in *A Room of One's Own*, in which Woolf equates the suppression of creativity to the violent act of "destroying the tree at its heart."[283] In the character of Lily, Woolf further develops the act of writing as violently sexual, reproductive, and orgiastic—effectively re-visioning the heterosexual, homogenized sexual experience as artistic expression that dismisses the necessity of the male phallus as its impetus. Sorum interprets Lily's final artistic climax to be produced by the annihilation of Mrs. Ramsay's image, arguing that: "Mrs. Ramsay, object of such reverence and love, must be silenced in order for Lily to create." Further aligning the death of Mrs. Ramsay with the creation of Lily's art, Sorum finds that: "The

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[280] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 87.

[281] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 102.

[282] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 87.

[283] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 38.

painting thereby becomes just as much an act of destruction [of Mrs. Ramsay] as construction or, rather, the destruction itself underlies each creative act."[284] Yet, Lily's completion of the painting recalls her rapturous act of worship within the sanctuary of the feminine, which instead reverses Lily as the penetrator of the sanctuary and positions her, instead, as the penetrated.

Art, for Lily, re-feminizes its subject in ways that Mrs. Ramsay, as an aesthetic ideal, did not, as Lily takes up the paintbrush and is "drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people in the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention."[285] The thing that must be silenced, then, is not Mrs. Ramsay, the object of worshipful comfort and peace, but rather the god of creativity which ravages Lily, demanding satisfaction from the flesh of her hand. Lily rails against her servitude to its temple, lamenting that: "Other worshipful objects were content with worship; men, women, God, all let one kneel prostrate; but this form . . . roused one to perpetual combat, challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted."[286] Unlike her prostration at the knees of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily finds herself commanded to a full-scale battle that threatened a bloody, physical risk. The creation of art in this passage, as Sorum suggests, becomes an act of masochism, yet it is not clear that it is simply a "success achieved through self-inflicted pain."[287] Rather, art

[284] Sorum 39.

[285] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 158.

[286] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 158.

[287] Sorum 39.

calls Lily to combat, sexual and visceral, and raping her mind against her will. Woolf's understanding of creativity was invested with a sexual nature that re-created the maternal instinct as the producer of art at the expense of the feminine. Therefore, this scene of violent penetration demands the degradation of the natural feminine, as Butler suggests, in order to constitute the female phallus as the product of a sexual union between creativity and the female body. Within that act, Lily reiterates artistic creation in eroticized terms, as the battle becomes synergetic, and what emerges is indeed a phallic morphology of the feminine. As she engages in the combative process of painting, it is only:

> Then, as if some juice necessary for the lubrication of her faculties were spontaneously squirted, she began precariously dipping among the blues and umbers, moving her brush hither and thither, but it was now heavier and went slower, as if it had fallen in with some rhythm which was dictated to her . . . by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current. As she lost consciousness of outer things . . . her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modeled it with greens and blues.[288]

Responding first as feminine, Lily's mind secretes lubrication, yet is simultaneously negated by the signification of her hand as the phallus, "dipping," "moving," becoming

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[288] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 159.

"heavier" as it "quivered with life."[289] Within the act, the artist loses "consciousness of outer things," representing the archetypal effect of sexual orgasm. Yet, the phallus is not signified by a clearly gendered masculine source in this erotic act of creativity, but is rather absorbed by the feminine body and redeployed by the feminine flesh in the form of the painting hand. Its release is heralded by a "spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space," and the temporal absence of identity, the blank canvas, is irrevocably bruised "with greens and blues" by a female, phallic ejaculation.[290] In this way, Lily Briscoe supercedes, rather than destroys, any perceived maternal essence in Mrs. Ramsay through an incorporation of the male body within the female frame. Her reverence for the image of Mrs. Ramsey is not destroyed by the masochistic impulse of art, but rather becomes the muse for her penetrated feminine body that, in its unholy intercourse with the god of creativity, produces a corporeality of the amaternal, artistic feminine. At its conclusion, as Lily gazes upon her painting, she sees it "clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the center," and pronounces it "done."[291] By drawing "the tree rather more to the middle," Lily recenters her identity, and her sexuality, between the lines of hegemonic gender, then announces as she lays down her brush, "I have had my vision."[292] In her erotegenic inclusion of the writing phallus, Lily Briscoe represents only one characterization of the amaternal female body. Often overlooked as the Victorian idealization of maternity, Mrs. Ramsey represents the other.

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[289] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 159.

[290] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 159.

[291] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 209.

[292] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 209.

As perhaps her most matronly character, Woolf depicts Mrs. Ramsey as both mother to her children and suffering wife to her husband, a seeming break from the complicated and internally fragmented Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*. By day, Mrs. Ramsay is thoroughly invested in her role as mother, thinking to herself that "she would have liked always to have had a baby. She was happiest carrying one in her arms."[293] It is interesting to note that critics have traditionally read Mrs. Ramsey as Julia Stephen (Woolf's mother), the figure that provided the first foundation for Woolf's image of the "Angel in the House." Upon the writing of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf felt a psychic release in its completion, claiming that: "I wrote the book very quickly, and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her."[294] It would seem that in the autobiographical resurrection of her mother, Woolf had finally silenced a ghost – a haunting reenactment of the murder of an angel in *A Room of One's Own*. If Mrs. Ramsey represents the real Julia Stephen, it is in Woolf's fictional creation of the unseen female psyche that a woman, not an angel, is finally laid to rest.

Woolf's depiction of the internal life of a mother uncovers a deep well for the secret self, a self that has divorced its offspring to investigate its own desires. As alive as Clarissa's internal monster, Mrs. Ramsey's core is anything but maternal, rather it is one that finds: "it was a relief when they went to bed. For now she need not think about anybody. She could be *herself*, by herself. And that was what she often felt the need of .

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[293] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 58.

[294] Quoted in: Shannon Forbes, "'When Sometimes She Imagined Herself Like Her Mother': The Contrasting Responses of Cam and Mrs. Ramsay to the Role of the Angel in the House," *Studies in the Novel* 32 (Texas: U of North Texas, 2000), 464.

. . To be silent; to be alone."[295] Just as deliberately as *Mrs. Dalloway's* Clarissa carved the pronoun "her-self," Mrs. Ramsey delineates between the self that the world would consider and that which arose in "triumph" when the obtrusive bodies of her children were absent. Necessarily nameless, this self was a "wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others . . . having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures."[296] And it is here, in Woolf's drawing of a mother's internal life, that the impetus for rebellion resides – for essentialism calls for the maternal to define the entire entity of a woman. In Woolf's construction of the nonessential temporality of Mrs. Ramsey, there is an insistence *against* the maternally-inscribed body, as this "core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability."[297] Intricately woven into this musing is the bias of those who would scatter her, the ominous "they" who could not find the "core" that meant, for Mrs. Ramsey, a unified reconstitution of her true self.

Inherently Postmodern in her construction of women characters, Woolf draws the battle between the body and the soul into a stark and even disconcerting moment in the daily life of a mother.[298] While it is true that Woolf works to transcend the outer, socially-inscribed body, it is not as clear that she saw that body as expendable, but rather an integral part of the human experience. Laura Doyle writes in "'These Emotions of the

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[295] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 62. My emphasis.

[296] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 62.

[297] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 62-63. Note the similarity in this scene and the conclusion of *The Awakening*.

[298] Once again, Woolf worked within a Modern landscape, but represents a pre-emergent Postmodern sensibility.

Body': Intercorporeal Narrative in 'To the Lighthouse'" of Wolf's corporealization of space, finding that: "By extending the mother's embeddedness in things, in other words, the narrator transgresses the patriarchal and traditional motherly frame for that embeddedness and creates a site of uncoded embodiment."[299] Doyle further points out that this rhetorical maneuver transforms the metaphysical realms of the body into dimensions that "sensualize" physical experiences past traditional boundaries.[300] In Woolf's internal exploration of Mrs. Ramsey, the soul becomes malleable, able to explore the external world with its fingers, and by doing so takes on a physicality that explodes the codes of the metaphysical realm.[301] As Mrs. Ramsey's "dark wedge" of self becomes one with the lighthouse, her body is part of that transformation, as: "Often she found herself sitting and looking . . . with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light, for example." Further, she finds her eyes meeting "the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart."[302] It is this "uncoded embodiment," as Doyle points out, that resists the separation of body and mind as necessary for female liberation.[303] Adrienne Rich points to the impulse to reject the socially-inscribed body as

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[299] Laura Doyle, "'These Emotions of the Body': Intercorporeal Narrative in 'To the Lighthouse,'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 40 (Spring, 1994), 42.

[300] Doyle 42.

[301] Also see: Julie Kane, "Varieties of Mystical Experience in the Writings of Virginia Woolf," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41 (Winter, 1995), 328. Kane discusses the impact of theosophists and spiritualists in Woolfian mysticism.

[302] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 63.

[303] Although this dissertation utilizes Doyle's theory of intercorporeality, it does not fully agree with her interpretation of the lighthouse scene. Doyle posits that: "In depicting Mrs. Ramsay's response to the rhythm of the lighthouse searchlight the narrator explicitly sexualizes her relation to this physical world."

a defensive maneuver, finding that "the body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit."[304] Yet, although Mrs. Ramsey's inner self could "go anywhere," it is interesting to note that its existence constituted a "summoning together," suggesting that nothing had been, in fact, shrugged off, but rather ceremoniously reconvened.

Although the emergence of Mrs. Ramsey's dark wedge of identity necessarily required an absence of children, to interpret that identity as anti-maternal ignores its complex nature. Rather, her spirit is in fact *amaternal*, a crucial distinction in Woolf's construction of motherhood as a performance, albeit a willing and fulfilling one. In Mrs. Ramsay, and to some extent Clarissa, the internal self is neither born against the role of mother, nor fed by maternal impulses – a revolutionary creation that her Postmodern 2nd wave daughters would not consider, and a creation that her Modern sisters could not begin to fathom. Mrs. Ramsey's dark wedge of self is not born of a fragmentation of the social and psychic battle for precultural identity, nor does it depend on the exclusions/inclusions of gender ontology. Significantly, it is a self that is not static, but rather a psychic buttress against the intrusive world, as Mrs. Ramsey considers it to be a "summoning together, a resting on the platform of stability."[305] All the noise of her daily gestures, the "glittering, vocal, evaporated" in the wake of this self, signifying all that came before as a performance. Mrs. Ramsey (named only "she" in this passage) must

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While it is tempting to see the scene in erotic tones, sexualizing Mrs. Ramsey's experience denies Woolf's ability to see the human consciousness as androgynous, a position that denies the essentialism implicit in Doyle's characterization. See: Doyle 42-43.

[304] Rich 40.

[305] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 63.

purge the exterior in order to find herself, for only in "losing personality" could the real be located. It is through the "personality" of Mrs. Ramsey that she enacted the gendered roles of wife, as mother—roles that refused the stability her internal "core of darkness" provided. Yet, unique to Woolf's feminism is a certain androgyny that refuses to name itself male or female, a constructivist androgyny that relies on a subliminal consciousness that does not exist in opposition to sex.[306]

Often cited as simply a humanist position, Woolf's creation of the non-sexed mind predicted the feminist constructivist theory born in the latter half of the century, a position which reacted against essentialism as a patriarchal myth. What Toril Moi has called "Woolf's crucial concept of androgyny" refuses the binarism of gender, although many feminist theorists have understood it to be a "union of masculinity and femininity [it is] precisely the opposite, in fact, of viewing it as the deconstruction of the duality."[307] Moi accuses feminist critics of reading Woolf through the lens of the "humanist aesthetic categories of the traditional male academic hierarchy," rather than understanding her as a feminist materialist operating against notions of biologism.[308] In fact, Woolf might argue that it is the coexistence of male and female within one mind that cancels the primacy of either out, an act of "spiritually co-operating" that refuses the essentialism of binary gender. If, as Woolf has claimed, "the great mind is androgynous," it is also "less apt to make these distinctions" of male and female.[309] In other words, Woolfian androgyny

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[306] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 14.

[307] Moi 14.

[308] Moi 14 and 18.

[309] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1989), 98. First published in 1929.

destroys gender at the root, a necessary move for the writer, for seeing one "sex as distinct from the other . . . interferes with the unity of the mind."[310]

Therefore, for Woolf, gender operates on the perimeters of external life as a necessary performance. Butler examines gender as always already performative, arguing that:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* [which] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self . . . Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; "the internal" is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody.[311]

And it is here, in the fluid, ungendered center, that true identity lies for the lovely and dutiful Mrs. Ramsay. Although those places where the self thrived were often dark and unseen by others, no outside force could annihilate it. It is a phenomenon Mrs. Ramsey ponders as she attempts to adjust a boar skull in the least horrific way to her children's bedroom wall, and finds that "Wherever they put the light there was always a shadow somewhere."[312] Reinventing the notion of the real as that which is always in the shadows, Woolf threw into question that which was in the light—that which could be seen—forcing the fixable identity of 'mother' onto the stage as mere performance. Her creation of the lesbian/female phallus within the character of Lily Briscoe, as well as her depiction

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[310] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 97.

[311] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 179.

[312] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 115.

of Mrs. Ramsay as essentially amaternal, disrupted normative concepts of feminine nature. The implications were murderous to the myth of the Maternal Goddess, for if the social body is always "phantasmatic," and those actions it performs are only schemas to become a socially-intelligible being, what becomes of a mythical Maternal Goddess?

An Ernest Performance of Woman

Only one year before Woolf published *To the Lighthouse*, Ernest Hemingway created the gender-troubled Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises.* As one of the most unabashedly chauvinistic writers of the 20th Century, Hemingway's construction of women characters reveals an anxiety at the demise of the maternal woman. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the ultimate feminine, Hemingway creates the dark double of a woman seemingly unrestrained by her biological functions or societal norms. Released from her chains, and no longer the internal secret that Woolf's mother kept to herself, Brett becomes the nightmarish vision of the anti-maternal female—yet even here in the representation of a woman refusing to perform as a woman, there is performance. If she is, as Robert suggests, a "sadist," it is the sadism of improvidence, of male self indulgence run amuck, belying the self sacrifice of a proper Lady.[313] It is also the performance, however fractuous, of a man, and thereby constitutes an aberration of regulative schemas of gender. Brett becomes, in Hemingway's world, the female subject in drag, the maternal body repressed and oppressed by her own desires. Her performance

[313] Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 166. First printed in 1926.

is not, however, a liberating one, but rather re-sexes her as woman playing dress-up. Butler notes that a "masquerade [that] suggests that there is a "being" or ontological specification of femininity *prior to* the masquerade, a feminine desire or demand that is masked and capable of disclosure, that, indeed, might promise an eventual disruption and displacement of the phallogocentric signifying economy."[314] Brett, then, is a shape changer, Isis in modern clothes, and there is something *unnatural* about a being that cannot be clearly seen.

Yet, rather than denaturalizing the female position, the character of Lady Brett works to lay bare that which is working *against* nature, a construction that is complicit in the production of gender ontology. Butler argues that the "univocity of sex and gender [are] regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression."[315] Therefore, representing the unnatural, as Hemingway does in the Lady Brett, reaffirms the fallacy of a "pregiven femininity" which has been, in effect, muzzled. Brett often performs the male comrade, referring to herself as one of the boys, asking: "I say, can a chap sit down?"[316] She possesses a strange female virility that responds to the sight of battle and blood rather than shrink from it, and instead becomes "fascinated" by the carnage, remarking upon her unladylike arousal as only: "Funny . . . How one doesn't mind the blood."[317] And while Brett will never be sexually satiated, she nonetheless regrets the absence of a feminine propriety

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[314] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 60.

[315] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 44.

[316] Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 40. See also 206 for an identical passage.

[317] Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 139 and 211.

that would cancel out her predatory nature, remarking that "I've always done just what I wanted . . . I do feel such a bitch." It is interesting to note that the state of being "a bitch" is the direct consequence of being a sexual woman, as she exclaims: "My God! . . . The things a woman goes through."[318] In refusing the feminine role, Brett becomes unmarriable, a state that might have been restored if not for her refusal to perform in a culturally intelligible manner. As she chalks up her failure to hold onto Romero to be simply that: "He wanted me to grow my hair out . . . He said it would make me more womanly," Brett's language is still one of vain rebellion.[319] After all, she would "look a fright," and therefore Brett sallies away from the prospect of marriage, a move that ensures that she will not "be one of those bitches that ruins children."[320] It is a sentiment she will mindlessly echo, and the strongest place of her unholy resistance. Yet, the passage speaks also to the author's construction of a fragmented womanhood: the maternal could not reside in the sexual woman, as the sexual woman was inherently already a "bitch," unconcerned with her reproductive duties or the results of her physical exploits.

In his construction of the modern woman, Hemingway incorporates both the sense of royalty that Ruskin envisioned for his goddess-queen and the powers of an unrestrained ancient goddess. Within the character of Brett there lies the threat of female

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[318] Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 184.

[319] There is a strong disparity between the implications of bobbing one's hair in Hemingway's novel and F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." The former appears represent the path into bitchdom, and certain doom, while the latter implies a new autonomy for its subject and freedom from oppression. See: F. Scott Fitzgerald "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," *Flappers and Philosophers* (New York: Scribners, 1922).

[320] Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 242-243.

power, for she is not only devoid of the maternal core that would keep her solidly in place, but she is also invested with an inherent sense of superiority: she is titled (albeit through marriage) as Lady, a perceptible link to the Queen. Despite these royal connotations, she is complicated by an almost magical autonomy that refutes any domestic desires that Ruskin's housewife-queen would embrace. As Robert, one of Brett's many conquests, refers to her as "Circe" and "claims she turns men into swine," Hemingway inadvertently grants his Lady a mythic potency that belies her seeming lack of malicious intent.[321] She is, then, a goddess who is operating in a prephallic mode, a monstrous female force that castrates all attempts to control it. It is this reference, singularly embedded in Hemingway's text, which speaks to the fear of the early 20th Century: what if that which lies beneath the performance of the maternal woman is, in fact, the reality? That Woolf's "dark wedge" could be lurking, policed but never eliminated, is intricately aligned with Hemingway's suggestion of a dark goddess. Gilbert and Gubar investigate the emergence of the "monster-woman," finding a male-dread in literary constructs of her to be:

> . . . threatening to replace her angelic sister, embody[ing] intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author's power to allay "his" anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained " place" and thus generates a story that "gets away" from its author.[322]

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[321] Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 144.

[322] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 28.

As frequently as Brett will consider herself a bitch, most often in places where she is "embodying intransigent female autonomy," it is clear that something has gone horribly awry in the construction of literary goddesses. Brett had, in many instances, gotten away from her author.

As much as Woolf's internally-conscious woman provided a relief of extraneous performance, Hemingway's tale of an unnatural girl thoroughly refuses the privilege of an internal self. While the character of Brett appears to be a rather superficial construction of a woman out of her place, the havoc and pain she creates in the lives of men suggests a deeper implication in the work. If, as Butler has suggested, to be a gendered woman is only repetitive performance, and if Brett has been radically written as performing male, then what remains beneath? For the male writer, the murky underbelly of a woman's soul could very well be "a magical creature of the lower world who is a kind of antithetical mirror image of an angel."[323] As such, when the maternal is stripped away as only a regulatory act rather than a biological state, the residual fear becomes that "the monster may not only be concealed *behind* the angel, she may actually turn out to reside *within*" the breast of a woman.[324] In the case of Lady Brett, the cold and resolutely sexual self could culminate in nothing more than a calculated masquerade of a "femme in drag"—or could represent the lack of anything internally feminine to perform. Hemingway would attempt to create her nemesis in *A Farewell To Arms* in the character of Katherine Barkley, an earthly angel without a mirror that reflected monstrous goddesses – or even a bothersome internal self.

[323] Gilbert and Gubar 28.

[324] Gilbert and Gubar 29.

As if to resurrect a Victorian Angel, Hemingway wrote the lovely Katherine as his heart's darling, a subject without a cause other than to serve Lieutenant Henry. Devoid of any internal agency, Katherine has been cleansed of any identity that might work outside of the hetero-normative sphere. Her character is essentialized as the eternal feminine, a concept that Gilbert and Gubar describe as a "metaphysical emptiness," a purification of the female psyche that "signifies they are, of course, *self-less*, with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests."[325] Katherine becomes, in effect, Hemingway's acquiescent goddess, an entity that his passionate (and often homoerotic) friend Rinaldi cannot fathom. In frustration, Rinaldi berates Henry for his fascination with Miss Barkley as being: "Your lovely cool goddess. English goddess. My God what would a man do with a woman like that except worship her?"[326] Yet, unlike Hemingway's Brett, Katherine is a goddess bereft of malicious intent. She meets the primary qualification of all acceptable English Goddesses: she is *good*. It is an imperative connection made clear by Rinaldi's antagonistic appellation: "your good women. Your goddesses."[327] And good, she is, her mantra never straying past Henry's desires, but only adding up to: "I want what you want. There isn't any me any more. Just what you want. . . . I'm good. Aren't I good?"[328] Katherine epitomizes what Gilbert and Gubar name a "metaphysical emptiness," definitively "self-less" in her desires. Any

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[325] Gilbert and Gubar 21.

[326] Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1929), 66.

[327] Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 66.

[328] Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 106. Further examples are found on page 106, although counting them is very hard on the feminist stomach.

vestigial sexual simmering within Hemingway's angel remains under the jurisdiction of her lover, as there is no Katherine (and therefore, no female sexuality) outside of the parameters of the relationship. Resolute in her decision not to marry Henry, her reasoning is not one of necessary liberation, but reflects an extension of his identity that eclipses (or annihilates) any female self that came before, as she proclaims: "There isn't any me. I'm you. Don't make up a separate me."[329] Fundamentally folding the female self into the male frame, Hemingway constructs a goddess whose very existence depends on that of its male benefactor. [330] He is, therefore, the goddess's God, the prayer Katherine breathes as she promises Henry: "You're my religion." She is a nurse who has only one patient, a dutiful child whose sexuality is an accidental symptom of male desire, often begging to be useful by asking: "Is there anything I do you don't like? Can I do anything to please you? Would you like me to take down my hair? Do you want to play?"[331] It is interesting to note the difference between the angelic Katherine, a goddess in bondage, and the predatory Brett who could turn men into swine. In the character of Katherine, Hemingway had created the tale of a goddess redeemed – it was the great goodnight story, the balm that soothed the male psyche indelibly traumatized by the

[329] Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 115.

[330] Marc Hewson writes in his article "'The Real Story of Ernest Hemingway': Cixous, Gender, and *A Farewell to Arms*" of the possibility that Hemingway is employing the ecriture feminine in *Farewell*. In his endeavor to recover a feminist reading of *Farewell*, Hewson suggests that it represents: "writing that attempts to avoid the political power struggles to which masculine models are prone and that seeks to accept gender difference rather than oppose it." Although Hewson points to the homoerotica present within the novel as proof of such a reading, this dissertation resists the idea that Hemingway worked to liberate the female sex from gender difference. Rather, in the speech of Katherine one finds the overwhelming rhetoric of her submission of identity to be indicative of the quintessential feminine character, a depiction that underlines and reinforces "the political power struggles to which masculine models are prone." See: Marc Hewson "'The Real Story of Ernest Hemingway': Cixous, Gender and Farewell to Arms,'" *The Hemingway Review* 22 (Spring, 2003), 51.

[331] Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 116.

cryptic tales of Virginia Woolf. Yet, even this vision of an angel could not manifest on Modernist ground.

Although it is clear that Hemingway took his Lady Barkley quite seriously, her character remains a simplistic parody of the Maternal Goddess, a literary quandary for the author attempting to construct a viable goddess. In order to reinvest his angel with the obligatory maternal essence, Hemingway creates a problematic pregnancy, virtually ending both Katherine's sexual innocence and, in a necessary turn, her life. Butler suggests that the parody of any essence always splinters the real from the fantastic, finding that: "Practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic—a failed copy, as it were."[332] Katherine, as a failed copy of lived womanhood, cannot sustain both the physicality of her pregnancy (proof of her sexuality) and the psychology of the innocent subject. Upon entering a hotel room, Katherine laments that: "I never felt like a whore before," a momentary but revelatory moment that occurs just before she slips back into the rhetoric of being "a good girl again."[333] Katherine's pregnancy is then a necessary evil in her genesis as the angelic goddess, for the maternal grants the character her femininity, yet paradoxically ensures her demise. For all of its good intent, the introduction of the maternal infects Hemingway's romantic plot, fracturing Henry's control over his Katherine. His goddess is destroyed by the very thing that could mark her as female, and

[332] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 186.

[333] Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 152.

Henry has no feelings of paternity for his progeny, stating: "I had no feeling for him. He did not seem to have anything to do with me. I felt no feeling of fatherhood." It is a thing, a brat, a "freshly skinned rabbit" born dead – as incapable of life as the angelic Katherine. Regardless of his valiant effort to recreate a goddess, Hemingway could not escape the cost of investing his character with a maternal physiology.

What is intriguing about Hemingway's construction of women characters is the cleavages he created between the sexual, autonomous, nonmaternal woman and the sexually submissive, maternal woman. Strangely separated into separate novels, Hemingway provides two halves of a woman as warring factions of femininity without a unitary identity. Held safely beyond arm's reach, Hemingway's women could not speak to each other, ensuring that the nightmare could not disrupt the dream. Refusing the regulatory split in Mrs. Ramsey, Woolf posited woman not as antimaternal, nor pro-maternal, but revolutionarily amaternal at the root of her ontology—a position outside of the binary foundationalism of her time.

Eyes Wide Open: An Unbenevolent Goddess

While Hemingway saw woman in black or white, his colleague and friend F. Scott Fitzgerald's representations of women were the perfect shade of Modernist gray. Rather than to beat off the nightmare specter of the amaternal femme, Fitzgerald created his female protagonists with a sense of pained resignation, inadvertently striking yet another nail into the Maternal Goddess's coffin. Only one year before Hemingway published *The Sun Also Rises*, Fitzgerald introduced Daisy to the world in *The Great*

Gatsby as the mother who could not remember her daughter's name. Strikingly similar to Hemingway's Brett, Daisy is sexual, shallow, self-interested woman—yet Daisy operates from within the domestic sphere (however aided by governesses and maids). It is here that Fitzgerald breaks from Hemingway's treatment of the sexual woman, as Daisy performs the roles of wife and mother, but most disturbingly for the time, does not conceal the performance. It is all glitter and surface, the innards of womankind are displayed as so much frosting on the proverbial cake of society, and the nightmare has become the reality. As Nick voyeuristically observes her, Daisy becomes a study in nothingness, chatting with Miss Baker "with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire."[334] This "coolness" is indicative of the entire novel which placidly lays out humanity in all of its meaninglessness, yet the quintessence of Daisy is remarkably (or markedly) absent in the novel. When asked about her daughter, she replies only: "I suppose she talks, and—eats, and everything," never naming her aloud. Almost as a disclaimer for her lack of a maternal bone, Daisy describes her first reactions to her child's sex as being marred by a sense of doom, claiming: "I turned my head away and wept . . . And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful fool."[335] As if the child exists only as some ethereal fantasy, Daisy will puppet her here and there, never calling her by name (Pammy) but only "precious" and sweetheart" and, most tellingly: "You dream, you. You absolute little dream." [336]

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[334] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 1991), 27. First published in 1925.

[335] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 30.

[336] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 117.

Motherhood had, in fact, become only a dream in Fitzgerald's world, and though Daisy becomes the anvil around which men will choke themselves, the author appeared to take little conscious notice of her. In a review of his own book, Fitzgerald claimed that the work was a failure simply because: "the book contains no important woman character and women control the fiction market at the present."[337] Perhaps it was the character of the woman, not the woman as character, that Fitzgerald saw as being of no real consequence – for Daisy, beautiful and empty, is nothing if not pivotal to the text.

Fitzgerald's disillusionment with motherhood in *The Great Gatsby* would be echoed in the character of Nicole in his last (complete) novel, *Tender is the Night*. However, Nicole is no Daisy: she is multifaceted, richly drawn and psychoanalyzed to the point of exclusion of the normative rules of womankind. She is chaotic and subdued, powerful and vulnerable, fabulously mad and terrifically sane all at the same time. She is proof of the internal self, however flawed and unrecognizable to a gendered society, perhaps more real in her insanity than any sane female character who had come before. She is, of course, because she is Zelda.[338]

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[337] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 165.

[338] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), first published in 1933. In 1930, Fitzgerald's novel was halted by Zelda's rapidly declining mental health – a fact made poignant by his graphing of Zelda's mental disease against that of the character Nicole. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this alignment between real life and fiction is the manner in which he marks the end of each graph with dual question marks. Fitzgerald titles the graph: "Parallel between actual case and case in novel," dictating columns of similarity such as "a woman of 29, has a rivalry complex for success and power competing with husband [Zelda]," and "A girl of 15, has a father complex deliberately built up by her father, a well-screened degenerate [Nicole]." Fitzgerald also clearly denotes both columns of diagnoses, for both Zelda and Nicole, to equal schizophrenia. See: Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), insert.

Annie Dillard has described Modernist fiction as being that which "disassembles human life in time. It dissects the living, articulated joints and arranges the bright bones on the ground."[339] Of this, if nothing else Modernist, Fitzgerald is guilty. The pseudo-biographical character of Zelda/Nicole is riddled with a pained acceptance of the female condition; no longer separated from her dark double, she inhabits the darkness in the light. In Nicole, the laugh of the Medusa is audible because it is *present*, while the prediscursive maternal body is silently absent. The author has confronted the prospect that the maternal is performative, and draws the character of Nicole in both forlorn resignation and terror. As much as Hemingway's women react against or submit to biological determinations of gender, Fitzgerald's female characters appear to forge identities outside of those determinations. Neither Daisy nor Nicole are governed by anti nor promaternal impulses, but rather are inherently amaternal beings, wholly unconcerned with their offspring. In dislocating the binary positions of the maternal, Fitzgerald *locates* the apathetic female as outside of the locus of what Butler has called the Male Signifying economy and those physical essences that could police her. It is this female that Fitzgerald lays bare in his text as so many "bright bones on the ground," a virtual skeleton of all angels and goddesses who came before her.[340] She is, most disturbingly, a product of forces unseen, uncontrollable, unphysical—a product of WWI postwar culture. Judith Fetterley examines Fitzgerald's narrative of gender in *Tender is the Night* as "the anxiety-ridden perception that culture, not biology, is destiny," finding that even Dick Diver is subject to culture's power to maintain or destroy gendered

[339] Annie Dillard, *Living by Fiction* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1982), 62.

[340] Dillard 62.

positions at will.[341] It would seem that biology, that powerhouse of patriarchal control, was rapidly losing ground in Modernist literature, while culture, blind to the myths of the maternal body, was setting up shop in the most disconcerting manner.

While Nicole harbors the nucleus of the amaternal in *Tender is the* Night, the figures of Mrs. Speers and Rosemary alternately reflect the anxiety of a threatened institutional motherhood and the vacuous product of a Modern maternal endeavor. Mrs. Spears's character is marked by a "cheerful stoicism," determined to separate her daughter from herself in hopes that Rosemary would be "spiritually weaned."[342] Focusing solely upon Rosemary's acting career as the guarantee or of her happiness, Mrs. Spears "would not tolerate any spurious substitutes," but rather encourages Rosemary to act, as it were, as if she were a man. Rosemary's mother is her only patriarchy, her god, evidenced by her reverent speech: "'Mother is perfect,' she prayed."[343] Yet it is a strange tit from which to nurse, as Mrs. Spears denies Rosemary's right to determine her own gender by retaining, ironically, the feminine maternal right of ownership of her child. As Rosemary acts her way through a romance with a married man, her mother severs any dream of serious commitment, insisting instead that:

> You were brought up to work—not especially to marry. Now you've found your first nut to crack and it's a good nut—go ahead and put whatever happens down

[341] Judith Fetterley, "Who Killed Dick Driver? The Sexual Politics in *Tender is the Night*," *Mosaic* 17:111-28 (1984), 125-127.

[342] Fitzgerald *Tender is the Night* 11.

[343] Fitzgerald *Tender is the Night* 36.

> to experience. Wound yourself or him—whatever happens it can't spoil you because economically you're a boy, not a girl.[344]

It is the power to alter biology that Fitzgerald invests into Mrs. Speers, a power that is born of economics and the culture that feeds it. As Fetterely suggests, culture becomes destiny, and Rosemary's destiny is to inhabit the role of the independent male. Conversely, it is from within the role of mother that Mrs. Speers is able to spawn this economic mutation—yet only through a "final severance of the umbilical cord" can she ensure its survival. What is left, however, does not culminate into the economic boy her heart desires, but instead a girl whose only true identity is that of an actress. Mrs. Speer's labor produces, therefore, the abortive dream of a psychological hermaphrodite, once again dislocating the maternal as a nurturing, real, and sustainable essence. Her maternal nature is, like Rosemary's career, only an act.

Yet, Rosemary's performance is dually divisive, setting up an articulation of unanchored gender, as she has been raised to be a man, to work, yet her work is to perform an idealized feminine identity on the screen. Rosemary's caricature of the good girl in the film "Daddy's Girl" severs femininity from reality as something one parodies, allowing her to subvert patriarchy through her performance *within* it. Butler investigates the chaotic implications of such a performance, claiming that:

> Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized

[344] Fitzgerald *Tender is the Night* 39.

through their parodic recontextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself.[345] Rosemary, as the consummate actress, is devoid of any capacity to negotiate between what is the original self and what is the myth. Life is always the stage, and even in her most passionate role as Dick's lover she cannot see him as real, but presses her "lips to the beautiful cold image she had created." Within the same scene, Dick muses that the "most sincere thing" she expresses is simply: "Oh, we're such *actors*—you and I."[346] In this chilly parody of seductress and older man, Dick is just as guilty, just as trapped within the vortex of a fictional reality no longer under the performer's control. And yet, there is a suggestion embedded within Fitzgerald's depiction of this lackluster scene that the performance, however hollow, is preferable to the anarchy of the real. At the very least, the former can be predicted.

Juxtaposed against the impotent actress, Nicole, in all of her seductive (and perhaps dubious) madness, is stripped of performance and pretence. As Rosemary considers her sexual adversary, she thinks to herself that: "Nicole was a force—not necessarily well disposed or predictable like her mother—an incalculable force. Rosemary was somewhat afraid of her."[347] Fitzgerald's depiction of Nicole as "a force" usurps all categories, traditional and otherwise, investing her with an indefinable, unknowable darkness capable of immense autonomy. She is the culmination of Woolf's dark wedge of true identity, refusing the cool comfort of lying silently within its host. As

[345] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 176.

[346] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 105.

[347] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 59.

such, Nicole belies a true gendered ontology, revealing the myth of a Maternal Goddess to be a manipulative construction of culture, itself. Butler argues that location of the real is a privileged one, finding that:

> The question of whom and what is considered real and true is apparently a question of knowledge. But it is also, as Foucault makes plain, a question of power. Having or bearing "truth" and "reality" is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way in which power dissimulates as ontology.[348]

Certainly, Fitzgerald invested that power into the character of Nicole, against all attempts within the text to psychoanalyze it into feminine submission. What is intriguing about Nicole's power, her force, is its lack of origination, the utter vacuum of any nameable locus of control. Nicole is radically devoid of performance, and however horrific the truth of her might be, she is preferable to the cultural performance of womanhood, as Dick points out: "The strongest guard is placed at the gateway to nothing . . . Maybe because the condition of emptiness is too shameful to be divulged."[349] It is this emptiness that plagued early 20th century writers, this possibility of removing the mask of the Maternal Goddess only to find an empty space where their altars once were firmly carved.

As mad as she might seem, Nicole's mental illness is relieved only by the removal of patriarchal institutions and their mythical assumptions of the female role. Her deepest descents into insanity are surrounded by the sexual advances of her father, her husband's

[348] Butler, *Undoing Gender* 215.

[349] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 69.

reliance on the field of psychology as a lens through which to understand her, and the intrusive bodies and voices of her children. Incarcerated within the walls of socially-sanctioned womanhood, Nicole responds as an animal, her breakdowns culminating in "a verbal inhumanity that penetrated the keyholes and the cracks of the doors, [then] swept into the suite and in the shape of horror took form again."[350] It is interesting to note her form as inhuman, as Dick remembers one of his first contacts with her as almost supernatural: "Minute by minute the sweetness drained down into her out of the willow trees, out of the *dark* world."[351] She is capable of "bringing him the essence of a continent" unknowable to man, yet when captured as wife and mother, her sweetness culminates in the screams of a wild thing. Most provocatively, Fitzgerald's imagery of Nicole's travel through the boundaries of keyholes and doors implies a refusal to be incarcerated, neither by the domestic home nor the psychiatric clinic. The implications are gloomy for the Modernist writer: the uncontrollable woman must be "fixed" by the patriarchy or to go unfixed by the patriarchy, both being equally unsatisfactory alternatives. In his construction of a woman as a force unto herself, Fitzgerald drew Nicole as *unfixable*, the woman who would not be a wife, and could not be a mother.

As diligent as Dick Diver would appear to be in the handling of his marital ward, his understanding of Nicole is one outside of the matrixes of psychiatry. She is clearly untreatable, as he makes clear to Baby Warren after Nicole brazenly cuts off her hair: "That's all right. She's a schizoid—a permanent eccentric. You can't change that."[352] It

[350] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 112.

[351] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 235. My emphasis.

[352] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 150.

is a resigned attitude that he will repeat in reference to Mrs. Speers, finding that: "Women are necessarily capable of almost anything in their struggle for survival and can scarcely be convicted of such man-made crimes as "cruelty.""[353] Excusing womankind from the laws of a male-dominated society, Dick becomes a victim to female forces that are unchangeable, permanently outside of the institutions that would attempt to name and examine them. Although his profession should hold him up against the onslaught of the female mind, Dick's only defense becomes one of denial, marked by "a cleavage between Nicole sick and Nicole well," finding that his life often meant "serving her against his will." More than a mere hindrance, his life with this force of a woman had scarred him with so man "open wounds" that no science could heal, just as it could not heal Nicole.[354]

It is Dick Diver's position as both husband and psychologist that victimizes him, even castrates him, from a firm and comforting masculinity. Conversely, it is Nicole's madness, an incurable native womanhood outside of logic and law, that invests her with an "incalculable" power. Michel Foucault describes a principle of exclusion that requires division between a discourse of logic and the speech of the madman, born exclusively of the fear that that speech holds: "strange powers not held by any other . . . the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naiveté what the others' wisdom cannot perceive."[355] This necessary division immunizes a logical society from any infection in the madman's speech, or any unsanctioned power that might overtake the

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[353] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 163.

[354] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 168.

[355] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *The Rhetorical Tradition*, Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2nd Ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 1461.

rational mind. Using the institutional figure of the psychiatrist, Foucault warns that although the "doctor's role" is to only listen objectively, he is "listening to a discourse which is invested with desire, and which . . . thinks it is loaded with terrible powers. If the silence of reason is required for the curing of monsters, it is enough for that silence to be on alert, and it is in this that the division remains."[356] Having crossed that division as husband and lover, Dick succumbs to the force of Nicole's madness, finding that: "The dualism in his views of her—that of the husband, that of the psychiatrist—was increasingly paralyzing his faculties." Further victimized by her illness, Dick realizes that "she had several times carried him over the line with her, disarming him" as the weaker of the two.[357] Madness becomes power, seductive and frightening as Dick considers her illness in terms of "brilliance, the versatility of madness is akin to the resourcefulness of water seeping through," an interesting (if not somewhat pathological) reference to female/water imagery. Fitzgerald's anxiety bubbles through Dick's speech, suggesting an underlying fear of contagious female hysteria that, while innervating to the woman's soul, could atrophy the male intellect without warning. Even as the progenitor of her madness can be traced to those institutions that would claim to heal her, Nicole's position as "scizophrene" allows for an autonomy that ignores, or even erodes, its origins. Nicole's agency lies in her refusal to *act* sane, and in her refusal of all things feminine, she is able to both conquer and control masculine institutions within her sphere. The place of her strongest disobedience would be, however, in her desertion of the role of mother.

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[356] Foucault 1462.

[357] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 188.

If Woolf's Mrs. Ramsey harbored a dark wedge of self, unencumbered by maternal impulses, Nicole is proof that this core self need not hide in the dark. Unabashedly amaternal, Nicole is pushed into the position of the antimaternal by psychobiological expectations that do not seem to apply to her. As her husband panics at the loss of their children at the Agiri Fair, Nicole is anything but concerned, rather: "Evil-eyed, Nicole stood apart, denying the children, resenting them as part of a downright world she sought to make amorphous."[358] The "amorphous" world Nicole seeks would loosen its lines, providing release from the bodies that would lay claim upon her identity and coerce her into a civilized motherhood. As the scene culminates into deadly chaos, it is Nicole's primal scream that separates her from that downright world: "You were scared weren't you? You wanted to live!" Obviously unaffected by the danger to her children, the insidious suggestion is that *she wanted them to die*—a possibility that dawns upon Dick as her face is transformed into a "grinning mask"[359] It is crucial to note that Nicole is nowhere in the text as monstrous as she is at this murderous moment, nor is there any other moment in which she provokes a violent reaction from her husband. Yet, it is also another instance in which Nicole is contained, and it is that containment of mother and wife that appears to be the impetus for her felonious behavior. She is the lioness in the cage, exonerated for mauling her master, reacting to her confinement as inhumane and unnatural. Nicole is, in effect, "becoming undone," an experience Butler finds as possibly emancipatory for the oppressed subject. Seeing this experience as a provisional space for change, Butler further explains that:

[358] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 191.

[359] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 254.

> Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim.[360]

Strangely, Nicole's undoing as wife and mother is the precursor to her salvation—and the beginning of a "greater livability" for Fitzgerald's factious female protagonist.

As Nicole finds sexual release in Tommy, and maternal release in the governess, her thoughts begin to mirror a dawning sanity as she "felt *new* and happy; her thoughts were as clear as good bells—she had a sense of being cured and in a *new* way."[361] It would seem, as Butler suggests is possible, that Nicole's undoing enabled her "to inaugurate a relatively newer" self, as well as a relatively saner self. Her final internal speech is wrought with awakenings, as if she were an altogether new being: "Her ego began blooming like a great rich rose as she scrambled back along the labyrinths in which she had wandered for years." Her rhetoric is one of rebirth, made possible by her husband's absence as now: "she resented the places where she had played planet to Dick's sun."[362] In perhaps the most revelatory moment of Nicole's sudden clarity, she realizes that:

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[360] Butler, *Undoing Gender* 1.

[361] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 286. My emphasis.

[362] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 287. The similarities between Nicole's awakening to that of Kate Chopin's Edna are startling. Both characters are described often in animalistic terms, and are both resistant to male efforts of psychoanalysis. See Chapter II for a complete discussion on *The Awakening*.

> She had somehow given over the thinking to him . . . Yet think she must; she knew at last the number on the dreadful door of fantasy, the threshold to the escape that was no escape; she knew that for her the greatest sin now and in the future was to delude herself . . . Either you think—or else others have to think for you and take power from you, pervert and discipline your natural tastes, civilize and sterilize you.[363]

Capable of delivering unto man "the essence of a continent," Nicole refuses to be civilized, an interesting reference to the word most often used to justify invasion. Even more notable is her refusal to be sterilized, for as much as the word implies that which is dirty or unsanitary, any maternity within Nichole is already sterile, and its reversal suggests that to sterilize her is to force her body into a maternal role. Society's drive to "civilize" Nicole's female mind, to "pervert" her natural tastes is revealed to be the force that drove her mad, and it would seem that Foucault's vision of the madman (or here woman) bears the key to what is true, and what is real. Resisting the institutional forces that would exclude her as insane, Nicole exhibits the enormous autonomy of self-healing. Once incarcerated, she is now able to recognize the "number on the dreadful door" of her madness, and finds the key to be her own consciousness – a salvation that Zelda Fitzgerald, her worldly counterpart, Fitzgerald would never find.[364]

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[363] Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* 287.

[364] There are direct similarities between Nicole's speech and Zelda's letters to Scott, often so much so they appear plagiaristic. For a more thorough examination of the parallels between Nicole Diver and Zelda Fitzgerald, see: Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 284-290.

What reared its thorny head in the early part of the 20th Century, therefore, was the emergence of the amaternal being, unlike Freud's Id in that it refused all communication with sexual reproduction. For Woolf, the existence of this dark wedge of self transformed the body, exceeding its socially-inscribed gender boundaries while reordering the mind/body hierarchy in ways that were clearly heretical to a worried patriarchy. Of course, as a woman writer, Woolf had privileged insight into the mysteries of the female internal self, and found it beautiful. Conversely, Hemingway slices the female state into separate selves: that of the empty, angelic Katherine and the masculine, predatory Brett, neither enjoying a sustainable livability in the Modern world. Although Fitzgerald valiantly confronts the amaternal female in all of her mad glory, Nicole will not be possessed, and attains a sustainable life only when released from Dick's control. Both exhibit a masculine anxiety of loss, for everything that had been invested in the maternal woman, her sweetness, her submission, and her position in the domestic sphere was increasingly under review. As Rich points out, the institution of motherhood is crucial to a patriarchal state, as "the mother serves the interests of patriarchy: she exemplifies in one person religion, social conscience, and nationalism." In effect, the threat to a weakened maternal essence threatened more than the home, for if it is true that "institutional motherhood revives and renews all other institutions," it is also true that those institutions were male.[365] As such, the undoing of the feminine threatened to undo the masculine, as Michael Nowlin points out in "The World's Rarest Work" that: "the most fundamental implication is that 'masculinity' is as much a masquerade as

[365] Rich 45.

'femininity.'"[366] In the absence of the maternal woman, Fitzgerald creates the "phallic maternal" in the character of Dick Diver, a move that Nowlin cites as proof that "Dick foresees that he cannot restore patriarchal order to a gendered world gone askew in the wake of the war and in the post-war boom period without acknowledging the lack entailed by his own masculinity."[367] From this viewpoint, Dick Diver participates in gender performance, albeit without conviction, as a defensive maneuver against a disintegrating institutional order of the sexes, specifically that of the maternal woman.[368]

Yet, perhaps the patriarchal anxiety of the weakened state of motherhood is symptomatic of a deeper fear, one born of the loss of a goddess.[369] In abandoning her offspring, and all things maternal, the female emerging in the texts of the early 20th Century no longer seemed to need worshiping. She had become rebelliously sexual, outside of her sociobiological cage, and in her amaternity had refused the necessity of heterosexual regulatory fictions. How can one worship a goddess who will not allow

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[366] Michael Nowlin, "'The World's Rarest Work': Modernism and Masculinity in Fitzgerald's 'Tender is the Night,'" *College Literature* 25 (Spring 1998), 61-65.

[367] Nowlin 61-65.

[368] For more studies on gender in Fitzgerald's novels see: Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986); and Frances Kerr, "Feeling 'Half Feminine,'" Modernism and the Politics of Emotion in The Great Gatsby," *American Literature* 68 (1996).

[369] One common reading of *Tender is the Night* speaks to the Modernist dilemma of the feminization of culture, and the existing critique on the phenomena determines a male anxiety responding in ways that hoped to reestablish a masculinist America. Michael Nowlin investigates Dick Diver as seeking to "overthrow maternal power" in a "misogynistic bent" that participates in the Modernist endeavor to resist such feminization. This work, while respecting Nowlin's theory as one lens through which to understand Fitzgerald's treatment of gender, relies heaviest on Fitzgerald's *resignation* to an increasingly feminist world, and finds his response to be anything but resolutely misogynist. Although Fitzgerald's work certainly suggests a fear of the amaternal woman, it is not clear that his novel, *Tender is the Night*, worked to overthrow maternal power, but lamented instead its demise. In fact, it was the amaternal woman that seemed to give Fitzgerald the shivers, and the confusion in Nowlin's theory stems from his generalization of the feminine as equal to the maternal, the exact supposition that this dissertation attempts to expose as phantasmatic. See: Nowlin 61-65.

men to mark on her? No longer invested in the reproduction of the species, the image of the Maternal Goddess was loosed from her mores, demonized for her refusal of bearing the child—yet most frightening of all, could still force men to their proverbial knees. She could, in a word, seduce man despite all his valiant efforts, yet refuse his progeny. Either cold, empty, or crazy, the goddess that trips across the first half of the century answered to neither God nor man. Fitzgerald, in a letter to Zelda's psychiatrist Dr. Squires, once wrote: "Liquor on my mouth is sweet to her; I cherish her most extravagant hallucinations."[370] It is profound to note the fragility of his state, his hunger for her madness, even as his intellect would tell him to flee her – and just as profound to envision the impact of Zelda's doppelganger on the literary world.

Finally, by presenting the amaternal, however schematically flawed, Modern authors threw the image of the Maternal Goddess into question. Butler investigates transformative power of questioned knowledge, finding that:

> To intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality, and to use, as it were, one's unreality to make an otherwise impossible or illegible claim. I think that when the unreal lays claim to reality, or enters into its domain, something other than a simple assimilation into prevailing norms can and does take place. The norms themselves can become rattled, display their instability, and become open to resignification.[371]

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[370] Quoted in: Milford 222.

[371] Butler, *Undoing Gender* 27-27.

Such is the power of fiction, taking hold of the framework of that which is "natural" and stable, and shaking new beings from its seeming solid planks. Even so, Modernists were still grappling with foundational knowledge, and although the ontology of a firm maternal essence had been denaturalized, the female characters in question remained outside of those contemporary notions of reality that regulated the early century. Gilbert and Gubar find the marker of British and American Modernism to be "an obsession with false and true costumes, deceptive history and true myth."[372] Further, in locating this Modernist obsession, Gilbert and Gubar contend that "in the aftermath of the emasculating terrors of the war, many men insisted that the ultimate reality underlying history is and must be the truth of gender."[373] Finding the markers of gender would not be the task of the Modernist writer, but anchoring biology firmly to the breasts of women in the name of "true myth" would be as futile as ignoring the effects of war on the identity of a nation.

It would take another war, and the women who went to work and stayed there, to situate the amaternal woman as a cultural and material reality. For the Postmodern woman writer, essentialism was not a simple myth, but a suicidal endeavor, binding woman to her reproductive functions in ways that denied her intellect and bled her creative capabilities. For the Postmodern writer, such a fate was certain death, and just as Woolf would claim self-defense in the murder of an angel, the women writers of the later century would have no choice but to murder a disinterested, yet deleterious, Maternal

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[372] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. II (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 343.

[373] Gilbert Gubar, *No Man's Land* 343.

Goddess. Unlike Woolf, they would offer no defense—she was simply a goddess who needed killing.

CHAPTER IV: DYSTOPIC BODIES AND ENSLAVED MOTHERHOOD

Buddy, don't give me that tender little mother crap. She may be a mother, but she's big as a barn and tough as knife metal.

Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

The later 20th Century, marked by decades of the women's movement, several waves of feminism and a new economics that demanded women's work, became the killing field for the essentialized maternal body in literature. Academic feminism, paradoxically, began to work towards a politic of the body, finding strength in the myth of the womb while insisting upon an independence from any patriarchal conceptions of femininity.[374] Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, while questioning the power structures of the family unit, represents the early essentialist/feminist movement toward an ethics of maternity. Her first words, for instance, are simply "Women mother," a play on both motherhood as identity and act, entangled inexplicably until the one cannot be distinguished from the other.[375] By the same token, Helene Cixous's pivotal work, "The Laugh of the Medusa," worked to uncover the woman writer's locus of power within the womb, claiming that

[374] I refer here to second-wave essentialists in particular, such as Nancy Chodorow, but also to the later work of Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva. The Conclusion will deal with the reclamation of the body within the limited realms of academic feminism, and more abundantly within the theoretical premises of feminist theology and feminist spirituality.

[375] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1978). Chodorow's work specifically aligns itself to a second-wave move to celebrate the feminine body as a locus of power. Also see: "Being and Doing: A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Socialization of Males and Females," *Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 183-187; "Family Structure and Feminine Personality,"

any real feminist revolution would spring from the "cradler," or the eternal mother within all women.[376] Although the essentialist movement would be crucial in the evolution of feminism (in effect sparking the constructivist movement toward the end of the century), many Postmodern women writers of the time responded violently to the ethics of a rediscovered, resituated essentialism.[377] The resulting fracture between literature and theory was clearly a Postmodern quandary: what sounded like revolution on paper felt more like maternal slavery in an increasingly disillusioned society.

Literal and figurative slavery of the body animated the literature of the later 20th century, yet the concept of the child-master was one as old as the Maternal Goddess. The collection *Representations of Motherhood* is introduced by a 1940s picture of a diminutive mother in a baby swing, dwarfed by a giant (and gloating) baby. Reproducing and interrogating historical motherhood, the editors find that this vision of motherhood, enslaved by her offspring, was first resisted in the 1970s by feminists such as Jesse Bernard (1974) and Adrienne Rich (1976) as a dangerous myth.[378] Marked by an

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Women, Culture and Society, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974), 43-66; Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989); Nancy Chodorow and S. Contratto, "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother," *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (New York: Longman P, 1982), 54-75.

[376] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen (*Signs* 1, 1976), 875-93. First appeared in print under the French title: "Le Rire de la Medusa" in *L'Arc* in 1975. See also: "Castration or Decapitation?" Trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs* 7 (1981), 41-55; Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement., *The Newly Born Woman,* Trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986). Cixous represents the French feminist impulse to locate power within maternal essentialism.

[377] For further discussion on late 20th century concepts of motherhood, see: Patrice Diquinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[378] The "mother-text," so to speak, of second-wave feminism was released just prior to this period, see: B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963). See also: J. Bernard *The Future of Motherhood* (New York: Dial Publishers, 1974); Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York, Norton P, 1976).

increasing resistance to the dangers of a maternal ideology, the authors posit that: "In the 1970s, feminist theory directed considerable attention to dismantling the ideology of motherhood by understanding its patriarchal roots and by underscoring that it did not represent the experiences of mothers themselves."[379] Yet, in battling the politics of motherhood, many feminists still returned to the supposition of a maternal essence as the site of resistance—naively assuming a stronghold in an already sociopolitically-inscribed body. The assumption remained that essentialism, when in the hands of the oppressed, could be revolutionary. However, the fiction written by women during this time held out for further proof and questioned maternal feminism as suicidal. For, to essentialize a body, however voluntarily, inevitably leads to the lack of a possessable body – the first premise of slavery. The Postmodern woman's response would be the suggestion of the dystopic body – most evident in their creation of the unlivability of a maternal utopia.

Resisting Arrest

Alice Walker's 1976 novel, *Meridian*, neither negotiates nor submits to the maternal quandary, but rather outright refuses motherhood as a viable reality.[380] Walker's insistent focus on the childless, transparent body is marked by a refusal of earthly boundaries: Meridian's name, we are told, means: "the highest apparent point

[379] Donna Bassin et. al, *Representations of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 3.

[380] *Meridian* has most often been read in terms of its involvement the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s, as well as the feminist second-wave activists of the time. Although the issue(s) of the Movement are critical to Walker's text, this work focuses primarily at her use of feminist thought as it pertains to essentialism. For more on *Meridian* and activism, see: Susan Danielson, "Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Feminism, and the 'Movement,'" *Women's Studies* (1989, Vol. 16), 317-330.

reached by a heavenly body in its course . . . the highest point of power."[381] It is a necessary delineation in her work, as Meridian works to transform her physicality into a phantasmatic, unsexed state that necessarily surpasses the dangers of gender and maternity. Yet the goddess form is not an option for Walker. An early scene portrays the body of a deceased and fallen woman, mummified for viewing in a local fair, that represents a physical warning for white women everywhere: "Marlene had been an ideal woman, a 'goddess,' who had been given 'everything she *thought* she wanted.'"[382] The racist denial of access to the fallen Marlene is the impetus for Meridian's protest, yet, juxtaposed against the tale of the fallen goddess within is a startling vision of Meridian, violently kicking the in the door as Truman Held observes: "God! . . . How can you not love somebody like that?" The local's answer is prophetic: "Because she thinks *she's* God," a heretical and unfeminine accusation, but one that refuses the dishonored, and physically diminished, condition of the "goddess" Marlene. In its construction of Meridian, named for an unearthly body capable of unfettered flight, Walker's work resists the amaternal being that emerged in Modernist text, and replaces it with the violently anti-maternal woman.

Laden with masculinist subjectivity, the goddess position was not one Meridian could entertain, and still survive – but the suggestion of woman as "God," while clearly embedded in a patriarchal history, moved Walker's antiwoman toward an autonomy reserved for men and a subjectivity outside of the female body. It is a move of self-defense, of survival, in a world that would have her mother. Maternity becomes the

[381] Alice Walker, *Meridian* (New York: Washington Square P, 1976), ix.

[382] Walker, *Meridian* 1.

parasite to Meridian's soul, antithetical to the pleasure of the body, and an unwelcome guest that society has thrust upon her. Too late, she laments that "She could never forgive her community, her family, his family, the whole world, for not warning her against children." As pregnancy becomes slavery, Meridian rails against her maternal condition as eclipsing her physical sexuality, as she discovers that:

> For a year she had seen some increase in her happiness: She enjoyed joining her body to her husband's in sex. . . . [but now] she became distracted from who she was. As divided in her mind as her body was divided, between what part was herself and what part was not. Her frail independence gave way to the pressures of motherhood and she learned—much to her horror and amazement—that she was not even allowed to be resentful that she was "caught." That her personal life was over.[383]

In understanding her body as the betrayer, luring her into orgasmic complacency before nailing her to the wall with a fetus, Meridian's psyche is fragmented, as well. As much as her body is denied the release from an embryonic takeover, her mind is prevented the release of indignation—she must be silent in her maternal slavery, a sentence that felt like death. Yet this is what slavery is in its essence, a bound and alienated condition of the body from which the only escape is death.

Death, therefore, is the price of maternity, and as Meridian becomes involuntarily indoctrinated in the cult of domesticity the veil is lifted and she sees that "the mysterious inner life that she had imagined gave [mothers] a secret joy was simply a full knowledge

[383] Walker, *Meridian* 50.

of the fact that they were dead, living just for their children."[384] More than a cage, the maternal body became a coffin in which she was "buried alive," and within it her soul. Finding that: "Creativity was in her, but it was refused expression," her pregnancy and resulting condition of "mother" became the condition of her materiality, the constitutive inner/outer injunction that policed any real, imaginative self within.[385] In her tale of the enslaved mother, Walker offers no compromise, but rather makes it clear that for woman to escape, she must always be a refugee of her own body. It is a response born of resistance not only to an ancient patriarchy, but the treacherous mythology of another lineage: a sacrificial matriarchy.

Marking the place of disjunction between feminist theory and feminist fiction, essentialism, for all of its good intentions, became contested—for, now in the hands of the oppressed, there was nothing to ensure that women would not use it in the same oppressive manner in the name of feminist liberation. Although the call for essentialism was based in the theory of a forgotten female power, its residing premise belonged to the maternal essence assumed within the female body. Such a move was, for theorists such as Helene Cixous, encompassed within a larger body, a "universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses," albeit those of the flesh rather than that of the intellect. Her call to retrieve the body is one that theory has yet to fully realize, in part because of its refusal to understand that body outside of the gender-laden memories of culture. Finding that: "A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good

[384] Walker, *Meridian* 51.

[385] Walker, *Meridian* 51.

fighter," Cixous makes the first crucial step toward a re-constructive feminism—for, to essentialize the body is to create an un-possessable body, a fatalistic flaw in essentialist feminism.[386] Conversely, in reclaiming the body as feminine, and eternally maternal, Cixous creates a rigid feminist matriarchy that obscures any reality outside of its own norms. Replacing the governing phallus with the fertile womb, Cixous refuses the possibility that the feminine belongs to a history that cannot forget it—finding that even the creativity of the female mind belongs to the maternal. Claiming that: "A woman is never far from 'mother,'" Cixous argues for that ontology as already natural, for "There is always within [woman] at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink."[387] Yet, for the women writers of Cixous's time, the writing on the page took on a different hue, for white ink simply does not show up on paper.

Rather than finding the female mind essentially maternal, Walker sets up a dichotomy of the traitorous maternal body harboring the antimaternal intellect – unlike Kate Chopin's fragmented Edna or Woolf's independent "dark wedge" of self. Her construction of Meridian represents the defensive response to essentialism: there is no compromise between the physical and the psychic if the latter is necessarily hostile to the former. Refusing the body becomes the only alternative for Meridian; it is now malicious, animalistic, and uninhabitable. Understanding that body as also the barricade between herself and her mother's love, Meridian attempts to escape the flesh by starving its processes as "her body, growing frailer every day . . . stood in the way of a

[386] Cixous 880.

[387] Cixous 879.

reconciliation between her mother and that part of her soul her mother could, perhaps, love. She valued her body less, attended to it less, because she hated its obstruction."[388] By understanding her physicality as both maternal and the product of maternity, Meridian suffers through an abortion brought on by "the fecundity of her body," a body that could not even allow her to "once [have] been completely fulfilled by sex."[389] And, in sheer victory, Meridian discovers revenge on that body: her sight vanishes, paralysis takes her legs, and, refused nourishment, her soul finally (albeit temporarily) escapes as "to her surprise and astonished joy, she began to experience ecstasy."[390] Walker's move to set Meridian free through ecstasy is clearly at the price of her health, a cost Meridian clearly does not weigh as she lies "smiling happily at a blank ceiling," set free only by the destruction of the flesh that she could not own. In this scene, Walker creates a materiality of the mind outside of prior signifiers, enacting foreclosure upon the body as a necessary experience, a move that Adrienne Rich denounces as dangerously naïve. Rich argues further that, although the "body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit," to do so denies the reality of that body in ways that can be counterproductive to a revolutionary feminism.[391] Unable, or unwilling, to present any viable alternative for the character of Meridian, Walker constructs the *dystopic* female body, a Postmodern horror tale of the maternal essence as a malignant and terminal condition. Yet, at a time of politicized feminist

[388] Walker, *Meridian* 97.

[389] Walker, *Meridian* 114-115.

[390] Walker, *Meridian* 119.

[391] Rich 40.

maternal recovery, Walker strategically portrays the perpetrator of that condition to be the veteran matriarch. No longer the complicit victim of the institution of motherhood, Walker's matriarch, Mrs. Hill, perpetuates the maternal myth as if revenge for a legacy of sacrifice.

As Walker sets up the maternal dystopic body as a parasite, blasphemously feeding on the autonomy of the female mind, the body itself becomes a thief. Meridian will understand her mother to be justified in her refusal to nurture, for after all it "was for stealing her mother's serenity, for shattering her mother's emerging self," the act of a maternally-produced body forever unforgiven for its crimes. As a product of her mother's womb, Meridian is forever guilty, evidenced by her mother's eternal question: "have you stolen anything?"[392] The answer is clearly her mother's autonomy, exonerating Mrs. Hill from the maternal instincts that would have her nurture her child. For, in fact, Meridian had been the thief of her mother's possible life, and was guilty "for stealing her mother's serenity, for shattering her mother's emerging self."[393] Mrs. Hill's identity had been effectively invaded, her life revoked, bled of the dark wedge of self that Woolf's mother so carefully protected by vampiric children. It is only through the duties of motherhood that she can express herself, as:

> In the ironing of her children's clothes she expended all the energy she might have put into openly loving them. Her children were spotless wherever they went. In their stiff, almost inflexible garments, they were enclosed in the starch

[392] Walker, *Meridian* 51.

[393] Walker, *Meridian* 51.

> of her anger, and had to keep their distance to avoid providing the soggy wrinkles of contact that would cause her distress.[394]

The language here in this passage is marked by material boundaries: the "inflexible garments," the children "enclosed." It is a language of imprisonment, an echo of the forced closure of maternity. Walker sets up the natural inheritance of her maternal condition to be a continuation of involuntary imprisonment—the only defense being anger, which must also be carefully encased. The alternative would be the unthinkable fantasies of murdered infantile masters.

The language of theft riddles Walker's chapter entitled "The Happy Mother." Meridian's baby is mindlessly "robbing her of sleep," forcing her labor to continue past birth, as Meridian becomes increasingly dehumanized, "mumbl[ing]," "lurching" through the motions of forced work, she thinks "is what slavery is like."[395] In grappling with the conditions of her capture, the Happy Mother is unsettled by "the thought of murdering her own child," an urge muzzled only by thoughts of suicide. As her own body has metamorphosed into a thing outside of itself, it is finally vulnerable to attack in moments when "she made her hands play with the baby, whom, even then, she had urges to kill. To strangle that soft, smooth helpless neck, to push down that kinky head into a tub of water, to lock it in its room to starve."[396] For Meridian, motherhood becomes the continuation of prenatal slavery, made possible by the maternal female body that has harbored

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[394] Walker, *Meridian* 79.

[395] Walker, *Meridian* 69.

[396] Walker, *Meridian* 72-73.

malicious intent all along. The baby, now outside of the protection of her womb, can be subjected to the same methods of starvation Meridian had inflicted upon its host.[397]

Walker's vision of female physicality as slavery, therefore, debunks essentialism as a political viability on the grounds that it violates its own premise of a necessary body. Judith Butler pushes the issue in *Bodies That Matter* by asking: "How can we legitimate claims of bodily injury if we put into question the materiality of the body?"[398] If, indeed, maternity inflicts bodily injury, the body is turned upon itself, leaving no grounds for a maternal essentialism. Locating this bodily quandary within the mother/child dynamic, Walker depicts a mother who will condemn Meridian's maternal rebellion as unnatural, arguing that: "You should *want* Eddie Jr. . . . Unless you're some kind of monster."[399] The chapter, entitled "Battle Fatigue," depicts Meridian to be at war with her own marked maternal body, yet it is her mother, not a hypothetical patriarchy, who decrees Meridian to be unnatural. Ms. Hill's own rhetoric of motherhood is marked by hypocrisy: "I have six children, though I never wanted to have any, and I have raised every one myself," to which she is ironically reminded: "You probably could have done the same thing in slavery."[400] Historical slavery is paradoxically the only model, the only possible scenario, in which the child could be loved, thereby lessening the "bodily injury" of

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[397] This passage is hauntingly similar to Katherine Mansfield's "The Child Who Was Tired," incorporating the Modernist imagery of fragmented womanhood. Walker's Postmodern representation of murderous maternity, however, is significantly different in her vision of maternal murder as a natural reaction rather than one nightmarish fragment of forced feminine enslavement. See Chapter II for a full discussion.

[398] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 54.

[399] Walker, *Meridian* 89.

[400] Walker, *Meridian* 90.

motherhood. Reflecting that her mother was "worthy of this maternal history," that which was wrung from the hands of white masters, Meridian is blinded (both literally and figuratively) by a matriarchy who believed "'Freedom' was that it meant they could keep their own children."[401] As this maternal freedom rematerializes into yet another slavery, dictated by the voices of past mothers, Meridian's guilt cannot be atoned for: "her mother's and her grandmother's extreme purity of life was compelled by necessity. They had not lived in an age of choice."[402] Therefore, to refuse the gift of owning the body of her child, bought and paid for with the blood of an enslaved matriarchy, Meridian refuses her own maternal body *as well as* the heroic legacy of a "maternal history."[403] It is a history that is alien to her, and she to it, as her ancestresses join together in a "voice that cursed her existence—an existence that could not live up to the standard of motherhood that had gone before."[404]

In a move that would predict the feminist constructivist position, Walker traces the deconstruction of the maternally-inscribed flesh, culminating in the final chapter, properly entitled "Release." It is in this last scene that Meridian is observed with some

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[401] Walker, *Meridian* 91.

[402] Walker, *Meridian* 91.

[403] Lindsey Tucker writes in "Walking the Red Road" of the apparent conflict in Walker's concept of the maternal figure. Tucker finds that, in comparing *Meridian* with *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, there is a marked disjunction in Walker's text, claiming: "It would appear that Walker has a problem with this maternal legacy, a problem that manifests itself thematically in numerous images of entrapment and paralysis." It is, however, crucial to note that *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* is a work of prose, an altogether autobiographical piece in which Walker attempts to connect with the stories of her mother and all mothers. The place where her prose and her fiction meet reflects not a necessary break in her rhetoric of motherhood, but rather a convergence of history and the present, legacy and possibility, for the woman who chooses to mother. See: Lindsey Tucker, "Walking the Red Road: Mobility, Maternity and Native American Myth in Alice Walker's *Meridian*," *Women's Studies* (1991, Vol. 19),1-17.

[404] Walker, *Meridian* 91.

ambivalence by the man who once impregnated her, and therefore could never be trusted to love her. Her room reminds Truman Held of a "cell," the place where he must now take up residence as a gesture of voluntary atonement for his own participation in her enslavement. It is a room marked by sickness and death, its "walls decaying sheetrock," the sunlight penetrating "through a tattered gray window shade [that] cast the room in dim gray light."[405] As the novel moves back to its beginning scene, the cell becomes the tomb that has paradoxically harbored both Meridian's maternal abjection and her spiritual resurrection. As Meridian has stripped herself of all material necessity, thereby "own[ing] nothing to pack," Truman Held is reminded of Lazarus, yet finds her to be a reconstituted being who, unlike Lazarus, was "less passive, had raised [herself] without help."[406] She is outside of his understanding, possessing a physicality that denied definition as Truman realizes that:

> He would never see 'his' Meridian again. The new part had grown out of the old . . . This part of her, new, sure and ready, even eager, for the world, he knew he must meet again and recognize for its true value at some future time.[407]

No longer belonging to a category within the social norm, Meridian cannot be conceived by a male mind, cannot be "his," nor can she be clearly understood by those regulatory fictions that would assume her femininity. It is crucial to note her evolution to be the

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[405] Walker, *Meridian* 219.

[406] Walker, *Meridian* 219. For a full discussion of the resurrection of Lazarus, see *The Holy Bible*, John 11.11. Note verse 44: "The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'" It is interesting to note that Lazarus must remove the funeral garments, just as Meridian must discard all clothing from her past.

[407] Walker, *Meridian* 219.

growth of new parts from the spoils of a traitorous body– yet her "becoming" exists only in exile, and the meaning of her new body only resonant in solitude. As Truman laments: I hate to think of you always alone," Meridian replies "But that is my value," a value which can only be preserved outside of the phallic and androcentric culture that has betrayed her.

Working outside of the feminist movement to reclaim the maternal body, Walker creates a woman who refutes the feminist utopia of maternal power. Rather, Meridian constitutes the dystopic body at war with its host, positing the reproductive and biological functions of the female body as parasitic to the creative mind. Resisting what Butler has seen as the philosophical impulse to "try in that disembodied way to demarcate bodily terrains," Walker draws Meridian's battle against the body to an unlikely end: she simply grows a new one.[408] Yet, what remains is indeed a dystopic materiality, a body remade but outside of the presuppositions of culture. Revisiting Walker's definition of "meridian," the zenith of the maternal body can also be understood as the place of the most tension, the release possible only in the evacuation of a "heavenly" feminine body.[409] In her attempt to escape essentialism, however, Walker runs the risk of ultimate constructivism, for in attempting to "demarcate" the boundaries of the flesh, constructivism will "invariably miss the body or, worse, write against it."[410] The contours of the feminine flesh are reproduced in unstable form, and worse, operate only

[408] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 54.

[409] See Walker's preface in which she traces the definition of meridian as: "1. the highest apparent point reached by a heavenly body; 2. (a) the highest point of power, prosperity, splendor, etc."

[410] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* ix.

in peripheral and marginalized domains of culture. In this sense, the Postmodern representation of the Maternal Goddess, dethroned by Modern women revisionists who found her merciless, rejects the signifiers of sex and its boundaries within the goddess frame. This erasure of biological surface, while providing for the semiotic release of "woman," created an uninhabitable body, incapable of both political and cultural materialization. As a Postmodern response to essentialism, Walker's Meridian bleeds the Maternal Goddess of all that would make her feminine, yet never clearly repossesses a body once deemed "heavenly." In this sense, Walker's portrayal of Meridian is that of a slave, as the first act of enslavement is bodily arrest. Meridian's flight from that body, while the only available form of revolt, does not equal freedom, but only a desperate desertion of the shackled female form. Yet, Walker's depiction of the body arrested marks a crucial place in the literary demise of the Maternal Goddess by representing the maternal body as anything but utopic. Just as Meridian will resist arrest through a metaphysical desertion of the body, Margaret Atwood's maternally-bound slave is provided no such relief.

Bound and Gagged

Written a decade after Walker's *Meridian*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* presents the horror of forced labor from which there is no real escape. Written at a time when feminist essentialism was reaching its own zenith, Atwood's novel is a cautionary tale of the primacy of the physical within a modern dystopia. In her

construction of Offred as a breeder in the Puritanical Giledean empire, Atwood's literary concession to essentialist theory stands as a sarcastic response to Cixous's assumption that:

> Though masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis . . . woman does not bring about the same regionalization which serves the couple head/genitals and which is inscribed only within boundaries. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide.[411]

It is the mantra of essentialist feminism, the call back to the maternal body that assumes a psychic sexuality unmarked by the prohibitions of masculine delineation.[412] Assuming a freedom not assigned to the masculine body, Cixous's dream of the utopic feminine claims liberation of sexist oppression through resignification of its terms. Submitting to the essentialist dream, Atwood's dystopic tale depicts a ruling matriarchy in the Aunts, a move that "links the morality of the Aunts to that of radical feminists" and finds further

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[411] Cixous 889.

[412] Often called "post-feminism," the chronology of second-wave feminism overlaps what others have deemed third-wave feminism. While some critics mark the early years of second-wave between 1967-1973, others cite third-wave generation as being born between 1963 and 1974. Further studies have named the 1980s as the true birthplace of third-wave feminism, leaving the field of feminism's chronology to be a hotly contested era. A more precise delineation of the "waves" of feminism might be found in its characteristics, as Amanda D. Lotz argues in "Communicating third-wave feminism and new social movements":

> A single "feminist" perspective has not existed anytime in recent memory, if ever, despite the singular construction mass media assessments and literature criticizing feminism often advance. In many cases, only activists and scholars are aware of the multitude of feminisms and feminist perspectives circulating in a given society or even globally. Most people become aware of feminism when it is covered by, appears in, or is constructed by the mass media for some reason. These articulations of feminism tend to be very simplistic and often envision feminism as a monolithic entity.

As the naming of feminism has always been, therefore, both personal and political, the work will consider Postmodern fiction against third-wave feminism, the latter being the more inclusive of the terms. See: Amanda D. Lotz, "Communicating Third-Wave Feminism and New Social Movements: Challenges for the Next Century of Feminist Endeavor," (*Women and Language*, Spring 2003, v26), p2 (8).

that in those "active syllogism of power, the premises of repression lead to conclusions of oppression."[413] Indeed, Atwood's novel is layered with scaffolds of appointed female oppressors: The Wives, The Aunts, and The Marthas. Even under the stiff control of a new patriarchy, women become the enforcers of male desire, bearing down upon their own kind. The protagonist Offred, impressed with the name of her master, is consoled by her matriarchal guard, Aunt Lydia, to "think of it as being in the army," a subject position Offred must inhabit if she is to comprehend her cage as "not a prison, but a privilege."[414] The terms of that privilege/imprisonment are fertility—escaped only by a renunciation of femininity as an "Unwoman," a position that means certain exile and death. In this determination, Atwood resists the body flight enacted by Walker's Meridian, positioning such an escape to be possible, yet suicidal. Positing the body to be both the method of enslavement and the means of survival, Atwood reclaims the body in all its treachery as necessary matter, and engages in a theoretical debate between the abjected body and the autonomous mind.

In a world where the physical marks of femininity no longer insure reproductivity, other markers become the necessary signifiers of maternal enslavement. Branded with the name of their masters, breeders are labeled by the color of their biology, a hue that Offred muses as "the color of blood which defines us." While participating in her own enslavement as "us," Offred resists erasure by remaining separate from the female race,

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[413] Catharine R. Stimpson, "The Handmaid's Tale," (*The Nation*, May 31, 1986 v242), 764.

[414] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986), 7-8.

noting that: "I never looked good in red, it's not my color."[415] Refusing to possess her body as part of an understood schema of womanhood, Offred allows for its surface to be owned, its boundaries to be interpreted, but never fully penetrated past its sexual orifices. Rather, she is "as Sister, dipped in blood," dressed in her oppression but never successfully invaded.[416] Open to violations only when visible, the body becomes defensible when divorced from its reproductive organs, implicated in Aunt Lydia's warning: "To be seen—to be seen—is to be—her voice trembled—penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable."[417] What is remarkable about this corporeal resistance is its intentional fracture: Offred's sexuality has been split in two, its functions (when maternal) are the property of a new society, yet those functions (when sensual) answer only to her. Her sexual interlude with the chauffeur, Nick, is anything but forced: "His mouth is on me, his hands, I can't wait and he's moving, already, love, it's been so long. I'm alive in my skin, again."[418] In a deliberately revised memory, Offred reconstructs only the details of their intercourse, adding in the sound of thunder "to cover up the sounds, which I am ashamed of making."[419] Yet, just prior to this scene (and still fresh on her skin) is a sexual encounter with the Commander in which her flesh feels nothing, and rather than "alive" it becomes instead "a dead bird," unresponsive even to

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[415] Atwood 8.

[416] Atwood 9.

[417] Atwood 28. This scene is often linked more to the issue of the veil in Atwood's novel, a trope that one critic notes as "tropological excess," and synonymous with Jacques Derrida's theory of hymeneal logic. For more on this interpretation see: David Coad, "Hymens, Lips and Masks: The Veil in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's* Tale," *Literature and Psychology* (Spring-Summer, 2001), 54.

[418] Atwood 261.

[419] Atwood 263.

her own will as she pleads with herself to: "Fake it . . . Move your flesh around, breath audibly." [420] In the disjunction between the flesh alive and the flesh dead, Atwood constructs a splintered physicality, not centered around reproductive biology but in opposition to it. It is a flesh divided. Offred has become duplicitously female, spouting an identity as part of the other: "I am a national resource," while being the impetus for that separate being: "I wait. I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born."[421] It is here, in her categorization of the maternal as "composed" or "made" rather than born, that Offred presents a prior "I," the thing that is essentially her self, the outer self constituting only a performance. Yet, the fact that the latter is subject to a very real physicality is not an essentialist surrender for Offred, as it exists only within the critical boundaries of reproduction—a physiology that is not primary to her identity as woman. For, even as a "made thing" constitutes images of materiality, its subjugation to the real "I" bequeaths upon the unmaternal self a rightful existence, "born" outside of the womb. Atwood's separation of the body feels like violence in a static state, as Offred describes the pain to be like "the sound of glass, I feel like the word *shatter*," broken into warring forms of matter.[422] Both "treacherous ground" and her "own territory," it once was "solid, one with me."[423] Now irreparably fractured, Offred considers the body around which:

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[420] Atwood 255.

[421] Atwood 104.

[422] Atwood 103.

[423] Atwood 73.

> Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. Inside it is a space, huge as the sky at night and dark and curved like that, though black-red rather than black. Pinpoints of light swell, sparkly, burst and shrivel within it, countless as stars . . . I listen to my heart, wave upon wave, salty and red, continuing on, marking time.[424]

Within this body is an internally-manifested extension of the surface, the cavity of the womb, the traitor on the inside. But even here Atwood resituates a prior physicality in the unsexed heart, the provider of the flesh, necessarily "born" and generated before any reproductive organs, and relentless in its function. Her reproductive cycle will never reveal itself to her, although it "becomes the earth [she] set her ear against, for rumors of the future," it is an alien and silent process, unlike the beat of a heart that she cannot help but hear.[425] Her body is *fracture*, a story unto itself that Offred will offer as apology: "I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it."[426] This body, dysmorphic and dystopic, is now the natural thing that cannot be altered, cannot be rejoined to its traitorous parts. It is also, however contradictory, born of essentialism as the natural result of an ungovernable physical autonomy.

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[424] Atwood 73-74.

[425] Atwood 73.

[426] Atwood 73.

Even as Offred participates in her own capture as biological slave, her identity resides in the fissures of essentialism. For, as Meridian will muse that her foremothers could only love the child they could not own, Offred will ache for the stolen child she can only touch in a photograph, yet hate the maternal potential that it signifies. Motherhood, no longer optional, has become the enemy that she fatalistically yearns for, her memory betraying her as she contemplates a kitchen that "smells of yeast, a nostalgic smell . . . It smells of mothers," a dangerous connection which she regards simultaneously as also "a treacherous smell" that she forces herself to ignore.[427] It is a nostalgia that Offred cannot afford in a society driven by "biological destinies," and policed by matriarchal traitors who insist: "All we've done is return things to Nature's norm."[428] Motherhood has been drained of its nurturant essence, and become the castrated bitch who will lie with anyone who gives her bread. Moreover, it is a goddess that would kill her, the form she partially inhabits against her will, as if possessed. In a scene that mimics Virginia's Woolf's encounter with the "Angel in the House," Offred is aware of this murderous feminine force, as she thinks:

> Behind me I feel her presence, my ancestress, my double, turning in midair under the chandelier, in her costume of stars and feathers, a bird stopped in flight, a woman made into an angel, waiting to be found. By me this time. How could I have believed I was alone in here? There were always two of us. Get it over, she

[427] Atwood 47. Offred refers to her body as "treacherous ground." Atwood earlier describes a scene in which homosexuals have been hung and displayed on the Wall wearing "purple placards" with the words: "Gender Treachery." The notation of the color purple is intriguing, as it has historically represented (since Greece) funeral grief. See: Atwood 43.

[428] Atwood 220.

says. I'm tired of this melodrama, I'm tired of keeping silent. There's no one you can protect, your life has value to no one. I want it finished.[429]

As ancestress, this goddess/angel is emblematic of the physical split within Offred, made deadly by her translucent materiality—a cosmic formation of historical femininity that cannot be contained by the flesh. Working outside of the body, this image is immune to physical quarantine (unlike Offred's reproductive organs), and concedes no alternative identity for its subject, as it constitutes "always two." In this other-worldly encounter, Offred experiences total takeover as a victim to the femininity she has endeavored to compartmentalize, an effect that Butler sees as inescapable for the maternal body since:

> The problem is not that the feminine is made to stand for matter or for universality; rather the feminine is cast outside the form/matter and universal/particular binarisms. She will be neither the one nor the other, but the permanent and unchangeable condition of both—what can be construed as a nonthematizable materiality.[430]

As the boundaries of the feminine are cast outside of the essentialized body, Offred is paralyzed by the specter of a goddess from which she cannot disengage. It is a goddess, however, born of a Christian ideology, layered in the phallogocentrism that had marked her maternal.

Yet, Atwood will offer other goddesses for the world of the future. In the conclusion of the novel, set at an academic conference in 2195, Offred's personal

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[429] Atwood 293.

[430] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 42.

manuscripts will be considered by post-war critics to be the product of a society that was "although undoubtedly patriarchal in form, occasionally matriarchal in content." Finding the roots of Gilead to be "echoes . . . of the fertility rites of early Earth-goddess cults," and therefore primitive, the introductory speaker juxtaposes Gilead culture against the current "Goddess of History," and calls upon Eurydice to understand "the obscurity of the matrix" of the past.[431] Understanding Eurydice to be unpalatable, future scholarship cannot suppose to control her, "cannot make her answer; and when we turn to look at her we glimpse her only for a moment, before she slips from our grasp and flees."[432] She is the Goddess of History, the Goddess of the Dead, a shape-changer not unlike the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis. In this glimpse of an unmarkable goddess, Atwood resists the feminist solution of essentialism and finds relief in the myth of an original, autonomous deity. It is only a momentary resurrection and one that Atwood's maternal slave will never be allowed to witness.

Submission

Toni Morrison reveals essentialized maternity to be altogether suicidal to the female autonomous self in *Beloved*. Whereas Walker's Meridian finds refuge through psychic evacuation of the female body, and Atwood's Offred attempts to bisect the captured body into maternal surfaces and sensual interiors, Morrison's Sethe is fully immersed into an insidious maternal enslavement. Yet, even as the author clearly

[431] Atwood 308-309.

[432] Atwood 308-309.

positions the master of female slavery to be the historical white male, Morrison complicates that slavery as being produced by and within the maternal body. In doing so, the work "captures" its protagonist on natural grounds, an inescapable and deadly condition that Sethe willfully embraces outside of actual institutional slavery. Although it is critical to understand that slavery as evoking the socio-historical horrors of the black female experience, such an understanding of *Beloved* as operating only along the lines of race ignores the narratology of motherhood within that experience. Morrison's own commentary on *Beloved* carves such a space for the maternal that is significantly singular in its purpose, noting that: "The *controlling* theme of the novel is how women negotiate or mediate between their nurturing compulsion to love the other, husband, children, work, and the other part, the individual separate self that has separate obligations."[433] As such, Morrison's work resists simplistic categories of racial representations, as those categories—although motivated by a refusal of the universalization of the black experience—often produce the very stereotypes they intend to eradicate. Thus, *Beloved* offers within its depiction of historical slavery an alternate tale of essentialized motherhood, an interior narratology that is easily overlooked through the political lens of race.

In an attempt to excavate the subversive black voice within *Beloved*, Emma Parker's article, "A New Hystery: History and Hysteria in Toni Morrison's Beloved," locates Beloved and Sethe as hysterical characters. Finding that "the hysteric's symptoms function as counterhegemonic form of mimicry," Parker argues that "To

[433] Morrison ix. My emphasis.

appreciate why a passion for sweets and a propensity for (metaphoric) cannibalism constitute hysterical symptoms . . . it is crucial to locate sugar and cannibalism in their racial context."[434] Finding Beloved's drive for sugar to be emblematic of historical slavery, Parker firmly couches that drive as one born of hysteria that "represents the return of the repressed." Indeed, Beloved's hunger for sugar is immense and insatiable, as Parker points out, and cannot be abated by: "Honey as well as the wax it came in, sugar sandwiches, the sludgy molasses . . . lemonade, taffy and any kind of dessert."[435] It is an inborn drive, and does, in fact, draw upon the slavery images of Sweet Home, the plantation of her birth, as: "It was though sweet things were what she was born for."[436] And as Parker connects Beloved's sweet tooth to her cannibalistic attitude toward her mother, her claims focus the latter upon: "the devastatingly cannibalistic character of the slavery that destroys [Beloved]," a conclusion that begins and ends with the logic of "racial Otherness."[437] Parker insists upon a reading that interprets Beloved's cannibalistic nature as "hysterical mimicry" that "reproduces the logic of master discourses" that are invested in racist interpretations.[438] Yet, in doing so, Parker marks off the pathological

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[434] Emma Parker, "A New Hystery: History and Hysteria in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 47 (Spring 2001), 6.

[435] Qtd. In Parker 5. Original citation: Morrison 55.

[436] Qtd. In Parker 6. Original citation: Morrison 55.

[437] Parker 7.

[438] Parker 7. Of course, any interpretation of Morrison's text as resistant, counter-hegemonic text is valid. It is important, however, to avoid universalization of African American text as univocally speaking in racial contexts. This work considers Morrison's representations of both race and sexuality as those experiences, while undeniably connected, are not necessarily one and the same. Parker does go on to suggest the significance of sugar as it pertains to "race and gender power structures," yet finds even then for a hysteria that functions primarily as a "counterhegemonic form of mimicry" invoking the history of slavery.

images of maternity in such a closed reading. In an earlier passage, as Sethe retells the point of separation from her baby girl, she remembers "nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the woman in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me."[439] It is the sugar, then, that has replaced her breastmilk, the sweet and addictive taste of her mother's body that Beloved remembers, desires, and demands. As such, it is that maternal body that Beloved craves, the object of her cannibalism for whom she feels no mercy, as she "ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it."[440] Sethe's marked passivity to the attempt upon her life denies hysteria, as she notably "yielded it up without a murmur" as penance to the child she once murdered out of love. It is a vision of an institutionalized woman, thoroughly drained of resistance and for whom chains are no longer necessary to insure her enslavement.[441]

Morrison draws a picture of motherhood that is anything but utopic: Beloved becomes parasitic to her maternal body and her mind, symbolically cutting her off from the social sphere as well as to her emotional attachment to her daughter Denver. Within this monstrous depiction of the condition of motherhood, Sethe cannot refuse her

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[439] Morrison 16.

[440] Morrison 250.

[441] Other textual implications for Morrison's depiction of maternity have found it to be a resistance to patriarchal objectification, arguing for a more aggressively amaternal reading. For this and other alternate readings, see: Paula Gallant Eckard, *Maternal Body and Voice in Toni Morrison, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Lee Smith* (U of Missouri P, 2002); Jennifer L. Holden-Kirwan, "Looking Into the Self That Is No Self: An Examination of Subjectivity in *Beloved*," *African American Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Fall 1998); Kimberly Chabot Davis, "Postmodern Blackness": Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the End of History," *Twentieth Century Literature* 44.2 (Summer 1998); Cynthia Dobbs, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Bodies Returned, Modernism Revisited," *African American Review* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 1998); and Michele A.L. Barzey, "Thick Love: Motherhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*," *Black Theology in Britain* 5 (2000), 9-20.

biological/reproductive functions. Bound by those maternal functions, her body betrays her as it cannot refuse the violations of a mammatory rape, the horror of which she tries to impress upon Paul D. as he reacts only to the punitive symbols of slavery:

> "They used cowhide on you?"
>
> "And they took my milk."
>
> "They beat you and you was pregnant?"
>
> "And they took my milk." [442]

The mammatory rape of Sethe is therefore more horrific than a vaginal rape as, in her lactating state, her bodily functions become a treason of her will: although she could refuse orgasm, she cannot refuse the biological let down of milk, a function most mothers know can be sexually stimulating. By subverting the erotic to the pleasure of the aggressor, Morrison dislocates the sexualized maternal body as a violent experience, once again resituating the maternal essence as a producer and product of oppression—doubly marked by an African female slave narrative. Yet, it is a necessary step toward the deconstruction of a crippling notion of sexual essence.

Both Walker and Morrison approach the maternal body through notions of historical enslavement, and by doing so, link the body to history in ways that deny any real physical experience outside of a social memory. Alison Easton writes of this phenomenon in "The Body as History and Writing the Body," claiming that: "It appears then that a celebration of the female body will not be possible without first consciously and directly subverting the white traditions of signification and those narratives they call

[442] Morrison 17.

history."[443] Finding essentialism to be a signifier of a white patriarchy, Easton denounces Cixous's call for a reclaimed female essence as unattainable for the African female subject, as her black body has always been translated through a white male/master gaze. Writing in *white* ink, however maternal, becomes a doubly dangerous concession for the black woman writer, as her body risks being interpreted as breeder, and her written text is pushed precariously toward the margins of a white patriarchal tradition. Reading Morrison's *Beloved* as the "suffering, mutilated black body as text," Easton problematizes a simple break from the semiotics of essentialism, arguing instead from a materialist vision that:

> What we are dealing with then is not a matter of overthrowing the female body taboos of the puritanical West, but the black body as the site of oppression, oppression of blacks by whites and women by men and, in reaction to this, the possibility of a revolutionary change imagined through the erotic body.[444]

Yet, locating the erotic must occur outside of the normative schemas of sexuality that have historically claimed the feminized and oppressed black body. Morrison's Sethe rarely experiences erotic freedom: even the sexual release provided by Paul D. is wrought with the ghosts of their shared slavery. As she confesses the murder of her child to him, his internal monologue is laced with animal imagery, as he tells her "Your love is too thick," and thinks: "That bitch is looking at me."[445] As their interchange plays out, Paul

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[443] Alison Easton, "The Body as History and 'Writing the Body': The Example of Grace Nichols," *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1994), 59.

[444] Easton 62.

[445] Morrison 164.

D. responds involuntarily and internally to the eyes of past masters, unable to respond to her without "the conviction that he was being observed through the ceiling." Sethe, regardless of their shared past, becomes no more than a mindless dog, a slave to her base instincts, as Paul D. tells her: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four."[446] It is this inescapability of the natural, as well as her dogged acceptance of her fate, that threatens to destroy Sethe's mind and sanity.

As the root of Sethe's enslavement runs deeper than her skin, the scars of the whip have become a live thing, a chokecherry tree that grows there still—a symbolic image of belated labor. What should have remained only marled tissue grows on, capable of bearing cherries, a part of her and yet somehow unwelcome, as Sethe acknowledges: "I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms."[447] Significantly, "nothing" is in between, as her body is invaded without a fight. Eternally pregnant, Sethe's body relentlessly continues involuntary maternal processes, as her bladder lets go upon Beloved's appearance and Sethe realizes that "there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb."[448] She is "like a horse," a mare drawn mindlessly to her colt. Yet, there are places of resistance in Sethe's maternal submission, moments that contest the physical cost of her motherly love. As Sethe pays for her baby's headstone inscription with her body,

[446] Morrison 164-165.

[447] Morrison 15.

[448] Morrison 51.

consummating her sin over fresh gravedirt, it is a sacrifice that eclipses the horrific murder of her child, for:

> Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil.[449]

Significantly, it will be this moment that white-washes her vision, rather than the moment her daughter's blood stained her hands red. It is the pink hue of feminine interiors, the shame of a stronger bondage, that haunts her, and "the last color she remembered."[450] While Sethe traces her memory of color to be first "red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips," it is significant that her vision is permanently traumatized at the grave.[451] For, it is through her sexual act that she creates the word "Beloved," the word that rebirths a malignant child who exceeds the teleology of the maternal body. It is a laboring body from which there is no release, narcissistically reflected in the possessed body of a ghost-child who refused to die.

Morrison's work subverts society's rhetoric of the innocent child by investing Beloved with a body existing outside of time and space. She is a baby/master, a vampire child whose presence at 124 is felt as "full of baby's venom," a seductive force that Sethe

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[449] Morrison 5.

[450] Morrison 38.

[451] Morrison 38-39.

cannot resist, as Beloved takes possession and thinks: "I AM BELOVED and she is mine . . . I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop."[452] She is a seductive child that Sethe naively believes she can own, yet outside of the boundaries of slavery Sethe understands the cost of maternal ownership to be deadly. As she considers Paul D.'s plea for another child, Sethe "was frightened by the thought of having a baby once more," and prays away the specter of another pregnancy: "O Lord, the thought, deliver me. Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer."[453] Her speech is reminiscent of Meridian's warning against the dangers of maternity outside of slavery, as the "killer" becomes the ownership of the child. For, as ownership becomes physical, the body of the child can own the maternal flesh, as well—a dangerous paradox that depends upon a maternal sacrificial drive that starves the self. Paul D. understands the implications of that ownership, finding it to be "very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love."[454] Yet, it is a love hard refused. As Beloved embodies the phantasmatic excess of the power dynamic in the master/child, Sethe becomes the addict who cannot get enough, and victim to a "mother-love" that could kill her. Motherhood represents a place of trauma within the text, an element that R. Clifton Spargo locates as critical in "Trauma and the Specters of Enslavement in Morrison's *Beloved*," as:

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[452] Morrison 210.

[453] Morrison 131.

[454] Morrison 45.

> By figuring the recovery of history as an involuntary or traumatic phenomenon, and by suggesting that characters inhabit such a history at the expense of their own freedom, Morrison enacts a fundamental tension between the history of injustice that needs to be recorded and remembered and an ethics of corrective action that hovers, if only spectrally, over the imaginative moment of our witness.[455]

Morrison's presentation of the "involuntary" within *Beloved*, however, insists upon the victimization of Sethe as a maternal being as well as an enslaved one, creating a dual dependency of the body upon history, and history upon the body. Morrison refuses essentialism on the grounds of reparation to the past, and by doing so, creates a body outside of historical semiotics, as Sethe reclaims a body that can still be her best thing. For, if memory of the past is subject to reinterpretation, so is the remembering body, as she points out: "Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was, that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared that way."[456] Morrison, therefore, uncovers a subversive quality in the act of memory that can create as well as re-present both the body and its scars, enacting what Easton locates as "the possibility of a revolutionary change imagined through the erotic body."[457] It is this eroticism, divorced from

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[455] R. Clifton Spargo, "Trauma and the Specters of Enslavement in Morrison's *Beloved*," *Mosaic* 35 *(Winnipeg)* (March 2002), 113-119.

[456] Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," *Thought: A Review of Culture and Ideas* 59 (December 1984), 385 and 389.

[457] Easton 62.

biological sexuality and historical memory, that is made possible by Morrison's use of memory.

Ashraf H. A. Rushdy finds a revisionary power in Morrison's work, writing in "Daughters Signify(ing) History" of its intended "eschewing that part of the past which has been constructed out of a denigrative ideology and reconstructing that part which will serve the present."[458] Yet, for Sethe, that reconstruction would not be autonomous, but require the community of women. As her live daughter, Denver, is symbolically displaced by the pregnant and carnivorous Beloved, Denver reaches out to Ella who "convinced the others that rescue was in order."[459] While acknowledging Sethe's sin, Ella refuses to let the past become "unleashed and sassy," for now "it took flesh and came in her world . . . this was an invasion."[460] It was a flesh that served the past and chained its host to the present, the latter of which was unfathomable. Ella names the present as sacred, the place where life can change and thrive, as the "future was sunset; the past something to leave behind."[461] Contesting the terrain of daily life as subject to the interpretations of memory, Ella's speech claims the body of Sethe as a site of rearticulation, a hallowed space of possibility undetermined by the significations of crimes against society and God. As Ella leads the female community to Sethe's door,

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[458] Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, "Daughters Signify(ing) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *American Literature* 64 (September 1992), 567-598.

[459] Morrison 256.

[460] Morrison 256.

[461] Morrison 256.

they are entranced, their faces "rapt," uttering not the words of history and oppression, but rather a primal and unified sound. This is a force that will exorcise any resistance, as:

> For Sethe . . . as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash.[462]

It is a guttural sound, a primordial yalp that breaks the words that have claimed Sethe: slave, mother, and murderer. It is also the sound of song, of freedom and possibility, that shatters the specter of Sethe's devil-child and with it, her penance. By reappropriating the slave songs of the fields, Morrison "encodes" the women's voices with a force that shows the way out of an enslaved past while violently baptizing and consecrating Sethe's atrophying maternal body against her will.

Morrison's imagery of "breaking" is crucial to Sethe's recovery, as Paul D. projects his own recovery along with hers as symbolically linked: "She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order."[463] Repaying the gesture, Paul D. hands Sethe back the only piece remaining in the ruins of her life, as she grieves her lost child: "She was my best thing," and he answers: "You your best thing, Sethe. You are." It is a revelation, a reconvening of the universe, as

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[462] Morrison 261.

[463] Morrison 272-273.

Sethe asks "Me? Me?"[464] It is crucial to note that it is the community that has baptized Sethe, for baptism has little to do with personal choice. Even as a congregation consecrates the flesh, it is the individual who must confirm the soul, as Sethe learns after escaping Sweet Home: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another."[465] Finding herself under psychic capture, Sethe offers herself "Me?" as an epitaph that replaces "Beloved," a maneuver that relocates the primacy of the soul over the flesh, the mother over the child, and today over yesterday. If essentialism is the normative consignment of the body to the past, Morrison's *Beloved*, works to consecrate all women who work and mother to the sacred present. There is always history, but perhaps here the feminist herstory is better employed—for the past remains accessible, but no longer a master of the material feminine flesh. It is as the townswomen in Beloved knew it to be "after they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them . . . remembering seemed unwise."[466] Morrison marks the difference between remembering and "re-memory" to be the difference between research and re-creation, a move that shatters the legitimacy of a permanent historicity.[467] After all, reparations are made to the past in order that we might not repeat them.

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[464] Morrison 272-273.

[465] Morrison 95.

[466] Morrison 274.

[467] For a full discussion of Morrison's term "rememory," see: Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, "'Rememory': Primal Scenes and Constructions in Toni Morrison's Novels," *Contemporary Literature* 53 (Fall 1990), 300(24). Morrison's own definition can be found on page 36, as Sethe explains to Denver: "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world."

Concluding Maternity

In the later 20th Century, slavery became the trope by which maternal body was interpreted, interrogated, and acquitted. The Maternal Goddess, in all of her angelic glory, became no more than a story to be retold, refashioned, but no longer reiterable as a physical state. To reclaim our mothers is not antithetical toward the evolution of feminism, for they are the chokecherry tree upon our backs, a history grown around the heart of our lives. Alice Walker writes of the importance of nodding to the past, claiming: "I do not want to be a queen, because queens are oppressive," but notes that "the thought came to me that any true queen knows the names, words, and actions of the other queens of her lineage and is very sharp about herstory."[468] For in the forgetting, there is the risk of repeating. Walker, Atwood, and Morrison participated in the retelling of maternal history as enslavement, and by doing so, set into motion a perpetual reconstitution of the female present. Embracing the scars of that enslavement as permanently dystopic, these women writers resisted the angelic notion of white ink, and wrote instead in blasphemous red: the color of Meridian's abortion, Offred's cloak, and the only hue from which Sethe can perceive her world. They wrote in the color of blood so that the world would remember and "rememory" them as they perceived themselves. Walker writes in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* of her deformed eye, permanently

[468] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 276. First printed in 1974, "A Letter to the Editor of Ms."

marked by a white scar like an inverse iris, that shamed her until her daughter noticed it and remarked: "Mommy, there's a world in your eye."[469] And so there is, for in the reclamation of a dystopic body that stands separately from a maternal one, Walker predicted a world that would insist on the sacral, feminine flesh and a legacy of sexual autonomy.

Writing at the end of a century, Postmodern women authors created the necessary fracture of maternal essence from the female body, overthrowing the Maternal Goddess and her tyrannical rule of the lived condition of women. Such a move created, as well, a vacuumous physical space that drew theory back to the site of the body, and begged reinscription in its place. The end of the 20th century and the encroaching 3rd millennium brought with it a cry for repossession of that body, and a re-suturing of the dualistic Western concept of the mind/body split in terms that resisted institutionalized sexuality. In an already technologically-bound culture, feminists had begun to turn toward cyborg myth in an effort to reclaim a physicality metered through the frame of cyberspace. A prevailing desire for a sacred body remained, wary of the alienating discourse of a cyberkynetic world, and as the 21st century gathered steam, it would invoke, ironically enough, the myth of an archaic, pre-Christian goddess.

[469] Walker, *In Search* 393.

CONCLUSION: SACRED CYBORGS AND 21ST CENTURY GODDESSES

For you men who still do not know I will give one further clue. Look into yourself—look into your heart. Do you see who it is who lies there, in a sleep near to death, a sleep that has lasted for centuries, a sleep from which you can awaken her?

Daniel Cohen, *Iphegenia: A Retelling*

People put me into all different categories: I'm a material girl, a sex goddess, a mother, spiritual. But I love contradiction.

Madonna

The late 20th and early 21st centuries shifted significantly from their Postmodern bearings in their search for new meaning, new ideologies, and new gods. Subsequently, the early 21st century has placed women into positions of political power, as a German Chancellor (Angela Merkel), a Chilean President (Michelle Bachelet), and a warily-predicted female incumbent for the American presidency, New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. American concepts of femininity have notably shifted toward a more Athenian model, as the cultural expectations of women now demand an inclusion of masculine strength. ABC launched "Commander in Chief" in the fall of 2005, a series

that depicted actress Geena Davis as the first female president, "softening the ground" of the American mind for the 2009 presidential campaign.[470] In a *Time* article, columnist Joe Klein vacillates between praise for Clinton's tough demeanor and anxiety over her apparent lack of femininity, claiming her first to be "a judicious hawk on foreign policy," yet firmly negating her candidacy on the grounds that: "she isn't a particularly warm or eloquent speaker."[471] Klein subsequently admits that: "Any woman running for President will face a toughness conundrum: she will constantly have to prove her strength and be careful about showing her emotions," yet immediately calls for a "credible feminine presidential style," an apparent conflict of terms.[472] Even so, the evidence that American femininity is metamorphosing to include masculine characteristics is quickly piling up: women are serving in the current war on Iraq in increasing numbers, and are ultimately dying in battle.[473] It is fitting, then, that American culture would cleave to a new goddess, fit for a 21st century climate of war. Perhaps the most radical evidence of

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[470] As a preemptive military maneuver, U.S. airstrikes are used to "soften the ground" for battle.

[471] Joe Klein, "Hilary in 2008? No Way!" *Time* (May 8, 2005); available from http://www.time.com/time/columnist/klein/article/0,9565,10590000,00.html; accessed 15 May 2006. An innumerable list of articles, news releases, and websites are devoted to the conversation and controversy surrounding the potential presidential candidate, yet perhaps the most notable evidence of the political rumor resides in the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Presidential souvenir shops carry an abundant array of "Hilary for President" memorabilia, evidence that backs up Klein's claim that Washington D.C., more than any other site in the country, assumes Clinton will run in 2008.

[472] Klein 1.

[473] Women comprise more than eight percent of military forces in Iraq, and over thirty-seven female U.S. troops have lost their lives there. Three female Defense Department employees have been killed while working in Iraq, while six female troops have died serving in Afghanistan. Even though: "Pentagon policy prohibits women from serving in frontline combat units, like infantry, armor or artillery," in Iraq those women "are participating in close-quarters combat more than in any previous conflict." See: "U.S. Female Troops Face Combat," *CNN.Com* (Friday, 24 June 2005); accessed 15 May 2006; http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/06/24/women.combat/index.html/. For more on women in the Iraqi War, see: Anne Hulle, "When Mom is Over There," *Washington Post* (Sunday, 8 January 2006, D01).

this Post-Postmodern shift toward a bi-gendered femininity resides in the terrain of pop culture, as it often works to soften national ground for new and disruptive iconic figures.

The pop culture of the 80s and 90s effectively produced cultural icons that either resisted or disrupted totalarian concepts of gender identity. Madonna, ironically named after a Christian Maternal Goddess, danced upon the holy ground of feminine concepts in drag, and Prince embraced a femininity that dared masculinist systems to name him. As the century drew to a close, Prince would rename himself after a symbol that refused pronunciation, a code created from a blasphemous fusion of traditional male/female symbols. This recodification of the self is emblematic of a 21st century shift in feminist thought, as well, marking the evolution of third-wave feminism and its insistence upon the individual. Kristen Rowe-Finkbeiner writes in *The F Word* of the changing face of feminism, defining it as third-wave, or "modern" feminism, finding the markers of modern feminism to be autonomy, political inactivity, and a radical malleability of identity.[474] Rowe-Finkbeiner admits the difficulty in situating a stable locatedness for modern feminism as "the general ethos of this generation rejects labels relating to the perceived exclusivity of identity politics and reveres the individual."[475] As such, third-wavers resist the gendered subject position, unlike their second-wave sisters, which has resulted in a political cleavage in feminism today.[476] The clearest point of conflict within feminisms is "that mainstream contemporary feminists, primarily led by second-wavers, has yet to catch up to the new ethos of the third wave, which doesn't shy away from

[474] Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, *The F Word: Feminism in Jeopardy* (Emeryville: Seal P, 2004), 17.

[475] Rowe-Finkbeiner 89.

[476] For clarification on second and third-wave feminism, see the Introduction, footnote 15.

combining 'traditional' and 'nontraditional' gender roles in ways that work best for each individual woman." [477] What this adds up to is a revolutionary way of thinking about identity, gender, and the body—the codification of all residing within the individual.

It is the power to code, then, that differentiates third-wave feminists from their predecessors and fuels the growing field of cyborg theory in constructivist feminism. Donna J. Haraway's immensely influential work, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," works against organic theories of biology toward "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction."[478] Fundamental to her theory of the cyborg is autonomous codification, as Haraway argues for "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self [that] feminists must *code*."[479] Further, Haraway foresees the technology of writing to be the impetus of self-coding, arguing for a defensive politics "against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallocentrism."[480] Central to this argument is Haraway's resistance to a biological body that is tied to reproduction, gender, and heterosexual matrixes. Indeed, most constructivist positions are born in the margins of hegemonic systems of domination. Yet, cyborg theory dances upon the dreams of a union between the flesh and the mind, insisting upon the erasure of gender as the only salvation, and

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[477] Rowe-Finkbeiner 148.

[478] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991), 149.

[479] Haraway, *Simians* 163. My emphasis.

[480] Haraway, *Simians* 176.

finds cyberspace to be the only ground stable enough to tred upon. It is a theory of resistance, and one in which Haraway utilizes the language of Christian mythology in her defense against an oppressive world, claiming that: "But with the loss of innocent in our origin, there is no expulsion from the Garden."[481] Haraway links the un-cyborg, biological body with the sinful body, finding that:

> A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end . . . Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment.[482]

Working against any theory that begins with "original innocence," Haraway permanently links the biological female body to white/Christian/Western systems of domination. In calling for "a myth system" that could produce a "monstrous world without gender," Haraway misses other mythologies that included the body in autonomous, transgressive ways.[483] In her last statement, Haraway nods to the goddess myth, yet dismisses it in favor of a cyborg identity, claiming: "Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess."[484] Even though the boundaries between the two appear to be distinct for Haraway, the disparity between the goddess and the cyborg is not clearly marked in her manifesto. Rather, in her resistance to Christian productions of femininity, Haraway posits that "my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the

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[481] Haraway, *Simians* 157.

[482] Haraway, *Simians* 180.

[483] Haraway, *Simians* 181.

[484] Haraway, *Simians* 181.

cyborg," a purposeful deviation from Western mythologies.[485] Yet, as original goddess and Earth Mother myths predate Christianity and patriarchy, they also offer a blasphemous reappropriation of the "myth of original unity," a radical departure from the juridicial schemas of gender, sex, and identity.[486] Further, Haraway describes her cyborg as "committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence."[487] Ancient Goddess myths are anything but innocent: from Mesopotamia to Egypt, Nut to Ninlil, goddesses were shape-changers, warriors, mothers, magicians, prophetesses, loving, defiant, and above all, sexual.[488] The latter, perhaps, is the fundamental point of contention for Haraway, as her cyborg is thoroughly disengaged from sexual reproduction. To the extent that the cyborg is capable of refusing an essentialized maternal identity, he/she/it does represent a departure from the totalizing and often crippling effects of normative gender systems. Even so, Haraway's constructivist foreclosure on the gendered body comes dangerously close to re-essentializing the female form. As she insists that "cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction," Haraway strips the liberated cyborg of what she names as "reproductive politics [as the cyborg is] not of Woman born."[489] In an effort to resist

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[485] Haraway, *Simians* 149.

[486] Haraway, *Simians* 151.

[487] Haraway, *Simians* 151.

[488] An enormous body of work exists on the myths of ancient goddesses, intriguingly evident in larger numbers during the last two decades of the 20th century until today. For more on this subject see: Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 1976); *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood: A Treasury of Goddess and Heroine Lore from Around the World* (Boston: Beacon P, 1979). Also see: Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2001).

[489] Haraway, *Simians* 176 and 177.

maternal essentialism, Haraway creates a material corporeality that excludes the maternal as one possible element in a feminist constituency. As her manifesto argues for a "cyborg politics" that must "struggle . . . against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism," any myth that becomes dogmatic in resistance to that dogma has effectively turned upon itself.[490]

Haraway does point to an alternative to traditional concepts of the reproductive female body in her discussion of regeneration, a metaphysical substitution for biological reproduction. As Haraway calls for a resistance to "holistic politics [that] depend on metaphors of rebirth," she finds that cyborgs "have more to do with regeneration," enlikening the cyborg body to that of a salamander that can regrow a decapitated limb upon demand. Such a regrowth "can be monstrous, duplicated, potent," more viable than ever before.[491] Although Haraway exempts the myth of a goddess as a "viable" analogy for feminism, it is in her call for a regenerative creativity that cyborg and goddess theories converge. The Egyptian goddess Isis was capable of such regeneration, but even more intriguingly, was capable of gathering the severed limbs of her brother/lover Osiris and piecing him back to life.[492] It is a mythology of physical reconstruction, and one that Haraway inevitably dismisses in the "spiral dance" that disrupts hegemonic semiotic systems of domination.[493]

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[490] Haraway, *Simians* 176.

[491] Haraway, *Simians* 181.

[492] For more on the goddess Isis, see: H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, Vol. II (Pasadena: Theosophical UP, 1988).

[493] Haraway, *Simians* 201.

As a constructivist/poststructuralist feminist theory, cyborg theory is most often presented as being diametrically opposed to the fleshed body as integral to its premise. Such a separability is not only unnecessary, but dangerous in its assumptions of a bias-free, unmarked identity. Michelle Chilcoat writes in "Brain Sex, Cyberpunk Cinema, Feminism, and the Dis/Location of Heterosexuality" of the current cleavage between science and feminists, finding the constructivist feminist resistance to the discussion of biology to be redundant. Arguing for a "malleability" in sexual sciences and politics, Chilcoat challenges the feminist/biological divide, contending that: "This positioning often requires feminism to abandon questions of biology and the material body altogether, for fear that any discussion of biology can only be reductionist."[494] There are good reasons for such a concern, as history has often proved, yet by abandoning the body, we leave it stable, knowable, and up-for-grabs for any ideological system that might have a dog in the fight. Finding that technology has opened the proverbial door to new discussions about the body, Chilcoat warns against the defensive abandonment of the biological body, arguing that:

> Inspired by developments of the information age, feminist theory and feminist science have opened the door to this dislocation. But to fully realize its potential, the notion that the biological or material body is static and prior to the cultural constructions of gender must be relinquished . . . If the body is reconceived in terms of perpetual transformation, resistance and disruption are no longer

[494] Michelle Chilcoat, "Brain Sex, Cyberpunk Cinema, Feminism, and the Dis/Location of Heterosexuality," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 2 (Summer 2004), 168.

> antithetical to the norms that dictate social behaviors, but characteristic of the norms themselves: it becomes normal not to be normal.[495]

Therefore, the transformative biological body must exist in order for resistance to occur. Haraway's use of the regenerative powers of the cyborg is one possible articulation of physical malleability, yet to dictate or limit that malleability as existing only in *opposition* to maternal or reproductive sites of identity disregards the autonomy of a transformative body. Chilcoat further points out that, while

> Cyberspace may indeed hold the promise of liberation, [it] is not about escaping from or to bodies . . . it is about putting the practice of imposing limits on the body into question, thereby rendering the will to locate and thus arrest knowledge a suspect, if not altogether undesirable practice.[496]

The suggestion that the body may be autonomous, but never maternal, negates the promise of liberation and regeneration that Haraway envisions as possible for the cyborg feminist.

Charlotte Ross continues the interrogation of the utopian cyborg existence in "Creating the Ideal Posthuman Body?" positing that: "whether intentionally or unintentionally, cyborg narratives reveal the importance of the *body* in psychic development, and function in part as a warning against detaching ourselves too definitively from our own corporeality."[497] The notion of the cyborg body, while

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[495] Chilcoat 169.

[496] Chilcoat 170.

[497] Charlotte Ross, "Creating the Ideal Posthuman Body?: Cyborg Sex and Gender in the Work of Buzzati, Vacca, and Ammaniti," *ITALICA,* Vol. 82, No. 2 (2005), 240.

enticingly utopian in its positioning of an untethered, unnamable state of existence, runs further risk by *de*-marking the body in ways that deny race. For the black feminist, such a risk is non-negotiable, for if the body is, as Haraway suggests, that which the "feminist must code," then the *un*marking of women of color constitutes a feminist homogenization in the name of liberation. Malini Johar Schueller, in her essay "Analogy and (White) Feminist Theory," resists Haraway's cyborg as a dangerous analogy, arguing that, while Haraway's attempt at inclusion is commendable, if it "entails a disregard for situatedness and locatedness, it avails itself of the universalizing and unmarked privileges of whiteness," the very thing that it purports to resist.[498] Schueller further argues against the "subsumption of race under gender/sexuality via analogy," finding that feminist theory is often (albeit unwittingly) guilty of "incorporation by analogy."[499] Although it is true that analogy runs the risk of assimilation by association, it is evident that the use of analogy and its signifiers is a consequential condition of analytic theory. It is the lens through which theory understands itself, and as such, runs a necessary risk as a tool of interpellation in feminist theory—which must, therefore, predate white, Western, male epistemologies of analogy. Schueller cites Haraway's analogy of the vampire in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium* as yet another romanticized myth of a marginalized, unmarked existence, asking: "But where and how in the specific matrixes of racial and gendered/sexual oppression, can vampirism be a choice?"[500] What is more

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[498] Malini Johar Schueller, "Analogy and (White) Feminist Theory: Thinking Race and the Color of the Cyborg Body," *Signs* 31.1 (Autumn 2005), 81.

[499] Schueller 65.

[500] Schueller 88.

disturbing than a vampiric existence, perpetually victimized and victimizing, is its lack of a flesh and blood existence. Haraway's vampire, much like her cyborg, is not of woman born, has no truck with reproduction, but perhaps most insidious, severs all bloodlines including that of race as: "Ties through blood . . . have been bloody enough. I believe that there will be no racial or sexual peace, no livable nature, until we learn to produce humanity through something more than kinship."[501] Haraway's exoticization of the unbiological body becomes a constructivist fetish in its urgency to usurp the flesh, a phenomenon that she denounces in detail in *Modest_Witness*:

> Curiously, fetishes—themselves "substitutes," that is, tropes of a special kind—produce a particular "mistake"; fetishes obscure the constitutive tropic nature of themselves and of worlds. Fetishes literalize and so induce an elementary material and cognitive error. Fetishes make things seem clear and under control.[502]

Ironically, Haraway's use of the "tropes" of cyborg and vampire become "substitutes" for the female body in her attempt to "make things seem clear," thereby eclipsing and "obscuring" the body, in all of its shapes and colors, from feminist theory.

Even so, Haraway's insistence on the technology of writing, an act of encoding, is crucial to a feminist theory that would bridge the gap between essentialism and constructivism. Haraway argues that cyborgs are "seizing the tools to mark the world that

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[501]Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_Oncomouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 265.

[502] Haraway, *Modest* 136. Haraway's use of the word "fetish" is primarily focused on the dynamics of genetic and creation sciences. As her theories often overlap, I am investigating her use of the word as it would apply toward another area of her specialty, specifically that of feminist theory.

has marked them as other," yet is this marking of the world not also a violent and oppressive act? [503] Instead, it might be useful to envision the cyborg as rewriting itself, erasing, marking, encoding an identity of its own rather than imposing a feminist solidarity upon the world. Haraway does point out that the cyborg "rewrites" herself and her body, yet does not interrogate the implications of "marking" a world in vindication for decades of oppression.[504] And so, in keeping with Haraway's definition of blasphemy "which has always seemed to require taking things very seriously," a feminist response to a constructivist manifesto might be: "I'd rather be a goddess than a cyborg."[505]

It seems to be the contention of cyborg feminism that the technology of writing, and its ability to code, necessarily begins outside of the fleshy body, and works as an extension into a cyberkynetic world outside of any organic, material reality. If this is true, then the constructivist impulse to abandon the body is more than phantasmatic: it assumes another plane of reality, altogether. The question remains, is an abandonment of the physical realm even possible for the cyborg feminist? Such a move disregards the body as a sight of real injury, leaving it open to aggressive invasions by any ideology that may claim it as uncontested (or uninhabited) territory. Virginia Woolf offered, in 1929, an alternate position for the writing body that contests the exteriorization of its

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[503] Haraway, *Simians* 175.

[504] Haraway, *Simians* 177.

[505] Haraway, *Simians* 149. Although I am toying with either/or notions of goddess and cyborg, some theorists have written about the connection between the two. Jane O'Sullivan writes of the possibility of an "uneasy partnership" between the tropes of cyborg and goddess. O'Sullivan suggests that "by adopting such a postmodern provisionality of identity, some of the attributes of a cyborg and a goddess need be neither antithetical, nor mutually exclusive." As a malleable creature, the cyborg has intrinsic value, a "disruptive power" akin to that of a mythical goddess. See: Jane O'Sullivan, "Cyborg or Goddess: Postmodernism and Its Others in John Fowles's *Mantissa*," *College Literature* 30.3 (Summer 2003), 110.

technology, instead envisioning an embodiment of text and its products for the literary woman. By locating the technology of writing as an interior process, Woolf situated it as crucial to physical processes, as it would be "death to hide . . . perishing and with it myself, my soul."[506] Further aligning the power to write with the power to live, Woolf suggests the writing heart to be metaphysically necessary, as its destruction would equal "destroying the tree at its heart."[507] While Woolf incorporates the tool of writing (a certain technology, itself), Haraway extends the body toward technology in a quest for power outside of the organic flesh, asking "Why should our bodies end at the skin?"[508] Rather than carving a space for anything sacred within the female frame, Haraway's argument cripples the autonomy of the body as useless outside of techno-exchange systems, as she argues that: "No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper *code*, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language." [509] What this interchange necessitates is an act of external coding upon the body in order to invest the sacred within the flesh; yet, does this not invalidate the license of the individual to self-code? To what extent might the act of interfacing be, itself, a violent inscription of technology (itself driven by ideological codes) upon the unguarded female body? In retrospect, Woolf predicted the inherent jeopardy of bodily erasure, insisting upon the "great part which

[506] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1981), 38. First published in 1929.

[507] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 38.

[508] Haraway, *Simians* 178.

[509] Haraway, *Simians* 163.

must be played in that future so far as women are concerned by physical conditions."[510] Rather than voluntarily sacrificing the body to the technology of writing, Woolf claimed that "the book has somehow to be adapted to the body," re-visioning technology as metaphorically absorbed within the boundaries of a self-governed frame.[511] Legislating the body as the primary location and necessary space for the art of writing, Woolf creates spatial bodily boundaries capable of negotiation with external semiotic producers of identity rather than passive incorporation through the interface of technology. In doing so, Woolf's writing body forms a primitive template for the feminist cyborg, insisting upon the contours of the body as indispensable territory for the writing woman. After all, writing the body necessarily means retaining its privileges of ownership, however tenuous that ownership may be in a technological world.

Natasha Bedingfield's 2006 pop hit, "Unwritten," echoes Donna J. Haraway's call to "actively rewrite the text of [the] body."[512] Bedingfield's lyrics suggest the act of self-coding as rebellion, claiming: "I am unwritten, can't read my mind, I'm undefined. I'm just beginning, the pen's in my hand, ending unplanned."[513] It is crucial to note Bedingfield's refusal to be culturally codified, as she disavows the subject position by alienating her identity from external identifications. Her lyrics insist upon a social insurgency, as she claims: "I break tradition, sometimes my tries, are outside the lines," locating a porous, malleably materiality that "breaks" external signifiers. Bedingfield's

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[510] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 78.

[511] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 78.
[512] Haraway, *Simians* 177.

[513] Natasha Bedingfield, "Unwritten," *Unwritten* (Bmg International, 2004). Her album was released in America by Sony in August, 2005, after achieving triple-platinum status in the UK. "Unwritten" made it to the top ten slot in pop music in America during the Spring of 2006.

chorus incorporates the flesh as text, rendering the body as the location of its own epistemology:

> Release your inhibitions / Feel the rain on your skin
>
> No one else can feel it for you / Only you can let it in
>
> No one else, no one else / Can speak the words on your lips
>
> Drench yourself in words unspoken / Live your life with arms wide open
>
> Today is where your book begins / The rest is still unwritten.

The self, as Bedingfield points out, is the "rest," codified by words "unspoken," and necessarily, irreducibly, physical. Consequently, Haraway's claim that no space or body can be sacred delimits the power of words to code the physical self in political, sexual, racial, and even spiritual ways. If, as Haraway suggests: "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves," then the next step for the cyborg is to reclaim her/his body, recast and recode it, as a host for the sacred.[514]

Sacred/Sacré Bodies

If the marker of Postmodern women's fiction was the refusal of the feminine body, then the marker of a Post-Postmodern world is its urgent impulse to relocate the sacred within the feminine frame. Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva argue for a revival of the sacred in feminist theory, asking: "What if the ancestral division between

[514] Haraway, *Simians* 181.

'those who give life' (women) and 'those who give meaning' (men) were in the process of disappearing?" Their answer is a hopeful one, as they posit that: "It would be a radical upheaval, never before seen. Sufficient to herald a new era of the sacred."[515] Clement and Kristeva define the ambiguous term "sacred" to mean many things, as it is "sexual," a form of "sadomachism," but finally, and most clearly, a question:

> What if the sacred were the unconscious perception the human being has of its eroticism: always on the borderline between nature and culture, the animalistic and the verbal, the sensible and the nameable? What if the sacred were not the religious *need* for protection and omnipotence that institutions exploit but the jouissance of that *cleavage*—of that power/powerlessness—of that exquisite lapse?[516]

It is in this "permanent questioning" that the sacred holds its power. The alternate assumption has been, in essentialist feminist studies, that a permanent relationship exists between the sign and the signified, which has led many constructivists to abandon the body. Yet, in loosening the sacred from the body, Clement and Kristeva offer a theory that sacrifices the narcissistic impulse to reproduce feminine nature as flesh, thereby freeing the body for self-inscription. Constructivist theorists such as Monique Wittig and Donna J. Haraway, while offering revolutionary images of the unsignified body, radically

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[515] Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva, *The Feminine and the Sacred*, Trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), 14. In the same passage, Clement and Kristeva find that, in locating the sacred on a global scale, they are also uncovering the phenomenon as 'increasingly black.'" Although this racial delineation suggests an appropriation of African spirituality, it resists Western/White mythology in a productive, and perhaps even radical, ways.

[516] Clement and Kristeva 26 and 27.

*un*mark the body in ways that may, in effect, only reproduce the violence of regulatory systems of identification.[517]

Judith Butler argues for the possibility that "certain identifications and affiliations are made . . . precisely in order to institute a *dis*identification with a position that seems too saturated with injury or aggression, one that might, as a consequence, be occupiable only through the loss of viable identity altogether."[518] Such a loss is nonnegotiable for women of color, women who choose maternity, lesbians, transsexuals, or any identity that claims the body as its site of resistance and/or locus of power. Clement and Kristeva warn against the public marketing of the sacred as political freedom, finding that:

> The sacred is, of course, experienced in private; it even seemed to us to be what gives meaning to the most intimate of singularities, at the intersection of the body and thought, biology and memory, life and meaning—among men *and* women . . . A 'private' sacred, therefore, since, as soon as it claims to become public, it totalizes and turns into totalitarian horror [is necessary as] it is in the sharing of it that the sacred unveils its risks as much as its vitality.[519]

Therefore, essentialism and constructivism are both incapable of harboring the sacred, for the former always assumes a permanent relationship with the maternal, and the latter assumes (too often) a permanent fracture from the maternal. Both dismiss the sacred as

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[517] See: Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon P, 1992). Forward by Louise Turcotte.

[518] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 100.

[519] Clement and Kristeva 178. My emphasis. Perhaps it is this paradoxical space of connection and cleavage that essentialists have attempted to claim, locating the moment of maternal labor as a reliable sacrament in accessing the sacred. Yet, it is not the nature of sacraments to provide reliable access to what is sacred, but rather to provide its possibility.

either communal flesh or a dangerous myth, yet it is the nature of the sacred to be singular, private, orgiastic, and disruptive. Clement and Kristeva note the alternate linguistic meaning of the French term *sacré* to be "also used as an expletive equivalent to 'damned,' 'blasted,' or 'bloody,' and further note that the noun *sacrément* is "similarly ambivalent."[520] It is interesting to note the binary meaning of the holy word, as it is usually the case that what is sacred to one is often blasphemous to another. It is the code, therefore, that accesses the sacred, or what Virginia Woolf's Clarissa called "flowers of darkness, invisible to others" and what Mrs. Ramsey named the "wedge-shaped core of darkness" that could only be accessed in solitude.[521] Changeable and private, it is the code that is most often mistaken for what is sacred or damned, and it is the coded body that provides serendipitous access to what is both.

The body, therefore, need not be discarded in an effort to further a feminist politics within the 3rd millennium. The "unwritten" body becomes the "resistance to the Spectacle in which the religion of the Word culminates," a temple that can only be coded or decoded from its interior.[522] Natasha Bedingfield's body as text reverses the sacré for the sacred, insisting upon an untranslatable, private sacral flesh as she claims "I am unwritten," a declarative revolt against institutional semiotics of femininity.[523] Clement and Kristeva argue that the sacred "does not vanish with the appearance of religious

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[520] Clement and Kristeva 15. For the purposes of this work, I will use the French term "sacré" in its explicative form.

[521] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 29; and: Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 62.

[522] Clement and Kristeva 27.

[523] Note that this is an enactment unlike Madonna's performance of the sacré, standing as both interesting commentary on the reversibility of the sacred as well as a 21st century impulse to relocate a feminist spirituality.

codes . . . since its nature is to turn the order upside down," and further claim that "one of its functions is to cross over."[524] It follows that the body, sacrilegiously encoded in a private language, is crucial to a feminist ethos of autonomy that "cross(es) over" the fractures of essentialism and constructivism.

Pop Culture and the Goddess

In investigating the place of a goddess in the realm of the sacred, Clement (in a letter to Kristeva) notes that "sacrilege befits a goddess," as historically they are created "without the support of a clergy."[525] As the goddess trope reemerged in the late 20th Century, she took form most often on the airwaves, far from the silencing confines of religious sanctuaries. Clement and Kristeva note that: "Of all the arts, music is no doubt the closest to that elevation without words, before words, beyond words, the passion made voice, sound, rhythm, melody, and silence that the sacred communicates."[526] Music, therefore, is the sound of the sacred, the force that Toni Morrison's communal women accessed in *Beloved*, the "the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words."[527] Not surprisingly, the act of recoding the sacred is most visible pop music,

[524] Clement and Kristeva 30 and 126.

[525] Clement and Kristeva 127 and 129.

[526] Clement and Kristeva 136.

[527] Morrison 261. See Chapter IV for a full discussion.

outside of the logophobic discourse of academia. Clement and Kristeva nod to the pop diva, Madonna, as the epitome of "a caricature of the sacred," noting that "the enormous cross on her punk chest in her early films, the role of Evita . . . the daughter baptized 'Lourdes,'" all parody the sacred in sacré ways.[528] Yet, to dismiss Madonna's own coding of identity as "caricature" denies the possibility of a radical malleability of identity, the ability to reshape and recode oneself, which is the reflection of the sacred itself.[529] Such an identity refuses to align itself in traditional and interpretable terms, as Madonna has exhibited in her constant transformation.

Judith Butler argues that identification (what I have called self-coding) occurs outside of the symbolic law, insisting that "identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation; they unsettle the 'I,'" and as such are in a constant state of contest within normative culture.[530] Therefore, to interpret Madonna's identity performance as mimicry is to dismiss the legitimacy of a radically malleable self, reflected on the flesh, yet born of the sacred. Clement bases much of her analysis of Madonna's performative sacred on what she notes as "her stage name," missing the crucial significance of the pop diva's given name, Madonna Louise Ciccone.[531] As a Madonna since birth, and a disavowed

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[528] Clement and Kristeva 144.

[529] The standard definition of malleability lends itself to exterior forces that can shape and transform matter. My use of the term is modified by its radical potential of identity to be formed by specifically interior forces.

[530] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 105.

[531] Madonna picked the name "Veronica" as her confirmation name, and chose Esther as her Kabbalistic/Hebrew name, after the heroine in the Hebrew scriptures.

Catholic, Madonna evokes a goddess stripped of her power, and in doing so, reinvests her own image in sacré signifiers—a move that suggests more than mere parody. Further, songs such as "Like a Virgin" (1984) and "Like a Prayer" (1989) purposefully rework, or reverse, the sacred for the sacré, made publicly clear when the Vatican condemned the latter as blasphemous for its intentional eroticism. Indeed, if the sacred is always the sacré, turned upside down and always moving in reverse, then Madonna's persona represents not simply an echo of the sacred as it exists externally within culture, but its constitutively internal malleability.[532] Madonna's confirmation name, Veronica, evokes that very phenomenon, as the Sanctus Veronica myth depicts the saint as having wiped the face of Jesus on his way to Calvary, permanently imprinted his face upon her veil. Significantly, Veronica has also been purported to be in a constant state of blood, permanently menstruating, and thereby permanently unclean, until she was magically healed by Jesus Christ prior to his death.[533] Madonna's personal confirmation under the

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[532] Other late twentieth century musicians disrupted hegemonic concepts of identity: the pop artist Prince, on June 7th, 1993, legally changed his name to an unpronounceable symbol of androgyny in an effort to retain the rights to his own personal image and identity. Prince reverted to his birth name on December 31, 1999—the date that his contract with Warnel-Chappell expired.

[533] Veronica has been legendarily identified as the niece of Herod the Great, and was healed of an "issue of blood" by Christ. (*Holy* Bible, Mark v. 25 *sq*; Matt. ix. 20). Yet, most theologians concur that Veronica was an amalgom of feminine figures, tracing her through history as:

> The woman of Jerusalem who wiped the face of Christ with a veil while he was on the way to Calvary. According to tradition, the cloth was imprinted with the image of Christ's face. Unfortunately, there is no historical evidence or scriptural reference to this event, but the legend of Veronica became one of the most popular in Christian lore and the veil one of the beloved relics in the Church. According to legend, Veronica bore the relic away from the Holy Land, and used it to cure Emperor Tiberius of some illness. The veil was subsequently seen in Rome in the eighth century, and was translated to St. Peter's in 1297 by command of Pope Boniface VIII. Nothing is known about Veronica, although the apocryphal Acts of Pilate identify her with the woman mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew who suffered from an issue of blood. Her name is probably derived from Veronica , as was reported by Giraldus Cambrensis. The term was thus a convenient appellation to denote the genuine relic of Veronica's veil and so differentiate from the other similar relics, such as those kept in Milan. The relic is still preserved in St. Peter's, and the memory of Veronica's act of charity is commemorated in the Stations of the Cross. While she is not included

name “Veronica” evokes the act of claiming the sacred by imprinting it, and thereby claiming it, upon the unwritten self. Further, as Catholic mythology suggests that Veronica had been healed from her malignant sexual processes, thus permanently made barren, the Saint Veronica myth cleanly reverses the sexual for the sacred. Yet, unlike her confirmation namesake, Madonna’s performance heretically reverses traditional sacred tropes for sexual ones, and in doing so, invokes what Clement and Kristeva have named a “trait of the divine,” that which “predates religion” in its deployment of the erotic. Madonna’s lyrics often reinvests the erotic into the spiritual, as her song “Like a Prayer” exhibits:

> When you call my name it's like a little prayer /I'm down on my knees,
>
> I wanna take you there / In the midnight hour I can feel your power
>
> Just like a prayer you know I'll take you there
>
> I hear your voice, it's like an angel sighing / I have no choice, I hear your voice
>
> Feels like flying / I close my eyes, oh god I think I'm falling
>
> Out of the sky, I close my eyes / Heaven help me[534]

Calling to mind fallen angels, Madonna’s lyrics infuse the sacred with sexual eroticism, and reinvents worship as the physical act of felatio. Yet, even on her knees she is in power, as she promises “I’ll take you there,” a suggestion that reinvigorates female sexuality as an act of aggression, heretically disrupting the Christian sexual hierarchy of phallic domination. Clement and Kristeva note that, unlike the religious which must have

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in the Roman Martyrology, she is honored with a feast day. Her symbol is the veil bearing the face of Christ and the Crown of Thorns.
See: “Saint Veronica,” *Catholic Online*, 13 May 2006, http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint>.

[534] Madonna, “Like a Prayer,” *Like a Prayer* (Sire/London/Rhino, 1990). First released March, 1989.

organization, the sacred "does exactly the opposite: it eclipses time and space. It passes in a boundlessness without rule or reservation, which is the trait of the divine."[535] Such a designation mediates the flesh, itself an organized surface, as the sacred, but rather posits the body as the vessel through which it passes. Clement and Kristeva note it as an act of private "revolt" against the "intersection of the body and thought," never existing as one or the other, yet giving both meaning.[536] Therefore, the function of the sacred is not to reestablish symbolic order, as it already precedes it, but rather to condemn it as natural law. Madonna's exhibition of the sacré therefore might reflect a sacred, divine upheaval of a religion that had once attempted to police her femininity, erase her sexuality, and name her unclean. In her blasphemous reversal of the sacred, Madonna deprivileged a Catholic mythology of the divine, and transformed into a diva.[537]

Almost a decade later, Meredith Brook's feminist manifesto, "Bitch," hit the airways of pop music and named a plentitude of identities as residing within the body of woman. Her lyrics both denounce abject correlations of angelic characteristics and announce the evasive goddess attributes within the female frame, claiming:

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[535] Clement and Kristeva 30.

[536] Clement and Kristeva 176 and 178.

[537] In November of 2005, Madonna released her album, *Confessions on a Dance Floor* (Warner Bros.), which included "Isaac," a song which she claims is based on Yitzhak Sinwanit, a Yemeni singer. Since, the Jewish response overwhelmed the press with accusations of blasphemy, claiming that Madonna refers to the 16th century mystic Isaac Luria. Using the names of catalysts for public ends and profit is against Jewish doctrine, and has created conflict between Madonna and Jewish mystics. Further evidence that Madonna has revisited her period of sacred parody and commentary was noted on her "Confessions" world tour. Rising from the stage bound to an electric, mirrored red cross and wreathed with a crown of thorns, Madonna sang "Live to Tell," inciting Catholic League President, Bill Donohue, to admonish the artist with the statement: "Knock off the Christ-bashing." It would appear that, in keeping with the surge towards a reclamation of a feminine sacred, Madonna has come out of her disco closet and reentered the 21st century as sacré as ever. For more, see: "Critics Rage at Madonna Imagery," *CBS NEWS*, 11 June 2006, http://www.cvsnews.com/stories/2006/05/22/entertainment/printable1640297.shtml.

I tried to tell you but you look at me like maybe

I'm an angel underneath; innocent and sweet

Yesterday I cried; Must've been relieved to see the softer side

I can understand how you'd be so confused

I don't envy you; I'm a little bit of everything all rolled into one.[538]

Sympathetic to the masculinist desire for the angel, Brooks relieves that anxiety only temporarily before reaffirming a fragmented, yet whole, identity:

I'm a Bitch, I'm a Lover / I'm a child, I'm a Mother / I'm a sinner, I'm a saint

I do not feel ashamed / I'm your hell, I'm your dream / I'm nothing in between

You know you wouldn't want it any other way.[539]

Brooks's bitch is assuredly duplicitous, yet that is the condition of a goddess, "tender and murderous, without tears. Devotion guaranteed, fanaticism assured."[540] Sexed and maternal, sinful and sanctified, Brooks creates the Bitch Goddess of the late nineties as, rather than unwritten, uncodable in her ambiguous, amorphous frame. In doing so, Brooks claims both the sacred and the sacré, she is both "sinner" and "saint," enacting the reverse upon each other in a rhythmic, univocal synergy. Her chorus both disrupts and gathers the sacred and the sacré, most evident in her final rendition and revision of the chorus:

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[538] Meredith Brooks, "Bitch," *Bitch* (Capitol Records, 1997). It is interesting to note that Bedingfield, Madonna, and Brooks all released their hit songs under albums of corresponding titles.

[539] Brooks, "Bitch."

[540] Clement and Kristeva 84.

I'm a bitch, I'm a tease / I'm a goddess on my knees

When you hurt, when you suffer / I'm your angel undercover

I've been numb, I'm revived / Can't say I'm not alive

You know I wouldn't want it any other way.[541]

Offering the comfort of angel "undercover," Brooks resituates the angel as only one version of a performance, unlike Madonna's visceral response to an angel's voice to which she has "no choice." Yet, both artists invest the image of an angel with a very physical eroticism: Madonna responds to an angel's sigh as passionate foreplay, while Brooks transforms into an angel "undercover," suggesting a divine consummation of her flesh under a bed sheet. It is also interesting to note the similarity between Brooks's imagery of a goddess performing felatio and Madonna's depiction of worshiping an angel "down on my knees." Yet, for Brooks, there is a corporeal expression of power in a goddess on her knees, as the male passive recipient of the sexual act has been bled of his autonomy. As the locus of sexual power is effectively reversed in the act of felatio, Brooks's goddess is poised as sacré through her oral worship of the phallus and the blasphemous displacement of holy sacrament. As the ultimate object of worship, the goddess on her knees accepts bodily sacrifice—an elemental necessity in the conjuring of the sacred.

Clement and Kristeva point out that "these representations [of sacrifice] do not remain in their place of representation but plunge back into the flesh, which is not quite

[541] Brooks, "Bitch."

so sacrificed, after all, allowing it to resonate, in jouissance."[542] Therefore, both Madonna's and Brooks's representations of the act of felatio reincorporate the sacrifice back into the body, through orgasmic expellation, and resonate there—recreating the act, often conceived as demeaning and submissive, as an aggressive and invasive act of the sacred. Clement and Kristeva note that: "The sadomasochism of the sacred connection (body/meaning) seems more obvious to a woman, more operative in a woman," yet never more fully realized than when on her knees.[543] Through the incorporation of both the sacred and sacré, Brooks's depiction of a kneeling goddess disrupts the religious code of sex, as it denies scriptural doctrine that insists upon the sexual act as exclusively ordained for reproduction. Further, the paradoxical nature of the sacred, always going in reverse, emerges as Brooks's lover offers himself up to a goddess for sacramental consumption, an act that both reverses holy communion and demands the physical sacrifice of the mortal, male subject. This scene creates a sense of feminine sexual domination, not unlike the ancient goddess cults that required the act of intercourse with her mortal consorts in order to achieve communion with the deity. Merlin Stone, in her work *When God Was a Woman*, explains this sexual ritual, pointing out that: "Women who resided in the sacred precincts of the Divine Ancestress took their lovers from among the men of the community, making love to those who came to the temple to pay honor to the Goddess."[544] Stone further points out that those sexual acts reflected the sacred sexuality

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[542] Clement and Kristeva 15.

[543] Clement and Kristeva 15.

[544]Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman: The Landmark Exploration of the Ancient Worship of the Great Goddess and the Eventual Suppression of Women's Rites* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976), 154.

of the feminine, and constituted male homage and reverence to "the patron deity of sexual love."[545] In her mythological origins, then, a goddess possessed a sexual materiality, was realized through male sexual sacrifice, and made contact with her world through the metaphysical experience of orgasm. As a Christian patriarchy reinvented the goddess as sexually frigid, her image retained only the reproductive mythos of maternal essence, effectively castrating her capacity for erotic pleasure. Brooks's Bitch Goddess, however, enjoys a full recovery from an anesthetized feminine sexuality, claiming: "I've been numb, I'm revived," and predicts the 21st century recovery of goddess mythology. [546]

The recovery of the sacred in 21st century literature was not exclusively motivated by nonwestern, pre-Christian mythology. Rather, in Dan Brown's controversial novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, the sacred feminine is revealed to be harbored within the conspiratorial legends of Christianity, itself.[547] Positing the Holy Grail (or chalice) to be

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[545] Stone 154.

[546] Meredith Brooks notes her inspiration for the song as being motivated by a desire to reincorporate duplicitous meanings into the identity of woman, as she claims that: "I was hoping to change the meaning of that word [bitch] with the song . . . I was saying that I am all of these things that make up a woman and how that is perceived by people." See: Anne Taylor, "Meredith Brooks," *Village Voice* (16 August 1997).

[547] While the *The Da Vinci Code* is popular, rather than literary, fiction, it put the term "sacred feminine" into a cultural conversation that has had worldwide impact on feminism and Christian myth. Brown's novel has been translated into 44 languages, over 60.5 million copies have been sold, and was released as a major motion picture in May, 2006 by Columbia Pictures., grossing 30 million dollars in the first night of wide release in America. The Catholic Church has noticed the impact, although: "the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI, has not voiced an opinion either way on the novel or the film, many Catholic Church officials have." In an interview with CNN reporter Alessio Vinci, Father Joseph NiNoia, a Vatican official, was quoted as saying: "I'm mystified by the popularity of it." Many countries and principalities, including South Korea, areas in India, and Singapore, have either called for a ban of the movie or have already eliminated it from future releases. The outrage and controversy incited by Dan Brown's presentation of a sacred feminine equal to the sacredness of Jesus Christ is indicative of the novel's increasing cultural collateral, and the emergent interest in pre-Christian Goddess mythology. See:

the body of a woman, Brown weaves a tale of the sacred feminine accessible only through the matrix of codes. Ironically enough, the symbologist Robert Langdon is incapable of breaking those codes without the aid of a female cryptographer, Sophie Neveu. Brown feminizes his male heroes through his depiction of them as "heretics," noting the original meaning of the Latin word *haereticus* to mean "choice," and aligns the choice to revere Mary Magdalene as the sacred vessel with the heretical devotion of the Priori of Sion.[548] Situating the Sangreal documents as "tracing the symbology of the sacred feminine—tracing her iconography through history," Brown inserts an argument for the necessary utility of myth, arguing that:

> Every religion describes God through metaphor, allegory, and exaggeration, from the early Egyptians through modern Sunday school. Metaphors are a way to help our minds process the improcessible. The problems arise when we begin to believe literally in our own metaphors.[549]

Despite his closure on the validity of metaphorical representation, Brown's positioning of metaphor asserts its irrefutable power, and situates metaphor as the lens through which humanity understands its own meaning and spirituality. Landon argues that: "Religious allegory has become a part of the fabric of reality," a supposition that lays claim to Clement and Kristeva's warning of a public, institutional sacred and its murderous potential. What has been murdered here in this work of pulp fiction is a holy femininity,

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"Da Vinci Code Meets With Catcalls," *CNN.com*, 15 May 2006, http://www.cnn.com/2006/SHOWBIZ/Movies/05/17/da.vinci/index.html.

[548] Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, Random House, Inc., 2003).

[549] Brown 341-342.

an assertion that denies it as myth, yet condemns myth as the force of its destruction. Brown predicts a resurgence of the divine feminine, musing upon its rise in the early 21st century as: "Her story is being told in art, music, and books. More so every day. The pendulum is swinging. We are starting to sense the dangers of our history . . . and of our destructive paths. We are beginning to sense the need to restore the sacred feminine."[550] And, keeping with Clement and Kristeva's call for a private sacred feminine and a permanent questioning of its boundaries, Brown denotes the Divine Mary Magdalene as fleshly, yet amorphous, claiming that: "The beauty of the Grail lies in her ethereal nature."[551] Disaligning the sacred from the myths of religion, Brown's work articulates the ungovernability of the divine feminine, outside of the institutionalized discourse of Christian doctrine. *The Da Vinci Code's* marked delineation between the realm of the sacred and religion is crucial to Clement and Kristeva's understanding of the divine, as they argue that "the sacred predates the religious," and critically "authorizes the lapse, the disappearance of the Subject," surpassing the laws and organizational impulses of the physical realm.[552] Yet, as Clement and Kristeva suggest, the sacred passes through physical vessels, often experienced through the act of sexual ecstasy. Brown's assertion of the sacred feminine is grounded by the assumption of Mary Magdalene's sexual

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[550] Brown 444. Brown often uses Isis mythology to explain the misinterpretation of Mary, mother of Christ, as the originator of the sacred feminine. For an example, see page 232.

[551] Brown 444. Also see: Riene Riesler, *The Chalice and the Blade* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988); and *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body--New Paths to Power and Love* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998). Dan Brown's novel was partially inspired and attributed to *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, provoking the current debate and law suite in both America and England over rights of authorship. See: Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Bantam DoubleDay Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1982).

[552] Clement and Kristeva 30.

nature, resituating the erotic, female body as the ordained vessel of divinity, a move that recalls the sacred sexual rites of Goddess cults. As pulp fiction, *The Da Vinci Code* relegitimizes the erotic as sacred, rather than sacré, and thematizes the feminine as historically misinterpreted. Brown's legitimized heir to Christ and the Magdalene, Sophie Neveu, exists as both the codebreaker and the code, as her name becomes the "keystone" that leads to the Holy Grail: Sophie, or Sofia, "literally means wisdom in Greek."[553] By incorporating a logos of wisdom into the discourse of the feminine, Brown recalls the Goddess Athena, and her mythological sister goddesses, as the victims of a politically-motivated transmogrification of Christian symbology. In his conclusion, Brown positions his protagonist on his knees to the "outcast one," reverent, and: "For a moment, he thought he heard a woman's voice . . . the *wisdom* of the ages . . . whispering up from the chasms of the earth."[554] It is here, in his redeployment of the sacred as ultimately female, that Brown regenerates the myth of a goddess, Ruskin's Goddess of Wisdom, an echo that had been reduced to the sound of a whisper by a phallocentric suppression of feminine sexuality.

More than any other theme, Brown's use of ancient Hebrew and Greek encoding systems mark the access road to the sacred feminine. *The Da Vinci Code* requires, however, that the breaking of code be enacted by both the feminine and the masculine, the symbologist and the cryptologist, and argues for the synergy of the male/female alliance represented in the ancient symbols of the chalice and the blade. This critical alignment thus threatens interpretive schemas of feminine subordination, a disruption that

[553] Brown 320-321.

[554] Brown 454. My emphasis.

Kristeva notes in *Powers of Horror* in her discussion of defilement and taboo. Finding that: "biblical impurity is permeated with the tradition of defilement; in that sense, it *points to* but does not *signify* an autonomous force that *can* be threatening for divine agency."[555] Dan Brown resituates the defiled prostitute, Mary Magdalene, as already divine, working against biblical symbology of feminine sexual filth.[556] By doing so, he enacts a signification that interprets feminine sexuality as sacred, rather than sacré, presenting Mary Magdalene's womb as the carrier of God's seed. Reversing the Christian/patriarchal logos of an innocent maternal body for that of a sexual vessel, Brown pollutes what Kristeva names "the biblical test," that which "performs the tremendous forcing that consists in subordinating maternal power (whether historical or phantasmatic, natural or reproductive) to symbolic order as pure logical order regulating social performance, as divine Law attended to in the Temple."[557] Yet, Dan Brown's novel explodes that "symbolic order" through its questioning of it as a material reality. As Sir Leigh Teabing reveals the image of Mary Magdalene in Leonardo Da Vinci's *The*

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[555] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Trans. Leaon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), 90.

[556] The interpretation of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute is commonly attributed to Pope Gregory the Great. He was purported to have accidentally misread a passage in Luke, a blunder that David Van Biema denotes in Time magazine as: "The mix-up [that] was made official by Pope Gregory the Great in 591: 'She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary [of Bethany], we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark,' Gregory declared in a sermon. That position became church teaching, although it was not adopted by Orthodoxy or Protestantism when each later split from Catholicism." Yet, official or not, once claimed a prostitute, Mary Magdalene remained in the minds of history as such. It was a difficult image to retract, although "In 1969, in the liturgical equivalent of fine print, the Catholic Church officially separated Luke's sinful woman, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene as part of a general revision of its missal. Word has been slow in filtering down into the pews, however." See: David Van Biema, "Mary Magdalene: Saint or Sinner?" *Time* Magazine (11 August, 2003); accessed online 19 May 2006, http://www.danbrown.com/media/morenews/time.html. While the Magdalene myth is in slow recovery, the increasing interest in the Gnostic documents, dating back to A.D. 125, revalidate her as a disciple and companion to Christ.

[557] Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror* 91.

Last Supper, the embodiment of the Holy Grail, he notes that "Everyone misses it . . . Our preconceived notions of this scene are so powerful that our mind blocks out the incongruity and overrides our eyes."[558] Positing what Clement and Kristeva deem "divine Law" as often subconsciously absorbed through the phenomenon of "*scotoma*," Brown's protagonist, Robert Langdon, further notes that: "The brain does it sometimes with powerful symbols."[559] It is a crucial moment in this fictitious account of a suppressed sacred feminine, for to note the power of symbols to create a malicious corporeality is to assume its vulnerability to an insurgent reversal. It is also indicative of a 21st century resurrection of Goddess symbology, the visceral reversal of a nation's *scotomatic* logos of femininity.

Women's Rites: Reincarnating a Goddess

Dan Brown's fiction represents an emergent "structure of feeling" in the 21st century, a phenomenon that Raymond Williams defines in *Literature in Society* as being "often apprehended as isolated and individual, a private feeling: it is often what is felt by members of society," but once felt and recognized, "is seen as a real structure which unites individuals who may not have been aware of each other."[560] Although the resurgent interest in the sacred feminine has appeared most often in the music and fiction

[558] Brown 243.

[559] Brown 243.

[560] Raymond Williams, "Literature and Society," *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 37-38.

of pop culture, there is evidence of an emerging discourse of the sacred within academic theology. Carol P. Christ's article "Whose History are We Writing?" foresees a formidable following for Goddess feminism, arguing that: "Though it has no institutional funding and little academic support, the feminist spirituality or Goddess movement has hundreds of thousands of adherents in North America, Great Britain, continental Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and elsewhere across the globe."[561] Further, Christ locates a critical lapse in feminist conversation, especially within the realm of religion and scholarship, noting that: "It thus becomes critical that we name the political circumstances within the academy, the churches, and the larger culture in which feminist work in religion is being *codified* and transmitted.[562] Christ's emphasis on the interruption of external coding is reminiscent of the late 20th and early 21st century insistence on the power to code, evidenced in Donna J. Haraway's myth of the cyborg, Natasha Bedingfield's *Unwritten* body, and Dan Brown's coded sacred feminine. Evidently, the phenomenon of the sacred and the deployment of its codes is fundamental to the new face of feminism, as the relinquishment of the ability to code "simply transmits the (patriarchal) status quo," and leaves the feminine body open to oppressive

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[561] Carol P. Christ, "Whose History Are We Writing? Reading Feminist Texts with a Hermeneutic of Suspicion." *Feminist Studies in Religion* 20.2 (Fall 2004): 59(24). Also see: *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan,) 2003. Another important source feminist/religion study is: Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Academic studies in Goddess Feminism include: Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister* (new York: Oxford UP, 1994); Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism: Ritual, Gender, and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London: Routledge, 2002); Kathryn Roundtree, *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-Makers in New Zealand* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Kristy Coleman, "Matriarchy and Myth," *Religion* 31, No. 3 (2001): 247-263.

[562] Christ, "Whose History Are We Writing?" 60. My emphasis.

signification. Therefore, the language of "Goddess feminism" is one that codes the sacred female body in specifically matriarchal terms. Specifically, Christ "reenvision[s] the standard theological topics of authority, history, divinity, humanity and nature from the standpoint of Goddess spirituality," claiming the emergence of a "profound metaphoric shift" from patriarchal to matriarchal thinking that disrupts and exceeds normative perceptions of the feminine as flesh.[563] If it is true that patriarchal institutions created a Maternal Goddess, thereby imprisoning woman through the trope of the reproductive body, those very institutions might be overthrown by reclaiming a matriarchy and its vision of the sexed, feminine flesh as sacred.

In her essay, "Feminist Theology as Post-traditional Thealogy," Christ asserts the significance of renaming the historically male Christian deity, for "to name the divine power as 'Goddess'" unsettles patriarchal hierarchies "in the way we understand all that the female body has come to symbolize: the flesh, the earth, finitude, interdependence, and death."[564] The crux of Christ's argument rests on the necessity to reclaim the feminine body within theology and spirituality studies, an alignment that is inherently assumed in Goddess religions. Christ criticizes "Orthodox theology's emphasis on immortality," linking that emphasis to "similar trends in the history of Western theology," and claiming it to be "structurally connected to the denial of the body and therefore to the subordination of women."[565] Even so, Christ foresees a quantitative

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[563] Christ, "Whose History Are We Writing?" 72. Also see Christ's full discussion in "Feminist Theology as Post-Traditional Theology," *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, Susan Frank Parson, Ed. (Cambridge: Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, 2002), 81-94.

[564] Christ, "Feminist Theology" 81.

[565] Christ, "Whose History Are We Writing?" 72.

dismissal of Goddess feminism as it relates to spirituality, noting that while it promises "concepts of borderland, contact, and Hybridity [and] provides new tools for talking about the way cultures and groups influence and transform each other," there still "remains the stubborn resistance of entrenched interests, both religious and secular, which shape the contexts in which feminist research is produced."[566] Finding academic feminism to be heavily "entrenched" in the politics of the Ivory Tower, Christ argues for a hermeneutics of suspicion" in reading feminist texts, and is puzzled by the "antipathy toward [the Goddess's] reemergence in Western cultures," and especially that of feminists.[567]

Regardless of academic feminist resistance, Christ is not alone in her endeavor to promote Goddess feminism in the 21st century. Vrinda Dalmiya writes in "Loving Paradoxes: A Feminist Reclamation of the Goddess Kali" of an alternative reading of patriarchally-ordained goddesses, noting that "it has often been argued that the formulation of female divinity is a ploy to keep real power away from real women in the real world." [568] In spite of this theory, or rather outside of it, Kali argues for a reexamination of the masculinist appropriation of Goddess myth, finding that:

> [But] simply because an image has been (and can be) manipulated to serve the ends of patriarchy does not imply that it has no positive value or that it cannot be

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[566] Christ, "Whose History Are We Writing?" 82.

[567] Christ, "Whose History Are We Writing?" 82.

[568] Vrinda Dalmiya, "Loving Paradoxes: A Feminist Reclamation of the Goddess Kali," *Hypatia* Vol. 15, No.1 (Winter 2000), 128. For further study on the feminine within religious texts see: Laurel Lanner, *Who Will Lament Her?: The Feminine and the Fantastic in the Book of Nahum (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies)* (New York: T. & T. Clark Publishers, Ltd., 2006).

> further manipulated to serve other ends. It is the possibility of such an alternative encashing of a spiritual phenomenon that is being suggested here.[569]

Ironically enough, such a critical inquiry into the history of an image was suggested in the late 19th century by John Ruskin, as he labored over the possibility of misappropriated myth, claiming: "For the question is not at all what a mythological figure meant in its origin; but what it became in each subsequent mental development of the nation inheriting the thought."[570] The nation that would inherit that thought would be, inevitably, American.

The inheritance of a Maternal Goddess, therefore, can be traced back through the imagination of the Victorian mind: Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House, later to be absorbed by the image of John Ruskin's Housewife-Queen, and radically redressed in the garb of his Greek goddess, Athena. Yet, through all her productions, the goddess stubbornly remained a maternal concept, redressed in the phantasmatic cloaks of objective desire, motivating early 20th century authors to negotiate between binary presuppositions of femininity and a lived reality. Although Kate Chopin wrote in the late Victorian period, her work in *The Awakening* voiced a Modernist struggle between foundational concepts of the maternal figure. Katherine Mansfield's short stories furthered that conversation, rendering maternal essence to be suicidal to the female mind, and catastrophic to the autonomy of the female body. As Modernism reached its zenith, the male authors of the 1920s and 1930s, including Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, mourned the maternal figure in literature, their female characterizations

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[569] Dalmiya 128.
[570] Ruskin, *The Ethics of the Dust* 218. My emphasis.

depicting a discourse of crisis at the dematerialization of the Maternal Goddess. That discourse, and the patriarchal anxiety it expressed, was confirmed by Virginia Woolf in the figure of the amaternal feminine soul that denied the naturalness of maternity and predicted the later constructivist impulse to flee the female body.[571] It is important to note that, even as the Maternal Goddess was imagined first in the English mind, her radical dethronement began there, as well, in the "androgynous" mind of Virginia Woolf.[572] American authors would not have missed Woolf's literary insurrection of the Angel in the House, nor would they have been ignorant of the literary construction of the amaternal subconscious Woolf attributed to Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsey. Therefore, American authors possessed an identificatory bond with the English literary mind, reflected in the American specularization of the Maternal Goddess and her rise to power, as well as her impending fall from grace within literature. American authors actively participated in an "emergent structure of feeling" surrounding the Maternal Goddess, as it was: "seen as a real structure which unites individuals who may not have been aware of each other."[573] Yet once conceptualized as an oppressive figure, the Maternal Goddess was rendered vulnerable and reinterpretable in the hands of Postmodern American women writers.

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[571] Even as the Maternal Goddess was imagined first in the English mind, her radical dethronement began there as well, in the mind of Virginia Woolf. American authors would not have missed Woolf's literary insurrection of the Angel in the House, nor would they have been ignorant of construction of the amaternal subconscious attributed to neither Mrs. Dalloway nor Mrs. Ramsey.

[572] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 63.

[573] Williams 37-38.

In response to a Modernist nostalgia for the maternal body, Postmodern authors such as Alice Walker, Margaret Atwood, and Toni Morrison railed against embodied motherhood, offering dystopic concessionary images of maternity that constituted a catachrestic rupture of essentialized femininity. Presenting the mythos of the Maternal Goddess as a phallocentric logos, these authors enacted a literary rebellion that worked to de-romanticize maternity as a viable locus of power. Even as she became vulnerable to decades of literary dissention, the Maternal Goddess took the better part of a century to die, as she lived and thrived in the well-guarded minds of a nation. Her demise constitutes only the destruction of an image, an idealized myth of woman that never had a chance once inscribed on the page of literature. She has been redrawn, erased, written over, and finally torn from the pages of a 2nd millennial female consciousness—only to be resurrected as a sacré/sacred Goddess in pop culture.

If pop culture predicts emergent structures of feeling, softening the ground for reappropriation in literature and theory, then the future of feminism, in all of its forms, might be the next space of reentry for Goddess myth. Evidenced in the theories of cyborg feminism, as well as theology and religion, the malleable nature of the Goddess has already been introduced into the conversations of academia, albeit on tenuous and marginal ground.[574] As the myth of the Goddess negates fatalistic and dualistic Christian

[574] Although the list cannot be comprehensive here, some of the most pertinent conversation going on in feminist theology includes: Rita M. Gross, "Feminist Theology: Religiously Diverse Neighborhood or Christian Ghetto?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16/2 (Fall 2000), 73-78; Laurel C. Schneider, *Re-Imagining the Divine: Confronting the Backlash Against Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim P, 1998); Elizabeth Stuart, "A Good Feminist Woman Doing Bad Theology?" *Feminist Theology* 26 (January 2001), 70-82; Maria Pilar Aquino and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Eds., *In the Power of Wisdom: Feminist Spiritualities of Struggle* (London: SCM P, 2000); and Pamela J. Milne, "Voicing Embodied Evil: Gynophobic Images of Women in Post-Exilic Biblical and Intertestamental Text," *Feminist Theology* 30 (May 2002), 61-99.

ideologies, it may be useful within the field of feminism(s) that focus on West plus East, rather than West versus East, epistemologies of diversity, as well as work to heal the divide between constructivist theories of self-coding and essentialist premises of embodiment. If the emerging eco-feminist model requires the suturing of the female body to the materiality of the earth, the Goddess, and her tenets of natural and supernatural preeminence, might provide the basis for an ethos of connectivity and power in a Post-Postmodern world. Colleen Mack-Canty writes in "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality" of a certain urgency in eco-feminism to reclaim the body as a resource, noting it to be "an especially important endeavor in these environmentally disturbing times."[575] Arguing for eco-feminism's use in the wake of second-wave world, Mack-Canty notes its capacity to "broaden the explanatory power of feminist theory" in the struggles indicative of 21st century culture, such as "globalism, multiculturalism, and environmentalism."[576] And it is here, in the call for feminists to reconnect to the earth, that eco-feminists are in tentative conversation with the theology of Goddess feminists.

Arguing for a "feminist process paradigm," Carol P. Christ writes in *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* against dualistic theisms, asking: "Is the source of the theological mistakes of classical theism a rejection of embodied life that begins with the rejection of the female body?"[577] If those rejections were articulated in

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[575] Colleen Mack-Canty, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Fall 2004), 154.

[576] Mach-Canty 156.

[577] Carol P. Christ, *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 200.

terms of institutionalized maternity, the answer is clearly "yes." Aligning her feminist process paradigm to the concerns of eco-feminists, Christ offers that it "can shed light on conflicts that have arisen in relation to attempts to reclaim the female body, the earth body, femaleness, and the feminine in feminist spirituality."[578] Christ foresees a remarkable movement in our culture toward the Goddess, pointing out that: "The popularity of images of the naked female body of the Goddess in feminist art and ritual is testimony to women's hunger for symbols that express the creative and sacred powers of the female body."[579] By positing a feminist paradigm that includes the premises of both connectivity to the earth as well as access road to the sacred, Christ marries all of the terms prevalent in current feminist conversation: an encoded feminine, earthly materiality, and metaphysically-charged sacred. Arguing that "in process philosophy, the importance of body, relationship, and connection to nature is affirmed," Christ further contends that:

> While it was appropriate for ancient peoples to speak of earth as Goddess, it may be more appropriate for us to understand the world or the universe as the body of Goddess/God. A feminist process paradigm supports the feminist intuition that the earth body is sacred, while helping us to clarify our thinking and expand our

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[578] Christ, *She Who Changes* 202. For further discussion on eco-feminism and feminist theology, see: Gloria Feman Orenstein, *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Eco-Feminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990). Also see: Salli McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2001).

[579] Christ, *She Who Changes* 203.

vision. It also makes it clear that the desire to save the earth and its creatures is not misplaced romanticism.[580]

Although Christ's theory rests upon specifically theological ethics, her premise of recovery includes the themes of eco-feminism, specifically in the interrelatedness of the body to its environment. Disrupting Christian concepts of patriarchy and the dualistic treatment of the mind/body split, Christ argues for repair, and suggests its necessity for a 21st century world. Toward that end, Christ reinvigorates the use of myth for future feminisms, suggesting that: "Philosophical insight must be expressed in symbols that involve the body and community," and situates process philosophy as the lens through which we might "understand re-imagining symbols as a process of making new creative syntheses from the resources of the past."[581] The 21st century has already seen its models for Athena symbology, in the rise of political women, warrior women, and academic women who are fast becoming the keepers of wisdom.

It is not without some trepidation that this study presents the image of a goddess as a possible metaphor for feminist theory, for, as Christ warns us: "As we creatively re-imagine symbols, it is important to remember that symbols are not an end in themselves."[582] Rather, it is necessary that the Goddess be kept under constant watch and remain open to what Clement and Kristeva have called "a permanent questioning."[583] What has been historically manipulated as an instrument of oppression, in the form of a

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[580] Christ, *She Who Changes* 210.

[581] Christ, *She Who Changes* 244.

[582] Christ, *She Who Changes* 244.

[583] Clement and Kristeva 178.

Maternal Goddess, might be further manipulated to exclude masculine bodies from a feminist ethics of empowerment. The balance lies in an affirmation of Haraway's fragmented cyborg, Clement and Kristeva's sacred/sacré feminine, and Christ's recovery of the earthly body as contributions to a 3rd millennial, malleable and reusable Goddess. We must, as feminists, remember that symbols are indeed not an end in themselves. The autonomous, democratized self will be sustained only if it remains "unwritten," sacré in its insistence to code itself and therefore become, within the minds of a nation, a permanent question.

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