

STAGING AND UPSTAGING REVOLT: THE MATERNAL FUNCTION
IN TWENTIETH CENTURY DRAMA

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STAGING AND UPSTAGING REVOLT: THE MATERNAL FUNCTION
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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT
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IN TWENTIETH CENTURY DRAMA

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This dissertation explores the maternal role in subject formation and surveys varying depictions of this role in twentieth-century drama. While sifting through the genealogy of psychoanalytic theory, this project investigates how the *dutiful mother*, spawned by phallogentric notions of subjectivity and emerging in works like Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* and Norman's *'night, Mother*, passively yields to prevailing ideology and integrates her children into oppressive Symbolic structures. By examining the "correctives" to the Freudian-Lacanian paradigms proffered by Kristeva and Irigaray, this dissertation identifies how, when challenging patriarchal conceptions of the maternal function, these feminist philosophers each rely heavily on both Heidegger's fundamental

ontology and Arendtian political action. Kristeva and Irigaray provide the theoretical framework from which conceptual space for the *revolutionary mother* can be carved. This mother, in contradistinction to the Freudian-Lacanian mother, sanctions existing cultural practices only when she deems them ethically sound. Emerging in works like Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*, the potentials for revolt churning in the maternal function clearly surface. The revolutionary mother urges her children to reject injustice, to respect difference, and to pursue, in Heideggerian terms, the authentic mode of Being.

This work concludes by arguing that drama presents the ideal mode of literary representation for expressing the revolutionary power of the maternal function. As Heidegger, Arendt, Kristeva, and Irigaray each depart from a tradition of detached, universal objectivity by re-inserting the physical body into philosophical discourse, theatrical performance, via *performance*, depicts literature embodied. By presenting convergent data from the emerging field of cognitive science, this work identifies intersections between corporeal philosophy and dramatic performance and how these intersections can help us, when necessary, to restructure our culture, our ethics, and our interactions with other human beings.

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CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

Although twentieth-century theater can be and has been probed from innumerable perspectives, this project will explore varying conceptions of the maternal function, will pinpoint the core psychoanalytic theories from which these conceptions originate, will investigate how these manifestations of maternity affect a child's psychological development differently, and will examine dramatic works in which the mother-child dyad profoundly impacts the actions and the outcomes of fictional worlds and the characters that occupy them. In short, the terrain covered here consists of *how* the maternal function ushers the child into cultural and ideological framework and, subsequently, *how* she transforms the subject-in-becoming into the active subject. In this project, I present two versions of the maternal function. The first, *the dutiful mother*, inspired by Freudian-Lacanian theories of subjectivity, unconditionally yields to cultural practices despite how these practices impact her, her children, and the socio-political topography of her community. On the other end of the spectrum, there is the maternal function as imagined by Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Their theories provide the conceptual space for the *revolutionary mother*, or she who, as mediator of paternal law, places Symbolic structures "on trial" and legitimates prevailing ideology only when she deems it ethically sound. Throughout this project, I will identify the far-reaching havoc the Freudian-Lacanian mother wreaks on family and culture, and I will examine, in a

Heideggerian context, how the revolutionary mother harbors the potential to reshape cultural terrain and endows her children the power to experience an authentic mode of Being.

To be sure, therefore, when engaging this material, one must ask, quite simply, what is the role of the mother? What is her *responsibility*? What is her *duty*? To whom does she answer? To whom is she obligated? Should the mother focus solely on assimilating a child into culture, grooming the child to effectively navigate the existing parameters of propriety? If so, the maternal function, tethered by and to the societal practices that precede it, operates as a conduit through which culturally sanctioned modes of signification filter. Under such conditions, the mother offers little contribution. Instead of *actively* shaping her child's subjectivation, she *passively* integrates her offspring into the matrix of existing Symbolic structures by heedlessly adopting the worldviews she has inherited. Under these circumstances, the mother merely teaches her child the "rules of the game," the "steps of the dance." Is she biologically and psychologically programmed to endorse, perpetuate and guarantee existing societal conditions and hierarchical constructs?

For Freud and Lacan, the maternal function indicates a position of passivity. Anatomically, ethically, and ontologically "limited," the feminine-maternal embodies Lack and emptiness. As will soon be discussed in more detail, since Woman has no penis and therefore can never possess fear of literal castration, a fear from which a subject's ethical development and assimilation into culture spring, Freud and Lacan perceive the Woman as an "outsider." In Freudian terms, she generates an inferior superego; for Lacan, she experiences a deeper sense of Lack due to her biological castration and

therefore never entirely yields to the Law. Castrated and alienated, Woman becomes unspeakable, unintelligible and not-whole. Subsequently, the Freudian-Lacanian paradigms serve to legitimate and perpetuate the dutiful mother, a woman who's contribution is her erasure.

Before proceeding into detailed analyses of psychoanalytic theory, which we inevitably must, let us briefly examine what this dutiful mother looks like. In Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda Wingfield embodies a figure grounded firmly in the traditions and values of her time. Capitulating that females must rely on men, she urges her daughter, Laura, to find a husband. Without a male counterpart, Amanda asks

What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South – barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife! – stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room – encouraged by one in-law to visit another – little birdlike women without any nest – eating the crust of humility all their life! (16).

In this life-lesson, Amanda teaches her daughter that a woman obtains subjectivity and ontological “worth” only when she produces and rears a family. She describes *unmarried women* as *pitiful cases* because, *without any nest* full of husband and children, feminine essence, comprised by a *birdlike* compulsion to nourish and shelter her young, cannot be actualized. To be sure, Amanda also holds herself hostage to this conception of femininity. Abandoned by her husband and unable to bear life without a partner, she nostalgically retreats into her younger days during which “gentleman callers” hailed her

night and day. When explaining the asymmetrical notions of feminine and masculine subjectivity asserted by Freud and Lacan, Bruce Fink concludes, “a woman’s position in our culture is either automatically defined by the man she adopts as partner or is defined only with great difficulty” (*The Lacanian Subject* 116). Amanda Wingfield speaks to this *great difficulty*. For her, when a family possesses no “father figure,” prevailing ideology oversees the household. Without her own notions of ethical conduct, this mother relies upon the standards of appropriate behavior she has inherited from culture when she rears her children...even when this reliance undermines her own agency and restricts her daughter’s ontological development. Returning to theory, Amanda, by accepting and re-broadcasting dominant modes of signification, enacts the maternal function as mapped by phallogentric psychoanalytic paradigms.

As the origins of these paradigms, Freud and Lacan provide valuable, detailed, and sophisticated schematics of human psychological architecture that can be neither ignored nor discarded. At the same time, however, the patriarchal undergirdings of their theories signal the ideological context in which and *by which* they were fashioned – patriarchal culture yields patriarchal psychoanalytic theory. The necessity for feminine erasure exists only when paternal law is sacrosanct. The dutiful mother, therefore, reflects cultural contingencies and not bio-psycho-social reality.

Such a claim forces us to confront the possibility that within the feminine-maternal there exists an independent, autonomous mode of being. Is the mother not, when situated in the Freudian and Lacanian psychical models, a subject anatomically and conceptually positioned *outside* paternal law? Can this position be construed as *beyond* the law? If so, can the maternal function exert a force upon the Law? If endowed with

the power to perpetuate cultural practices, can this same power oppose, transform, or reshape Symbolic Law?

The “correctives” to Freudian-Lacanian theory mounted by Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva assist us in addressing these questions. As Irigaray and Kristeva re-imagine the Freudian-Lacan legacy, their contributions, in tandem, present the maternal function as a position churning with the power of revolt. Since Freud and Lacan present the mother as a figure who must acquiesce to paternal law in order to solidify the patriarchal culture they deem organic, Irigaray and Kristeva, each drawing from both Heideggerian ontology and Arendtian socio-political theory, recognize that the feminine-maternal occupies a conceptual space through which the law is mediated, and as mediator, the mother can therefore validate cultural law or repudiate it. To be sure, a Symbolic order constitutes the framework from which subjectivity emerges, and as such, cultural practices comprise the building blocks of “identity,” but when phallogentric or ethnocentric outlooks manicure our cultural landscape, Symbolic structures can inhibit a subject’s agency, power, and freedom. Under such oppressive conditions, the maternal function, once imagined in a Kristevan-Irigarayan context, becomes the epicenter of cultural reform.

Though I will later rehearse Kristevan and Irigaryan assertions more fully, we will first take pause from that investigation to examine how, in *Cloud 9*, Caryl Churchill presents the maternal function as a counter-force to paternal law. Notably, though this play covers a century of calendar time, the characters in the work only experience 25 years of subjective time. Conflating the past with the present effectively suggests that a fear of difference, evidenced in the drama by the sexual repression and Imperial

domination characteristic of Victorian England, still poisons our conceptions of Otherness in the “modern” world. In the play, Clive, the patriarch of a British family living in Africa, embodies a Symbolic order fueled by phallogentric authority. Resolutely attached to cultural practices he deems trans-historic and absolute, Clive imposes his ideology onto all of those around him. When Clive’s close friend, Harry, attempts to seduce him, Clive articulates intolerance, stating, homosexuality is “the most revolting perversion,” a “sin” that “can destroy an empire” (40). This sprawling Victorian *empire* partly justified its expansion by converting the vanquished into the fold of Christianity. As homosexuality indicates a deviant behavior this tradition endeavors to suppress, theological mandates demand also that a biblical God replace all indigenous, “false” deities. Clive, therefore, seeks to save Harry from abnormal sexuality as he has rescued an African family servant, Joshua, from pagan beliefs. Churchill, therefore, establishes “the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression” (i).

Ironically, Clive’s children, aptly named Edward and Victoria, both engage in same sex relations. In Act 2, Betty, Clive’s wife, tolerates her children’s departure from hetero-normative sexuality. Furthermore, she expresses curiosity, asks them both detailed questions about their intimate experiences, and her interest culminates in a lesbian encounter of her own. Betty’s openness to difference and to alternate modes of sexual pleasure illustrates her total rejection of Clive’s absolute system of values. Interestingly, the first act of the production primarily focuses on Clive’s interaction with family/community, and Betty plays a marginal role. In this regard, form and content merge. Since Clive wields patriarchal power like a hammer, the maternal role remains a marginalized figure. In the second half of the play, however, Clive only appears at the

very end when he laments the erosion of the family-empire. Since Betty repudiates the ethno-sexual enclosure to which her husband relegates wife and children, Clive, the father and protector of oppressive law, is nowhere to be found. Act 2 transpires in the revolutionary mother's domain. Betty articulates the ethical bedrock of this domain when she claims, "if there isn't a right way to do things you have to invent one" (86). This statement suggests not an amoral, nihilistic approach to living. On the contrary, if respect for alterity constitutes the irreducible core of ethical responsibility, an oppressive Symbolic order does not offer *a right way to do things*. Consequently, we must depart from its confines and *invent* a world in which difference can be both acknowledged and preserved. Betty, as a mother who combats the injustices of paternal law, provides us with a model for how to approach this endeavor.

Finally, before sifting through the genealogy of psychoanalytic theories and outlining multiple conceptions of the maternal function, we must distinguish between my notion of the maternal function as revolutionary space from assertions that propose motherhood best occasions feminist concerns. In *Turning Operations*, Mary G. Dietz warns against idealizing the mother as a safeguard against oppression. "As a political theory, Maternalism tends to accept the givenness of certain existing binaries (for example, male: female; public: private) and simply rearrange their normative content without challenging their fundamental conceptual coherence or their adequacy as frameworks for thinking politically" (34). In other words, *maternalism* simply turns the tables; rejecting patriarchal social structure, maternalist feminism maintains oppositional, binary thinking that simply privileges the maternal instead of the paternal. Furthermore, Dietz takes issue with "a maternalist 'family state' that seeks to promote particular ethical

or religious values in the name of uniformity and the good” because “maternalism’s identification of a ‘female’ sphere where women are the purveyors of good and truth and virtue also accords...special moral and political status to a gendered category (that is, women as mothers) that does more to reassert some fundamental patriarchal suppositions than challenge them” (44). Dietz speaks here to the violence of essentialism. Interested primarily in the subject’s socio-political agency, Dietz rejects the thematization of feminism. First, all women do not mother; second, *truth and virtue* cannot be co-opted by a *gendered category*; third, motherhood, as a domestic responsibility, takes place outside the public realm of political action.

In sum, Dietz rejects feminisms that thematize feminine experience by conflating Woman and Mother. Nancy Chodorow, for example, does both. In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow asserts, “by virtue of their gender...women feel intuitively connected to others, able to empathize” and “are embedded in and dependent upon relationships” (viii). As a result, “women’s capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure” (ibid. 39). Women, therefore, uniquely designed to (re)produce offspring, possess innate characteristics that enable them to nurture and care for the young. In her major work, *In a Different Voice*, psychologist Carol Gilligan, echoing Chodorow’s sentiments, describes male morality as an “ethic of justice” whereas females establish an “ethic of care.” Again, feminine “essence” corresponds to maternity, sensitivity, and love. Finally, Jean Bethke Elshtain, as a culmination of the assertions proffered by Chodorow and Gilligan, espouses a problematic theory. “Were maternal thinking to be taken as the base for feminist

consciousness,” Elshtain maintains, “a wedge for examining an increasingly overcontrolled public world would open immediately” (58). In stark opposition to Freudian assertions, “maternalism” suggests that women are predisposed to tolerate, nourish, and protect human life and should therefore rally around this “ethic of care” to combat oppressive patriarchal social structure. Each thinker here equates feminine subjectivity with motherhood. Though taking a different spin, maternal feminism, as outlined above, underscores the Freudian notion that female subjectivity emerges from the trauma of giving birth. In this context, the childless woman is Other, a distorted remnant of her *feminine psychic structure*.

Paradoxically, however, as I turn to the mother as a means for revolution, I do not appeal exclusively to females or to mothers. Such a move would hold women responsible for permitting injustice or require women to have children for any social reform to take place. The body of this work examines the potential promise that the maternal *function*, as that which exists *outside* paternal law, a position determined by the very order that the function itself can undermine, occupies a conceptual and psychological space that quakes with the power of revolt. The Freudian-Lacanian paradigms, as the bedrock of modern psychoanalysis, themselves establish the conceptual positions that govern subject formation. Freud’s Oedipal structure necessitates a child’s rejection of the mother; Lacan’s paternal metaphor ensures appropriate subjectivation. In both cases, however, the maternal *function*, a metaphor in its own right, must recede into oblivion for a child to successfully acquire “identity” in any given cultural context. Ironically, Chodorow makes an insightful point regarding this dynamic. “Women are prepared psychologically for mothering through the developmental situation in which they grow

up, and in which women have mothered them” (39). Women who do choose to procreate learn *how* to mother by mimicking the strategies their own mothers employ(ed). Mothers who seize their potential to challenge prevailing ideology, therefore, produce children (and future mothers and fathers) who might endeavor to do the same.

Clearly, there is much at stake in this exploration. What are some of the elemental components of the symbolic order? How do cultural forces determine the trajectory of subject formation? Are these forces oppressive outgrowths of a *phallogentric* cultural inheritance? Can the *Law of the Father* be usurped? If so, is this usurpation theoretical? Is it metaphorical? Or can it be achieved through family dynamics and through the mother-child dyad? When is this usurpation necessary? When does it become a cultural or ethical imperative? Not only is it vital to address these issues, it is important to evaluate the historical framework from within which these questions have been proposed.

Since this project targets various representations of motherhood in twentieth century drama and how depictions of the mother-child dyad conjure methods by which cultural restructuring is prevented or made possible, this introduction warrants a foray into psychoanalytic theories of the maternal function and its role in subject formation. As Elizabeth Grosz submits, “a feminism interested in the questions of subjectivity, knowledge, and desire can afford to ignore Lacan’s work at its own peril. His work is among the most wide-ranging, philosophically sustained, and self-critical accounts of subjectivity thus developed within our intellectual history” (*Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* 191). Lacanian discourse, however, emerges from Freudian theory and because conceptions of the maternal function presented by Kristeva and Irigaray develop

in stark opposition to Freudian-Lacanian paradigms, a skeletal reconstruction of the maternal function, as understood by these four thinkers, is in order.¹

Freud and the Mother as Object

According to Freud, “no one possesses more than one mother, and the relation to her is based on an event that is not open to any doubt and cannot be repeated” (qtd. in Sprengnether 1). At the same time, however, Freud consistently evades the importance of the maternal function. Instead of assuming an *active* role in shaping her child, the mother, despite her central role in *producing* the child, occupies an objectified and *passive* position for Freud. The sexual dynamic at work in the mother-child dyad, the Oedipal complex, castration anxiety as experienced by both sexes, and the speculative scenario of the Primal Horde culminate to portray the mother as negation and lack. Psychologically hardwired to defer to a masculine standard, she perpetuates and guarantees patriarchal social structure. The Freudian conception of the maternal function, therefore, what can be understood for our purposes here as the *dutiful mother*, indiscriminately transmits any and all cultural norms that have been established by the primacy of the father.

Freud encapsulates the mother’s task as that of “teaching the child to love” (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 89). Her charge is to nurture and suckle the child, to meet all of its needs. In doing so, the mother provides the child with a model for affection; *how* she nurtures and supports conveys to the child a template for *how* to love. *How* the child experiences maternal love defines for the child *what* love is. Simultaneously, however, the child’s experience with the mother remains profoundly

sexually charged. A child's satisfaction, even as an infant, registers as sexual pleasure when its needs are met.²

For the male child, overt sexualization of the mother resurfaces during the Oedipal Complex when "the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them" (*The Ego and the Id* 640). For Freud, a little boy's desire to consummate sexual desire with the mother is organic, innate, and *natural*, but it cannot be actualized and must be eventually displaced onto a love-object outside of the family.³ This external love-object emerges as an incest barrier preventing taboo relations. This barrier is a cultural demand resulting from inherited psychic residue of primitive human experience, namely the events of the Primal Horde during which, as Freud postulates, sexual tensions and struggles for power resulted in revolt and patricide.⁴

Upon the murder of the patriarch in Freud's *primal scene*, the conceptualization of father-deities fills the void of supreme power and "a fatherless society gradually changed into one organized on a patriarchal basis" (*Totem and Taboo* 505). What Freud ultimately proposes here is a psychological basis for the idealization of the father. The incest taboo (the possession of the chieftain's wives) originates as a sin against the father. Since the original revolt yielded a longing for a paternal figure (and the emergence of God(s) the *father(s)*), respect for paternal authority thus develops into a societal necessity. Furthermore, Freud claims, "that during the human family's primaeval period castration used actually to be carried out by a jealous and cruel father upon growing boys" ("Lecture XXXII: Anxiety and Instinctual Life" 778). In other words, the primal father would threaten other males with castration if they attempted to engage in sexual

activity with his women. The fear experienced by these *prymaeval* men represents the kernel of castration anxiety: deviation from prevailing ideology (experienced first as physical desire for the mother) results in the loss of the penis. The young boy's desire to sleep with his mother, therefore, is curtailed by culturally established notions of conduct, the incest taboo inherited from the Primal Horde, and by the imagined threat of castration. This threat of castration appears immanent. After all, the male child experiences a traumatic phase during which he discovers the anatomical difference between boys and girls. During this period, the penis becomes the focal point of his existence.⁵

Clearly, however, all human beings do not possess a penis. In Freudian theory, a little boy determines "that little girls have a penis as well, only it is very small" or "it was cut off and in its place was left a wound" ("Leonardo DA Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" 460). Confronted by the phantasmic possibility that the penis can be removed or not present, the threat of castration becomes terrifyingly plausible. The male child, in an effort to prevent the loss of his penis, aligns himself with his father and abandons sexual desire for his mother. "Under the influence of this threat of castration he now sees the notion he has gained of the female genitals in a new light; henceforth he will tremble for his masculinity, but at the same time he will despise the unhappy creatures on whom the cruel punishment has, as he supposes, already fallen" (ibid. 460). The mother is at once the object of sexual desire and the object of disgust, or, as Madelon Sprengnether argues, "Freud idealizes the mother's devotion to her child, at the same time that he conceives of her as castrated and hence inferior or worthy of masculine

contempt” (3). The mother elicits *masculine contempt* because, lacking a penis, she has been punished for doing something wrong; she has been *castrated*.

In this phallogentric model, it follows that the father assumes the role of ego-ideal, the idealized model of behavior with which a subject identifies. “The ego ideal answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man. As a substitute for a longing for the father, it contains the germ from which all religions have evolved” (*The Ego and the Id* 643). Castration anxiety necessitates the development of the ego ideal and the superego accordingly. The fear of castration precipitates the development of ethical responsibility and morality.

But since women do not possess a penis, how do they develop ethico-moral obligations? If castration anxiety enables the emergence of morality and “appropriate” socialization, is the female not fundamentally and biologically alienated from the process? Freud provides a vague account of female castration anxiety. “A female child...does not understand her lack of a penis as being a sex character; she explains it by assuming that at some earlier date she had possessed an equally large organ and had then lost it by castration” (“The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex” 665). Freud claims, however, that the essential difference between girls and boys is their *response* to castration. Girls resign themselves to the reality that they have been castrated; little boys are motivated by the fear that they will be castrated. Still, one’s position in regards to the penis plays a profound role in psychical development. The young boy aligns himself with the father (the penis) and rejects the mother. The little girl seemingly aligns herself with the mother, but the female’s fundamental drives still revolve exclusively around the possession of a penis. Throughout her life, the female experiences *penis-envy* that can be

alleviated only possessing a child of her own. “She slips—along the line of a symbolic equation, one might say—from the penis to a baby. Her Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift—to bear him a child” (ibid. 665). Returning again to Tennessee Williams, the child as phallic emblem constitutes a central theme in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Margaret, fearing that since she has “not produced any children” she is “therefore totally useless,” constantly pleads Brick to father her a child (1137). Remaining beautiful in middle age, Maggie tells her husband “other men still want me. My face looks strained, sometimes, but I’ve kept my figure...and men admire it. I still turn heads on the street” (1145). Maggie, however, yearns for more than representing the object of male desire. Though she clearly needs that status, her attractiveness consists of but a means to an end. In her eyes, Maggie will remain incomplete until she creates a baby. Resentful of her brother-in-law, Gooper, and his wife because they have produced a flock of screaming kids, Maggie enviously calls Mae a “monster of fertility” (1138). Freudianism assumes that Margaret’s compulsion to procreate stems from her biological and emotional compulsion (her ontic-ontological need) to assume “identity” through motherhood. Clearly, this theory ignores the possibility that this “necessity” results from culturally constructed, not biologically determined, circumstances.

Upon having a baby, in this Freudian model, the mother experiences vicarious wholeness because her child becomes a substitute for the penis that she has been anatomically denied. “The mother [regards the child] with feelings that are derived from her own sexual life: she strokes him, kisses him, rocks him and quite clearly treats him as a substitute for a complete sexual object” (*Three Theories of Sexuality* 89). Freud clearly

articulates a phallogentric economy. The penis is at the center of all human development. The female gives birth out of a compulsion to possess a penis; the male rejects the female out of a desire to preserve possession of the penis.

Although females experience a “milder version” of the Oedipal complex and are inculcated into a culture that rejects incest, their impaired physiology inalterably hampers their formation of an ego-ideal:

For women the level of what is ethically normal is different for what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men... They show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility—all these would be amply accounted for by the modification in the formation of their superego.

(“Some Psychical Consequences” 677)

In this assessment, women are biologically incapable of developing stable concepts of justice, ethics, or rectitude. With no penis to lose, their super-ego can never fully materialize. Echoing this Freudian sentiment, Clive tells Harry in Churchill’s *Cloud 9*, “There is something dark about women, that threatens what is best in us. Between men that light burns brightly” (40). It is no wonder then that matricide must occur. As epicenter of human development, the penis signifies power, authority, and completeness. Freudian theory situates the phallus as the engine of psychical formation. The woman, therefore, represents that which is not male. The mother, as a distortion of the father, enables subjectivation by “getting out of the way.” The mother allows the male to signify

and provides for the daughter a model for how to do so. Tacitly, therefore, the mother perpetuates a patriarchal order, an order that, for Freud, is not variable or arbitrarily constructed, but is instead the organic outgrowth of the human psychic function.

Lacanian Law of the Father and Phallic Mother

The Lacanian model of psychodynamics, clearly indebted to Freudian theory, endeavors to extract the anatomical element (the literal penis) from Freud's schematic and situate the subject in a symbolic (and linguistic) context. Though Lacan seeks to reformat the Freudian paradigm, he relies heavily on Freudian presuppositions. He most clearly integrates Freudian theory by retaining a phallogocentric economy. For Freud, human psychological development is dominated by "the biological factor."⁶ Since human beings are significantly less developed at birth than are most other animals, Freud asserts, "the value of the object" that can protect the helpless child is "enormously enhanced" (*Seminar XX* 155). This *object* refers to the mother. The child becomes profoundly dependent upon this object but ultimately severs its bond with her upon entering the Oedipal stage during which the child's fascination with the penis develops. Though Freud never adequately discloses the origins of this fixation, Lacan, by designating Lack as the fundamental component of human experience, explains that Freud's phallogocentric economy results from an ontological demand for wholeness. Lacan, therefore, substitutes the Phallus (a *symbol* of completeness) for the phallus (the male sex organ).⁷

Before examining the Phallus, however, rehearsing Lacan's notion of the mother-child dyad and its role in subject development is in order. During infancy, the pre-oedipal phase, human experience consists primarily of *need*. The mother's breast satiates

the most primordial need. For this reason, need corresponds to what Lacan designates the order of the Real. The Real signifies the raw and brutal materiality of existence.⁸ In the pre-oedipal phase of the mother-child dyad, the infant's cry signals its needs and, when articulated, functions as a "demand" for the mother to illustrate her "proof of love" ("The Signification of the Phallus" 1307). The breast, although the object which when presented manifests fulfillment of this demand, can never sufficiently satiate the infant's desire because the infant's need surpasses milk, shelter, and protection; the child seeks *total union* with the mother. The infant yearns for "the radical form of the gift of what she does not have" (ibid. 1307). This *gift* (absolute attention) will never, can never, be bestowed upon the child. The mother will inevitably fail; giving herself entirely to the child is impossible.

This failure of mother-child fusion, however, does not come to bear until the subject-to-be enters the mirror phase of development at approximately eighteen months of age. For Lacan, all psychical formation hinges on the moment during which a human being first confronts a "picture" of its body. The reflected image presents a distorted sense of wholeness from which the child never recovers. Upon engaging this vision of a fixed, stable, and coherent form, the little boy or girl confuses the figure in the glass (or in the mother's iris) with an aggregate, totalized "self."

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the infans stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity, . . . would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form. . . This form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain

irreducible for the individual. (“The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” 1286)

In simpler terms, the child experiences *mis*-recognition; according to the child, the image “looking back” signifies a being with neither Lack nor Desire. Subsequently, Lacan designates this phase as the Imaginary order of development. This reflected form, seemingly without *motor incapacity*, propels the subject-to-be in a *fictional direction*, the unending pursuit for this idealized self, the *imago* or *Gestalt*. As Lacan indicates above, however, the “actual” ego emerges only as a *social determination*. As I shall soon discuss in further detail, subjectivity originates in the acquisition of language. Only from within a linguistic network of signifiers can the human being “be.”

With an understanding of the mirror stage, we can explore its consequences. Initially, the child revels in the delusion of completeness. Shortly thereafter, however, the child endures a traumatic realization: it is autonomous and therefore totally alone in the world. Cognizant now of its distinctness, the pre-subject, fueled by the terror of its physical independence, attempts to “swallow up” the mother in an effort to eradicate the barrier between itself and the daunting realm of exteriority (Otherness).

It is here that we can return to the Phallus. In the pre-oedipal and mirror phases, the mother radiates wholeness and completeness. In the pre-oedipal phase, the child has no concept of itself as a distinct being; it (unknowingly) perceives itself as part of the mother. Once the mirror stage wrenches the child from this delusion, the child becomes compelled create this state of wholeness by fusing with the mother. In this context, the mother, as image of wholeness and as that which can alleviate Lack, signifies the Phallus. The Phallus presents ultimate fullness. “For the phallus is...the signifier intended to

designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier” (“The Signification of the Phallus” 1306). By *conditioning the effects of the signified*, the Phallus is the master signifier, the unsigned guarantee of all meaning. Accordingly, Lacan divines the Phallus as “the privileged signifier” (ibid. 1308). In “Les Formations d L’Inconscient,” Lacan asserts, the “signifier of the signified in general is the phallus” (qtd. in Borch-Jacobson 211). In short, the Phallus designates the absence of Lack. The child’s jubilant response to its reflected image results from the phantasmic *Gestalt*; the child sees itself as a Phallic whole. Once this exhilaration diffuses into the terror of separation from the mother, the (pre)subject becomes consumed by Phallic desire for completion. Having an *imago* of one’s own reveals separation from the mother. Since this distance indicates Lack, the child’s Phallic desire presses it onto its mother. Bruce Fink states,

In separation, the subject attempts to fill the mOther...with his or her own lack of being...the subject tries to excavate, explore, align, and conjoin these two lacks, seeking out the precise boundaries of the Other’s lack in order to fill it with him or herself...Children set themselves the task of excavating the site of their mother’s desire, aligning themselves with her every whim and fancy. Her wish is their command, her desire their demand” (“The Subject and the Other’s Desire” 81).⁹

Try as he or she might, however, the mother always remains out of reach. The maternal, therefore, simultaneously represents total fullness and absolute Lack.

There is an obstacle that bars mother-child union. Lacan refers to this barricade as the paternal metaphor. As a figure with which the mother interacts, the paternal

function represents a third party that prevents the child from consuming the mOther. Upon acknowledging the presence of this foreign entity, the child begins to understand that fusing with the mother cannot occur. Every effort the child makes to possess the mother results in a resounding (yet metaphorical) NO (*non*)¹⁰; Law, in-the-name-of-the-father, emerges. The Law against union with the mother (what Freud refers to as incest taboo¹¹) initially operates as paternal censorship and rejection of the mother. Mark Bracher explains that exposure to the paternal metaphor “refers to the subject’s assumption of a position” in which the subject-in-becoming foregoes desire for the mother and begins its assimilation into the Symbolic world of order and cultural norms (51). In so doing, the child tears itself from “the passive narcissistic gratification experienced by the child in its apprehension of itself as primarily the object of the mother’s desire” (ibid. 51). This illusion of separation (for the two were never one) has the impact of *castration*. As is the case with Freud, connections with the mother must be cleaved for “appropriate” psychological development to occur.

Repudiation of the maternal and alignment with paternal Law constitutes entry into the Symbolic register of cultural practices and socially codified behavioral standards. Once again, we can return to the Phallus. Though Lacan deviates from Freud by imposing psychical value on the Phallus and, in theory, isolating the concept of the Phallus from the literal penis, Lacan inevitably retains the phallogocentric economy proffered by Freud. Two immediate questions surface. When signifying completeness, why does Lacan use a term clearly linked to the male reproductive organ? Why must the child reject the mother to gain entry into the Symbolic order and acquire subjectivity? As one might suspect, the “answers” to these questions are inexorably linked.

For Debra Bergoffen, “language is sedimented in tradition,” so “though there are no logical reasons for refusing to call the master signifier the phallus, there are powerful empirical reasons against it” (282). For Richard Boothby, however, “the penis is especially well suited...to represent the breakdown of an imaginary *Gestalt*” because “the anatomical vulnerability of the penis readily symbolizes the possibility of a violation of the body’s imaginary wholeness. Aside from the mother’s breast, the penis is the only bodily appendage unsupported by bone and the only appendage incapable of voluntary movement” (153). Considering the fact that the Phallus indicates absolute wholeness and the absence of Lack, Boothby’s logic holds water. At the same time, Boothby himself acknowledges that *the mother’s breast* contains no bone and cannot be moved voluntarily. Why, then, would the breast not signify this wholeness?

We can turn to Lacan when addressing this query. First, the breast constitutes the object of all desire (*petit objet a*).¹² As the child develops, he or she conflates the breast with total satisfaction. As discovered throughout psychological development, however, this satisfaction can never be attained. The mother-child dyad is riddled by failure. More pertinently, however, in the maternal figure resides a paradox. She simultaneously signifies reprieve from Lack and the manifestation of Lack. The fulfilling unity with her always fails, *and* the Lack experienced by this failure amplifies upon the child’s awareness that she has no penis. Echoing the same phallogocentric assumptions Freud posits, Lacan explains maternal Lack in *Seminar III*.

Where there is no symbolic material, there is an obstacle or defect to the realization of the identification essential to the realization of the subject’s sexuality. This defect comes from the fact that, in one specific, the

Symbolic lacks material – because it must have some. The feminine genitals have a character of absence, of emptiness, or of hole which causes them to be found less desirable than the masculine genitals. (qtd. in Ragland-Sullivan 286).

The penis, *the symbolic material*, indicates presence. On the contrary, the female genital denotes the presence of an absence and is a *defect*. This is Freud all over again. Lacan, however, deflects Freudian roots through semiotics. In Lacanian theory, the Phallus is not “the organ, penis, or clitoris that it symbolizes” (“The Signification of the Phallus” 1306). On the contrary, the Phallus can only appear through the trace. The penis, most adequately encapsulates the wholeness the Phallus signifies. “The father,” therefore, “is privileged over the mother because his gender difference symbolizes the opposite of need or loss” (Ragland-Sullivan 288). We can now begin to understand, at least in a Lacanian context, why Lacan employs the term, “Phallus,” and why the mother must be repudiated. The subject-to-be equates its mother’s failure to meet his needs with her “incomplete” anatomical package. The paternal metaphor assumes richer significance. Though first experienced as a rival for the mother’s love, the father transforms into an image of wholeness.

Rejection of the mother finalizes in the acquisition of language. The paternal metaphor, barring access to the mother, offers the child a consolation prize: subjectivity. Though responsible for the obliteration of the mother-child dyad, conforming to paternal law ushers the subject-in-becoming into the Symbolic order. *Language* permits this migration. Lacan contends “that language imposes being upon us and obliges us, as such, to admit that we never have anything by way of being” (*Seminar XX* 44). Enunciation,

not intrinsic essence, yields subjectivity. To be sure, however, this transition is a “forced choice.” Retaining Freudian dimensions, fear of castration, fear of winding up like the mother, prompts the “decision” to embrace paternal law and disavow the mother. “It does not presume a Real castration but an acknowledgment...of willingness to give up ...powerful desires to accept the Law” (*Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* 119). The *powerful desires* are the urges to end isolation by fusing with the mOther. For the male child, “his ‘reward’ is the preservation of the penis as a narcissistic organ...the male comes to be affirmed as possessing or *having* the phallus” (ibid. 119). Instead of possessing his mother, he possesses a penis. For the female child, alliance with the father reflects her disavowal of Lack. Furthermore, as with Freud, entry into the Symbolic enables a woman to be the object of male desire, and, as such, she can hope to one day possess a phallus of her own: a child.

Plagued by wholeness unfulfilled, the child associates completeness with the male genital and substitutes paternal law for phallic desire. Still a void at its core, the child seizes language and becomes a subject in so doing. Language, therefore, contains the promise of phallic wholeness. Lacan, however, claims that the Lack resulting from failed union can never be alleviated. Language is always an ineffective tool. Since “the signifier only takes on importance when it is posited that what you hear, in the auditory sense of the term, bears no relation whatsoever to what it signifies,” all language is “marked by failure” (*Seminar XX* 29). Furthermore, when Lacan claims, “in the unconscious is the whole structure of language,” he asserts that the human mind is structured as language is structured; meaning is possible only within a network of signs and symbols (“The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious” 1290). Further still, *all*

linguistic structures fail to adequately impart meaning. “There is no language (*langue*) in existence for which there is any question of its inability to cover the whole field of the signified,” yet every subject remains “the slave of language” (ibid. 1293, 91). In short, as a signifier can never sufficiently harness the totality of the signified, the subject, produced by and structured like a linguistic system, can never articulate its “self.” There is always a gap, a Lack, between the word and the thing, between thought and expression. Subjectivity itself emerges as, and is condemned to remain, a symptom of this gap. As Lacan states in *Seminar XIV*, “it’s the subject himself who is not there to begin with” (qtd. in “The Subject and the Other’s Desire” 79).

Human psychical experience, therefore, is forever plagued by Lack and failure. In both the Freudian and Lacanian paradigm, the mother introduces the child to both. As a result, subjectivity, as simply the illusion of wholeness, occurs only through rejection of the mother. Lacan’s metaphor in *Seminar XVII* depicts the urgency of this disavowal.

The mother is a big crocodile and you find yourself in her mouth. You never know what may set her off suddenly, making those jaws clamp down. That is the mother’s desire... There is a roller, made of stone, of course, which is potentially there at the level of the trap, and that holds and jams it open. That is what we call the phallus. It is a roller that protects you, should the jaws suddenly close. (qtd. in “The Subject and the Other’s Desire” 84)

Clearly, the maternal functions as a monstrosity, as a threat to life and autonomy. Only by severing ties to her can healthy subjectivation occur.¹³ Though psychologically, she is the emblem of wholeness, anatomically, she represents the very Lack from which the

child must flee. Flight from the mirror is flight from Lack; alignment with the father is flight from Lack; acquisition of language is flight from Lack. In each case, however, Lack prevails. Lacan conflates maternal desire with the jaws of a crocodile because, “the desire of the mother *is* the phallus,” for she is devoid of a penis and yearns symbolically to fill that void by giving birth to a child; concurrently, “if the desire of the mother *is* the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire” (“Signification of the Phallus” 1309). Lacan suggests here that the mother-child dyad consists of a toxic relation. As the child seeks wholeness within the mother, the mother views the child as access to the completeness she has been anatomically denied. Finally, though the Phallus indicates jubilant completion, it is paradoxically “the signifier or creator of the lack that establishes substitutive Desire as a permanent ontological state and makes adult ‘wanting’ a shadow pantomime of the primordial drama of Desire between mother and infant” (Ragland-Sullivan 271). All human misery, all feelings of emptiness and angst, originate in the failings of the mother.

In this phallogocentric economy, it only follows that culture, politics, and law (all ideology and the Symbolic Order itself) originate in and emanate from phallic presence, thus can only be articulated by the Law of the Father. In *Seminar II*, Lacan articulates this sentiment with shocking clarity, “The Symbolic order in its initial functioning is androcentric. That is a fact” (qtd. in Ragland-Sullivan 289). This *androcentric function* is experienced first as the law of the paternal metaphor. That function, despite its *metaphoric* dimensions, results in an *actual* patriarchal social structure.

We encounter the dramatization of such a structure in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* when Linda Loman, a profoundly *dutiful* mother, devotes herself entirely to her

husband's symbolic world. The extent to which an androcentric culture valorizes the Father comes to bear with disastrous consequences. Linda perceives her husband as patriarch and head of the family despite his descent into fantasy, self-delusion, and emotional deterioration. Although she expresses anxiety over his condition, she enslaves herself to paternal authority instead of confronting the traumatic reality of the situation. She would rather enable his suicide than undermine or threaten his power. When Linda realizes that Biff's attitude will demolish this dynamic, she "chooses" paternal authority over obligation to her children when she shouts to her sons, "get out of here, both of you, and don't come back! I don't want you tormenting him anymore" (124). This *torment* indicates taboo repudiation of paternal law. Although Linda cannot be held responsible for Willy's behavior, she is clearly complicit in his fantasy. Her compliance, furthermore, germinates from the sanctity of the phallus. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy, like Amanda Wingfield, confines himself to a past during which he possessed a stable sense of self. When Biff discovered Willy's affair, the moral purity of paternal law collapsed. Though Biff keeps his father's infidelity a secret from Linda, Willy's pathology cannot be concealed. Miller's work amplifies the dangers of a passive and docile mother. Linda's identity exists as an outgrowth of male subjectivity. In this context, remaining "true to herself" occurs only by standing faithfully by her man. The play does not provide the audience with any alternate universe, a universe in which Linda challenges her conditions instead of perpetuating them. Sadly, Lacanian assertions suggest that such an alternate universe does not exist.

Though Lacan has reformatted the Freudian psychical model, Lacanian theory recycles the Freudian assertion that woman is a distortion of a male norm. Subjectivity is

engendered through relation to the Phallus, and this relation culminates in signification when desire for the mother is replaced by adherence to paternal law. At the core of Lacanian theory is a desire for presence...the presence of a penis, the presence of the Phallic signifier, the presence of wholeness and completeness. The roots of human suffering are absence, lack, desire. Woman possesses an anatomical reminder of the lack, desire, and absence that haunt subjectivity. The Law of the Father combats this threat of Real psychical conditions. Woman, therefore, as in the Freudian model, is the other, the aberration. Without a penis, she is fueled only by desire for what she does not have, and her desire for phallic presence is a harsh reminder to humanity that all human experience is rooted in insatiable desire. To ensure psychical health, therefore, the mother's role is to facilitate the child's assimilation into the Symbolic Order, into culture and ideology, into paternal law. Else she is a crocodile in whose jaws the subject meets doom, pathology, and madness.

The Quandary

In 1846, pre-dating Freudian assertions by decades and Lacanian theory by nearly a century, Karl Marx challenges a conception of the subject which had remained undisturbed for millennia. In "Consciousness Derived from Material Conditions," he posits, "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (391). In sum, the human being springs not from an essential core or primordial identity; instead, cultural context assembles the subject. Though Marx submits his claim in a socio-economic context, his understanding of subject-formation simultaneously paves the way for Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and undermines their paradigms. For Freud, biological processes and their impact on the unconscious problematize notions like "the

soul” and human essence. For Freud, family dynamics and anatomical features assume the role of cultural context. These factors act in tandem to construct the subject. Lacan follows suit. Embedded in the psyche, the desire for wholeness fuels every aspect of the human experience. This universal reality shapes subjectivation. As with Freud, family dynamics and anatomical features dictate this process. Lacan clearly renounces the existence of fundamental ontological matter; the speaking being, on the contrary, consists of Lack.

At the same time, however, the Freudian and Lacanian paradigms each idealize the phallus. Accordingly, both thinkers position the father as origin of culture and of law. Since rejection of the mother enables subject formation and since this rejection derives from the desire to keep the phallus or obtain the phallic child, Freudian-Lacanian theories presuppose that phallic privilege reflects a prime-original component of human psychical wiring. Only through this reasoning can one conflate paternity and the Law. The father produces and sanctions culture (via production of the Law) because he has a penis. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “culture” as both: “a particular form or type of intellectual development. Also, the civilization, customs, artistic achievements, etc., of a people, esp. at a certain stage of its development or history” and “the training, development, and refinement of mind, tastes, and manners; the condition of being thus trained and refined.” Culture, then, is both produced by and producer of its subjects. We—the subjects—are *trained* to assimilate the priorities and practices of our social landscape. In Althusserian terms, ideology interpellates subjects into social structures that pre-exist us.¹⁴ Patriarchal culture, for example, inculcates subjects to conform to patriarchal mandates.

With this in mind, do Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis fall prey to integrating *existing* socio-cultural norms into theories of psychological formation? Has society evolved as a patriarchal machine because of organic bio-psycho-social factors, or has a patriarchal machine generated hypotheses of subject formation that are inseparable from its machinery? Is rejection of the maternal function essential for subjectivation? Or must the mother be disavowed to perpetuate patriarchal culture? Finally, what impacts do Freudian and Lacanian assertions have on motherhood? On femininity? On Otherness? A turn to Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva provides insight on these queries and offers feminist “correctives” to the Freudian-Lacanian paradigms. For Irigaray and Kristeva, there is nothing inherently paternal about the Law. Law belongs to the father only when the father designs and delivers it. Moreover, the resulting patriarchal structures come to be only in paradigms in which the mother is passive and unheard.

Kristevan *Physio-Psychology*

Julia Kristeva challenges the phallocentrism of the Freudian-Lacanian paradigms from within their structures. In general, she maintains the dynamics of subjectivation proffered by these two pivotal figures in psychoanalytic theory. Accepting that the mirror stage prompts castration anxiety and effectively results in separation from the mother and conceding that language enables subjectivity, Kristeva significantly deviates from Freudian and Lacanian positions by submitting, a) the maternal body, by inaugurating a series of biological processes, prepares the developing subject for the trauma of the mirror phase and b) these same biological processes ensure the intelligibility of language while also threatening to undermine the stability of any and all linguistic systems. In her resulting bio-linguistic psychoanalytic, the maternal function

no longer operates as a docile body. On the contrary, the maternal function, as we shall see, mediates the Law. Though she may elect to passively defer to paternal law, and though culture may condition her for this deferral and expect it from her, the mother wields the power to put the law “on trial.” To be sure, Kristeva argues that subjectivation results from entry into the Symbolic (thus through separation from the maternal body), but the maternal function, as subversive and revolutionary force, endures and can shape the subject’s ontological trajectory, consequently restructuring the Symbolic terrain if and when necessary.

In her correctives to Freudian-Lacanian theory, Kristeva attributes significant meaning to the pre-oedipal phase of development, a period virtually ignored by her predecessors. Kristeva agrees that the mirror stage signals an intelligible confrontation with Otherness, but she proposes that there are biological functions at work that prepare the subject-in-becoming for the traumatic realization of its own autonomy:

Before recognizing itself as identical in a mirror and, consequently, as signifying, this body is dependent vis-à-vis the mother. At the same time instinctual and maternal, semiotic processes prepare the future speaker for entrance into meaning and signification (the symbolic). (“From One Identity to the Other” 104)

These processes include metabolization and respiration. One consumes food and expels waste; one breathes in oxygen and expels carbon dioxide. In these cases, the physical body absorbs material and excretes the unnecessary. These excretions indicate excess and waste which leave the body in the form of Otherness. These operations are “the body’s drives observable through muscular contractions” (ibid. 102). These processes,

albeit physiologically and involuntarily, occasion a precursory distinction between self and other. Internalization and comprehension of this distinction occurs during the mirror stage. A sense of autonomy and otherness, however, the *result* of the mirror stage, cannot occur without the biological precedent for these concepts. Kristeva presents this precedent, *primary narcissism*, as the pre-linguistic state during which bodily drives precondition the pre-subject for the separation that occurs during the mirror stage.

During this pre-linguistic stage, the infant is exposed to the *abject*. The abject, quite simply, indicates the materiality of existence. Essentially, the abject parallels the Lacanian Real.

What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*...what is *abject*...draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (“Approaching Abjection” 230).

Abjection is a reminder of mortality, of death, of chaos and destruction. The abject, as *that of being opposed to I*, demonstrates the traumatic reality that *I* am not all and shatters the *Gestalt*. Abjection evinces Lack, disunity, and incompleteness. The horrors of abjection never disappear and register throughout human life as revulsion to external stimuli.¹⁵ Law, culture, and ideology, all grafted onto the chaos of abjection, distract us from the Real and horrifying nature of our material existence. Any exposure to our materiality and finitude, however, remind us of abjection. “Refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death” (ibid. 231).

I renounce the abject physiologically; *I vomit; I wince; I turn away*. The subject recoils from abjection, and The Phallus, as that which signifies a desire for wholeness, offers a beacon of hope that can rescue me from abjection. The law, therefore, safeguards against abjection; civilization and the social pact minimize my traumatic exposure to the abject.

Kristeva returns to the Freudian scenario of the Primal Horde as the ontogenetic source of this social pact.¹⁶ The act of incest undermines the father's reign; it is improper, inappropriate, a defilement. As such, it is *impure*. For Kristeva, "*the impure is that which does not respect boundaries, that which mixes structures and identities*" (*The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt* 21). To disrespect boundaries, to mix identities eradicates autonomy, blurs, and conflates. The maternal, therefore, becomes invariably linked to the impure. Furthermore, the umbilicus is tissue that is both mother and child, the tissue that is neither mother nor child. This space is one of ambiguous boundary and mixed identity, a "*chora*, receptacle, unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the One, to the father" ("From One Identity to an Other" 102). Although Plato designates the receptacle as the formless site of generation, Kristeva *abjectifies* the chora as a space of fusion, conflation, perversion, impurity, and defilement. The chora signifies the taboo because it defies classification and assimilation into order and Law. It is a container that cannot be contained. The chora is perverse because it is in-between, transcendent, immanent, obscene in its chaotic Truth.

Kristeva links this sense of meaning, of obscene Truth, to maternal terrain, to the body, to materiality. Conflation mirrors abjection because fusion destroys subjectivity and therefore threatens to raze Symbolic structures. "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not

respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (“Approaching Abjection” 232). It is no surprise for Kristeva, then, that the feminine plays no role in Freud’s primal scene; the feminine-maternal, as abject must be excluded from the social pact. “Purification, the elimination of taint, and protection against the maternal are at the heart of the constitution of the sacred” (*The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt* 21). The mother, the emblem of abjection, elicits fear and must be rejected for the sanctity of order.

Such an understanding of the mother can be first conceived as problematic. If the mother is associated with the impure, the tainted, and the abject, it seems again *natural* that subject formation would follow the Freudian-Lacanian trajectory of rejecting the mother for the Law of the Father. One denounces the abject in pursuit of order and security. In the Lacanian model, assimilation into paternal law is finalized through the acquisition of language. In the Lacanian schema, therefore, the speaking subject has denounced the maternal. For Elizabeth Grosz, therefore, “Kristeva remains the dutiful daughter in so far as she enacts for herself and reproduces for other women the roles of passivity and subordination dictated to women by patriarchal culture and affirmed by psychoanalysis” (*Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* 167). Grosz, however, minimizes the revolutionary dimensions of Kristeva’s linguistic theory. The body, the *abject*, is not replaced by the Symbolic Order and language. As Kristeva supplements the mirror stage with primary narcissism, she re-imagines the complexity of language. Though she agrees with Lacan that language enables subjectivity and signification, she rejects the idea that language is a purely symbolic function. Language functions as a system of inter-dependent signifiers that enable meaning. One’s ability to harness the

power of language and communicate with the other a) signals acknowledgment of the existing gulf between the self and the other, and b) is contingent on one's assimilation into a mutually recognized lexicon and grammatical structure. In this way, language signals subjectivity and inculcation into culture, into the Law of the Father. For Kristeva, words, grammar, intelligible expression constitute *symbolic* language, "thus, a phoneme, as distinctive element of meaning, belongs to language as the symbolic" ("From One Identity to an Other" 103).¹⁷ Symbolic language, however, does not represent the only dimension of articulation. Infused with *semiotic* elements, symbolic language assumes texture, depth, and intelligibility. Gestures, body language, intonation are all semiotic elements of communication. Semiotic rhythms and tones, bodily energy, undergird all signifying practices.

The equivalent of incest: it is within the economy of signification itself that the questionable subject-in-process appropriates to itself this archaic, instinctual, and maternal territory; thus it simultaneously prevents the word from becoming mere sign and the mother from becoming an object like any other—forbidden. ("From One Identity to an Other" 104)

The *incestuous* semiotic blurs and conflates borders. In this context, semiotic is impure, abject. Moreover, by *preventing the word from becoming mere sign*, the semiotic shatters the possibility for meaning; the abject constantly threatens to undermine intelligibility, order, and paternal law. The semiotic pulses with revolt, revolution, and usurpation. At the same time, however, the semiotic does not "exist" on its own terms; as the Lacanian Symbolic assumes meaning only in relation to the Real and to the Imaginary, the semiotic functions only alongside the symbolic.

Although originally a precondition of the symbolic, the semiotic functions within signifying practices as the result of a transgression of the symbolic. Therefore the semiotic that “precedes” symbolization is only a *theoretical supposition* justified by the need for description. It exists in practices only within the symbolic and requires the symbolic break to obtain the complex articulation we associate with it. (“Revolution in Poetic Language” 118)

Language (thus subjectivity) emerges from the symbiotic relation between semiotic and symbolic modes of expression. For Judith Butler, however, “the semiotic is invariably subordinate to the symbolic” (“The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva” 105). In this claim, Butler misreads Kristevan linguistic structure. Though symbolic language is *audible*, a subject’s utterances are always already embedded with the semiotic. Stemming from her misconception of this linguistic model, Butler concludes, “Kristeva describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. She thereby safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially pre-cultural reality” (ibid. 105-6). In short, Butler charges that Kristeva, by linking abjection, maternity, and the semiotic, relegates the maternal-feminine to a position fundamentally outside Symbolic-symbolic structure, thus recycling Platonic-Freudian-Lacanian notions of femininity, yet Butler fails to recognize the revolutionary potential of Kristeva’s maternal space.

To be sure, Kristeva identifies with semiotic force as *outside* paternal-Symbolic law. Moreover, this force originates in and exudes from the body. Further still, Kristeva associates this semiotic energy with *maternal territory*, for it is beyond and behind paternal law. For critics of Kristeva, this alignment presents problems. Mary G. Dietz

contends that Kristeva's arguments "are variously materialist, maternalist, and semiotic in their theoretic predispositions" and articulate "a perspective that defends the moral and subversive possibilities of women's role as reproducer, nurturer, and preserver of vulnerable human life" (Dietz 113). Similarly, Madelon Sprengnethor submits that Kristeva "flirts with essentialism" (219). Though Kristeva clearly presents sweeping claims about the maternal function, her argument must be contextualized with Freudian-Lacanian discourse in which paternal authority and phallic privilege envelope and eradicate the mother and pre-oedipal phases. In *Beyond Accomodation*, Drucilla Cornell speaks to this quandary. "There is a difference between an appeal to essence and the illumination of feminine specificity as an explicit ethical and political position...not every 'context' involves essence," and it is a mistake that "we should even adopt the word 'essence' when we are indicating specificity. It is precisely the confusion of essentialism with any writing of the specificity of feminine difference that leads to the belief that we risk either 'essentialism' or indifference" (181). Though Kristeva presents us with the power of the maternal function, she does not reduce the feminine experience to motherhood. On the contrary, straitjacketed by phallogocentric discourse, Kristeva adopts the language and metaphorical devices that dominate her field in an effort to articulate *the explicit ethical and political position* of Woman within the conceptual framework of Freudian and Lacanian psychodynamics. In this light, the maternal function represents a counter-force to the phallogocentric economies.¹⁸ Kristeva's theoretical assertions culminate in the notion that the maternal function possesses the power to exist in opposition to paternal law. No longer is the mother simply "a source of silent support, a useful backdrop, and an invisible intermediary" ("The Woman Effect"

105). The mother is a dynamic and contributing figure. Instead of dutifully deferring or acquiescing to paternal law, the mother guarantees it through active endorsement.

Even if signification occurs only through rejecting the horrifying conditions of existence, a rejection experienced as embracing paternal law, these horrifying conditions are always already an inevitable reality for the subject. It is essential to realize is that it is not the mother, *per se*, who is to be identified with these horrors, nor is it the father who is to be identified as that which rescues the subject from this horror. These poles, order and chaos, are sexless. These conceptual spaces are *feminized* and *masculinized* by and through Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Designations of masculinity and femininity result from the paradigms themselves.

For Kristeva, the neutrality of these poles correlates to *archaic* functions. The *archaic father*, or *the Father of Individual Pre-History*, loosely equates to Eros, Freud's term for the life-drive, the will to reproduce, and the desire for community, culture, and law. Similarly, the *archaic mother* can be associated with the *nirvana principle*, the death-drive. The death-drive emerges in the child's compulsion to fuse with the mother; fusion with the other results only in eradication of subjectivity. To signify, therefore, the child must embrace the law and identify with the father of individual pre-history. In an interview with Rosalind Coward, Kristeva discusses the role of the mother in subject formation. Here, Kristeva equates teaching a child to love with assimilating the subject into the order. In order to accomplish these objectives, the mother must have a love-object that exists independent of the child; the mother's love must be qualified and contextualized by her ability to love something outside of the child: "The good-enough mother is the mother who has something else to love besides her child; it could be work,

her husband, her lovers, etc. If for a mother the child is the meaning of her life, it's too heavy. She has to have another meaning in her life. And this other meaning is the father of prehistory" ("In Conversation with Rosalind Coward" 334).¹⁹ Of primary importance, however, is that this father of prehistory be something that the mother can respect and with which she can identify. Essentially, therefore, the father of prehistory is *not necessarily* paternal law or the Symbolic Order. Instead, this father of prehistory signifies that to which the mother is committed. This father can be art, politics, religion...anything.

In the absence of an archaic father, the mother loses herself in motherhood. Committed *entirely* to subordinating her needs and focusing *only* on her child, this mother, having sacrificed every sense of self, risks devouring her child or risks the doom of profound existential dissatisfaction. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Eugene O'Neill masterfully conveys the deep despair caused when a mother relinquishes her archaic father because she thinks (or has been culturally conditioned) that sublimation of selfhood constitutes motherhood. After years of devoting herself to the family, the only peace Mary Tyrone experiences comes from a prescription she injects into her veins. In a morphine haze, she relives days during which she had interests and goals beyond mothering children and being a good wife.

I used to love to play the piano. I worked so hard at the Convent – if you can call it work when you do something you love. Mother Elizabeth and my music teacher both said I had more talent than any student they remembered...I had two dreams. To be a nun, that was the more beautiful

one. To become a concert pianist, that was the other...For a time after my marriage I tried to keep up with my music. But it was hopeless. (106)

Tragically, the abyss of addiction swallows Mary Tyrone. With debilitated, arthritic fingers unable to stroke the keys and no longer possessing the “purity” that the habit demands, Mary allowed birth to kill her dreams. To be sure, however, it requires great courage and strength for a mother to resist this fate. Living in a patriarchal world as conceived by Freudian-Lacanian theories, a woman must vigilantly protect not just her children, but her aspirations, ethics, and goals. The object-relations psychoanalyst, Winnicott, in stark opposition to Kristevan assertions, suggests that all mothers should dismiss their needs.

A woman’s life changes in many ways when she conceives a child. Up to this point, she may have been a person of wide interests...Experience shows, however, that a change gradually takes place in the feelings as well as in the body of the girl who has conceived. Shall I say her interests gradually narrow down?...As you become more and more sure that you will soon become a mother you begin to put all your eggs into one basket. (19-20)

This conception of motherhood, clearly inspired by Freudian theory, denies the mother her own ontological status and demands that, in becoming mother, she cease to be a subject.

For Kristeva, however, the mother’s devotion to a third term plays a pivotal role in the subject formation of her child. Just as the paternal metaphor initiates the law In-the-Name-of-the-Father, Kristeva’s father of individual prehistory conditions the child to

accept and internalize Law. Kristeva, however, positions the mother as a figure with ideology of her own. Though the child must separate from the mother to assume its own subjectivity, the child integrates into *prevailing ideology* (the law of the Father) if and when the mother sanctions that Law:

She will love her child with respect to that Other, and it is through a discourse aimed at that Third Party that the child will be set up as “loved” for the mother. “Isn’t he beautiful,” or “I am so proud of you,” and so forth, are statements of maternal love because they involve a Third Party; it is in the eyes of a Third Party that the baby the mother speaks to becomes a *he*, it is with respect to others that “I am proud of you,” and so forth. (“Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents” 148)

In this passage, the *Other* is culture. Any qualitative statements that articulate ‘pride’ or ‘beauty’ connote an implicit comparison to an existing norm. *I am proud of your achievements (when I compare them to the achievements of others)*. *I think you are beautiful (in relation to existing notions of beauty)*. These statements, therefore, function only if this existing norm is recognized. Moreover, these statements are expressed to a third term. The mother’s pride is verbalized to a community. The mother must have a relationship to a *Big Other*, so the child can emulate this identification in its process of separation and subsequent assimilation.

The maternal function becomes perverse, however, if the mother indiscriminately perpetuates the law. In other words, if the law possesses value merely because it is *law*, the potential for corruption and oppression explode. Ideally, the mother endorses the law because it is just.²⁰ Validity and justice should be mutually inclusive. If slippage occurs,

and codification or perpetuity trump justness, the mother relinquishes her power and succumbs to an alien will:

Feminine perversion (*pere-version*) is coiled up in the desire for law as desire for reproduction and continuity, it promotes feminine masochism to the rank of structure stabilizer (against its deviations); by assuring the mother that she may thus enter into an order that is above humans' will it gives her her reward of pleasure. Such coded perversion, such close combat between maternal masochism and the law have been utilized by totalitarian powers of all times to bring women to their side, of course, they have succeeded easily. ("Stabat Mater" 328)

In short, indiscriminate collusion with the paternal law can produce *totalitarian power*. As we shall explore in detail in the upcoming chapter, precisely this psychodynamic is staged in Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*; Bernarda Alba is unquestioningly complicit in meting out paternal law. Upon the death of her husband, she perpetuates the law of an absent master. Moreover, if one reads *The House of Bernarda Alba* as Lorca's commentary on Franco's tyrannical grasp of Spain, the notion that maternal docility can result in fascism takes shape. Bernarda Alba clearly collaborates in the transmission of paternal law. Her archaic father of individual prehistory is the Order itself. This unquestioning subordination to ideology is the same condition a regime requires when constructing a totalitarian state. Kristevan propositions, though stemming from the Freudian-Lacanian positions, oppose phallogocentric conceptions of subjectivation. To be sure, their phallogocentric models situate the maternal function *as* this indiscriminate collusion, *as* this passive indifference. So as Kristeva maintains the necessity of paternal

law, of the authority of the archaic father, she positions paternal law as contingent on the cooperation of the mother. Subject formation, therefore, becomes a collaborative effort. Signification occurs when the child accedes to the Law of the Father and assimilates into that law, but this acceptance and assimilation require maternal validation of the law. If the Symbolic Order is itself unjust, “its reformulation demands the contribution of women” (“Stabat Mater” 328). Revolt is the bending or the breaking of paternal law. That which is outside the law can only accomplish this. It is clear that the “feminine,” at least in a patriarchal, androcentric structure, represents a space beyond the law. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan claims: “not all of a woman is subject to symbolic castration” (72). The *not all* here is crucial. As a subject, a woman has no choice but to assimilate into the social order, acquire language, and navigate the Symbolic. At the same time, however, a woman has no literal penis that can be castrated and any castration anxiety is therefore metaphoric and never literal. Consequently, something of Woman may escape symbolic castration or does not submit entirely to the symbolic law. In a phallogocentric economy, woman, by biological definition, exists (at least partially) outside of the law. This alien position, however, is only *other than* the male norm in the Freudian Lacanian models, in schemas that presuppose patriarchal power structures. Only in these conceptions of psychodynamics does Woman exist outside the law. To be sure, no essential or natural mechanism, biological or otherwise, exists that positions woman outside the law. Woman’s position as an outsider depends the conditions of the Symbolic Order; it is when the law is a patriarchal construct that Woman cannot be entirely thematized or assimilated. Kristeva conveys this message when she claims, “In woman, I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and

beyond nomenclatures and ideologies” (qtd. in Grosz 166). It is in this context that Derrida concludes, “that which will not be pinned down by truth [truth?] is, in truth, *feminine*” (*The Ear of the Other* 163). That which can be neither seen nor heard constitutes the nebulous and abstract site of the Truth. Woman, as Lack and abjection, reawakens in humanity fears of finitude, instability, and materiality. For Freud and Lacan, therefore, she must be jettisoned so the illusion of order can be maintained. More accurately, however, the feminine-maternal must be repressed and marginalized to substantiate the phallic primacy of patriarchal social structure. As Kristeva illustrates, however, maternal space vibrates with an energy that can reshape cultural Law. The Crocodile is scary indeed.

Irigaray and the Phallacies of Philosophy

Luce Irigaray explores the impacts of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis on feminine subjectivity. By examining the extent of phallic privilege in their models, she concludes that the phallogocentric economy these polemics assert results in erasure of the feminine. “The Sex Which is Not One” zeroes in on how these inherited ontological approaches violently eradicate Otherness and reduce difference to elements of the Same. For her, male subjectivity has been historically understood as universal reality. “Female Sexuality has always been theorized within masculine parameters” (23). To be sure, the Freudian model revolves around the male genital, and the Lacanian subject pursues the Phallus. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud claims that the “libido is invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature, whether it occurs in men or in women and irrespectively of whether its object is a man or a woman” (85). In *Seminar XX*, Lacan posits that “there’s no such thing as Woman because, in her essence...she is not-

whole” (72-3). According to Freud and Lacan, woman cannot be characterized; she signifies only insofar as she is not male.²¹ Following this trajectory, the mother is the non-father and should therefore passively defer (as Freud and Lacan would have her do) to the will of culture and of the Father-God.

For Irigaray, feminine erasure can be traced back to antiquity. In 360 BCE, Plato’s *Timaeus* establishes a philosophical precedent for Woman as Lack or void. To be sure, Greek ontology privileges form over matter. Form is idea, the *true* thing-in-itself; the physical manifestation of the form in matter is but a flawed copy. Form constitutes “a self-same condition – unbegotten and imperishable,” whereas matter indicates the copy, “that which has the same name as the form and is similar to it” (*Timaeus* 84) [52 A]. Plato, however, speaks of the process of *generation*. When form converts into matter, a third being emerges. This third term, a container that Plato likens to “that of Space,” produces the copy (ibid. 84) [52 B]. This *receptacle*, as a passive position in which the production of matter occurs, proffers neither influence nor contribution to the creative process.

Plato articulates a fundamental notion that “woman” (the mother specifically) represents an “invisible and shapeless” container (*Timaeus* 83) [51 A].²² As such, the feminine corresponds to “a receptacle for all becoming, a sort of wet-nurse” (ibid. 81) [49 B]. The nature to which she remains true indicates a negative state. As *wet-nurse for all becoming*, woman, devoid of essence, produces form but never possesses any intelligible shape. For Plato, there exists “that which comes to be, that *in which* it comes to be, and that *from which* what comes to be sprouts as something copied. And what’s more, it’s fitting to liken the receiver to a *mother*, the ‘from which’ to a *father*, and the nature

between these to an *offspring*” (ibid. 83) [50 D]. In short, there is the real form (father), the thing generated (the child-copy), and the mother is the docile body enabling this production. Given the emptiness of the feminine, one can interpret that the real resemblance in her would only be in the *male* child she generates.²³ In this regard, Plato suggests that patriarchal social structures mirror culture’s inevitable and *natural* state.

Do Freudian and Lacanian theories not echo these Platonic conceptions? Irigaray cannot ignore the parallels. The idea of the thing is privileged over the thing itself, Form privileged over Matter; the phallus privileged over the gaping wound. This formula reduces Woman to the status of *object*. “If traditionally, and as a mother, woman represents a *place* for man, such a limit means that she becomes a *thing*” (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 10). Once objectified, the feminine dissipates into the producer of subjectivity. This subjectivity, however, is not her own. In her meditation on the Platonic conception of the receptacle, Irigaray asserts that Plato’s schema marginalizes woman as formless Other (what Lacan refers to as not-all) and such a formulation of human psychology results in one sex (*homo*-sexuality)...male subjectivity. Irigaray suggests that, “the receptacle receives the marks of everything, understands and includes everything—except itself—but its relation to the intelligible is never actually established. The receptacle can produce everything, “mime” everything, except itself: it is the womb of mimicry” (“Cosi Fan Tutti” 101). As the wellspring of masculine subjectivity, she covets the phallus, seeks refuge in the male gaze, and integrates, at the price of her own Being, into a patriarchal Symbolic in hopes of acquiring a phallic child. “Which means that, since her status as envelope and thing(s) has not been interpreted, she remains inseparable from the work or act of man, notable insofar as he defines her and creates *his*

identity with her as his starting point or, correlatively, with this determination of her being” (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 10). Conflating Platonic conception of the receptacle with Freudian-Lacanian phallic privilege, Irigaray illustrates the logic of feminine erasure.

In her work, *Top Girls*, Caryl Churchill offers literary insight into the philosophical problems that Irigaray addresses. During her dinner with an ensemble of historical women, Marlene hears from them tales of feminine “success.” Their achievements, however, are only possible by *imitating* male subjectivity. Joan impersonates a boy, so she can be educated. Nijo embraces her position as concubine; she perceives her value as contingent on her ability to be the object of male desire. Griselda, an obedient wife, sacrifices her children to prove her love, dedication, and submission to paternal authority. In all three of these cases, women can only experience a sense of power or worth if they conform to the parameters of a patriarchal system. With subjectivity not “their own,” they must navigate within borders that have been erected for them and not by them. Joan, who is so convincing in drag that she becomes pope claims, “I never obeyed anyone. They all obeyed me” (33). Even Joan, as God’s representative on earth, possessed no real power because, ascending through the ranks *in drag*, conceded to the impossibility of female signification. Moreover, all of these women share with Marlene that their lives were destroyed by their attempts to co-opt a foreign subjectivity. Joan and her baby are stoned to death when her “true” identity is discovered; Nijo is discarded into exile; Griselda, though willing to submit to her husband’s *tests*, suffers abandonment by a husband who, paradoxically, wants “someone else who’d give him an heir” (35).

Though stunned and disgusted by the behavior of these women, Marlene's life has tragically followed their models. Marlene rejects her own daughter, Angie, in order to pursue professional advancement in an employment agency, a firm devoted to perpetuating the same patriarchal cycle that has destroyed these women. For Marlene to succeed in the business world she has to behave like a man; motherhood presents an obstacle by which she refuses to be bound. This play explores the consequences of an order in which women are *perceived*, by themselves as well as by collectively acknowledged ideological notions, as devoid of "their own" subjectivity.

Irigaray, therefore, emphasizes the importance of sexual difference. By equating the feminine with deeper Lack, literal castration, and incompleteness, and by designating the phallus as fulcrum of psychical development, Freud and Lacan negate the possibility for feminine modes of signification. For Irigaray, departure from notions of subjectivity as a self-identical, masculine construct yields "the production of a new age of thought," and she proposes, "sexual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any known to date" (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 5). She specifies that sexual difference extends beyond anatomical features. "Between a man and a woman," variation signals "an ontological, irreducible type. Between a woman and another woman it's of a much more empirical type, and, furthermore, can only be understood and can only live in the ontological difference between man and woman" ("Je-Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray" 110). Situating the feminine within its own ontological category dislodges Woman from the void to which she has been relegated. Instead of constituting a perverse, misshapen image of man (antithetic to the jubilant sense of

fullness the child experiences upon the mirror phase), femininity congeals into a Form it has been systematically denied.

In order to emancipate Woman from the grasp of masculine subjectivity, Irigaray re-imagines the maternal function. To be sure, however, since her project targets feminine representation(s), she focuses on the mother-daughter relation. For Irigaray, phallic privilege profoundly alienates the female subject.

With regard to “the development of a normal woman,” we learn, through Freud, that there is and can be only one single motivating factor behind it: “penis-envy,” that is, the desire to appropriate for oneself the genital organ that has a cultural monopoly on value. Since women don’t have it, they can only covet the one men have, and, since they cannot possess it, they can only seek to find equivalents for it. Furthermore, they can find fulfillment only in motherhood, by bringing a child, a “penis substitute,” into the world; and for the woman’s happiness to be complete, the child must have a penis himself. The perfect achievement of the female destiny, according to Freud, lies in reproducing the male sex, at the expense of the woman’s own. (“Cosi Fan Tutti” 87)

This passage illuminates the cyclical dynamic of feminine estrangement. Castrated, woman lingers in shadows, condemned to darkness until impregnated. Only a *male* child, however, offers solace. Satisfaction remains illusory and the fantasy of wholeness, short-lived, subsides into deeper Lack once the child enacts Oedipal separation. Upon subjectivation, the child banishes (desire for) the mother to the unconscious, discards all

maternal remnants, and seeks in the father's culture, law, and language the promise of Phallic wholeness the mother failed to provide.

As emblem of failure and Lack, the mother awakens a subject's sense of self-disintegration. Here the Lacanian notion of mother-as-Crocodile emerges. Her hunger for completeness poses danger and destruction to the developing ego in her care. The female subject writhes in paradox. Though her own mother represents the annihilation of her psychological autonomy, the daughter pursues the wholeness she craves by becoming the mother to her own child.

If we are to be desired and loved by men, we must abandon our mothers, substitute for them, eliminate them in order to be *same*. All of which destroys the possibility of a love between mother and daughter. The two become at once accomplices and rivals in order to move into a single possible position in the desire of a man. (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 102)

Sameness indicates subjectivation according to phallic standards. For Freud and Lacan (therefore according to dominant models of subject formation), assimilation for all subjects – male and female alike – conforms to the presence/absence of the penis. Elizabeth Grosz explains concisely, “women, the mother in particular, must...be construed as *not having*, that is, as *lacking* the phallus in order for men to be regarded as having it” (*Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* 119).

Irigaray posits, however, that cultural demands, not psychological imperatives, generate matricide. The mother must be discarded only in a patriarchal setting. For within a phallogocentric economy, “the daughter is separated from her mother and, more

generally, from her family. She is transplanted into the genealogy of her husband, must live in his house, must bear his name, and so must her children etc (“The Necessity for Sexuate Rights” 199). Marriage becomes the act of exchange, a process by which woman becomes “a projection screen for playing out a masculine fantasy of wholeness” (Lorraine 73). Male primacy, validated by his union with a woman who defers to both his name and his phallic significance, endures. Similarly, for women, marriage brings with it the promise the phallic child. Irigaray challenges a trajectory in which:

Woman has to put love for her mother and for herself aside in order to begin to love men. She has to stop loving herself in order to love a man who, for his part, would be able, and indeed expected, to continue to love himself. He has to renounce his mother, in order to love himself, for example. She has to renounce her mother *and* her auto-eroticism in order not to love her self anymore. In order to love man alone. To enter into desire for the man-father. Which does not necessarily mean she loves him. How could she love him without loving herself? (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 66)

Integrated into a Symbolic in which woman demonstrates Lack and absence, feminine self-love always remains displaced by love for something else: the father, the child, the penis. The man revels in self-love because, endowed with a visible organ, he possesses *something* to love. Irigaray sounds the alarm and claims that self-love emerges once women re-conceive the mother-daughter dyad.

It is...necessary, if we are not to be accomplices in the murder of the mother, for us to assert that there is a genealogy of women. There is a

genealogy of women within our family: on our mother's side we have mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, and daughters. Given our exile in the family of the father-husband, we tend to forget this genealogy of women, and we are often persuaded to deny it. Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity. ("The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" 44).

Only by acknowledging the ontological viability of herself and of her mother's selfhood can woman achieve a self-love denied her by phallogentric renderings of subjectivity.

For Amber Jacobs, however, Irigaray's attempts to wrestle the feminine from sameness remain unspecific. For Jacobs, "the problem...is that you cannot symbolize the mother daughter relation before you have theorized it, and you cannot theorize it in the absence of a cultural law" (135). Though Irigaray voices the importance of sexual difference and maternal viability, Jacobs contends that, "there is a missing link in Irigaray's work between her powerful deconstruction of the male imaginary and the prescriptive imperative that encourages intervention and transformation. This missing link is the identification of a law through which the realization of her project could come into being" (ibid. 135). Though Irigaray does not proffer a "law" by which her endeavor can be actualized (and how one can willfully construct this law remains ambiguous in Jacobs' project²⁴), Irigaray does outline a methodology through which feminine subjectivity can be reclaimed.

By *speaking* herself, woman can distance herself, if not break altogether, from androcentric signifying practices. Irigaray proposes that feminine Lack doubles within the Lacanian paradigm. She has no phallus, and since the paternal metaphor propels the

subject into the linguistic field, the (p)Phallus inaugurates the word. “When a girl begins to talk, she is already unable to speak of/to herself. Being exiled in man’s speech, she is already unable to auto-affect. Man’s language [*ce parler homme*] separates her from her mother and from other women, and she speaks it without speaking it” (“The Poverty of Psychoanalysis” 101). The father’s NO mutes the voice of the feminine-maternal. Accordingly, rejection of the mother censures *parler femme*. Irigaray celebrates the maternal tongue and urges female subjects to articulate their “selves” that have been silenced by phallogentric discourse. Woman must refuse to let her passions “be annihilated by the law of the father” and must re-appropriate “her right to pleasure” and “restore her right to speech” (“The Bodily Encounter with the Mother” 43).

In light of Lacanian theory, Irigaray’s concept of self-speak takes on its significance. Since language guarantees reality, linguistic representation produces subjectivity. “There’s no such thing as a prediscursive reality. Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse” (*Seminar XX* 32). Yet Lacan concludes, “that woman is not-whole—there is always something in her that escapes discourse” (ibid. 33). To jettison the feminine from discourse effectively serves to negate feminine subjectivity. Though her indebtedness to Heidegger will be outlined in detail in Chapter 4, Irigaray’s incorporation of Heidegger is apparent here. In “The Way to Language,” Heidegger contends that, “language speaks man,” so new ways of speaking engender new ways of thinking, new ways of Being. For Heidegger, poetic language yields a richer existence; for Irigaray, feminine self-speak, communication apart from masculine discourse, constitutes *The Way to Love*.

What, however, is this self-speak? In *The Way to Love*, Irigaray claims, “Our rational tradition has been much concerned with ‘speaking about’ but has reduced ‘speaking with’ to a speaking together about the same things. Which supposes a common universe and conversations about a third without real exchange between ourselves” (8). The *same things* comprise androcentric theories of subjectivation; female subjectivity is the *third* term to which Irigaray here refers, that is to say Woman as Other of the Other, as an entity in its own right as opposed to the distorted Other of the Same. In “When Our Lips Speak Together,” Irigaray employs biology as metaphor to convey *parler femme*. Combining self-expression with autoeroticism, Irigaray theorizes that women, endowed with four lips, possess a capacity to “speak” a “language” unmediated by the Phallus.²⁵ In short, a woman *speaks herself* when she embraces the feminine *as the feminine* instead of as the non-male. Irigaray, however, never explains precisely what constitutes the feminine. She does not disclose its character as much as she renounces how Woman has been traditionally conceived (passive, domestic, docile, Other of the Same). Despite Irigaray’s deliberate ambiguity, her critics have gained much currency with charges that she essentializes the feminine.²⁶ Far from inscribing specific features onto Woman, Irigaray simply rejects the notion that phallic difference constitutes fracture, incompleteness, and void. Her celebration of the feminine indicates a celebration of difference. On the one hand, this difference is sexualized; on the other, this difference indicates a viable alternative to phallogocentric notions of subjectivity. Situating Irigaray once again in a Heideggerian context, Irigaray contends that the feminine possesses authentic Being, signification uncompromised by prevailing notions of subjectivity. As Heidegger proposes that *the they*, the nebulous amalgam of popular opinion and inherited

beliefs, squelches agency and individual desire, Irigaray maintains that androcentric conceptions of subject formation suppress femininity.²⁷

In sum, Irigaray's refashioning of subjectivation empowers the maternal function. A passive, docile emblem of Lack, the Freudian-Lacanian mother dutifully defers to paternal law. Moreover, in their analyses, feminine identity (as the illusion of phallic wholeness) can be actualized only through motherhood. Though Irigaray focuses on the mother-daughter dyad, she intends not to relegate Woman to motherhood; instead, Irigaray targets the maternal function as the initial battleground on which the fight to (re)claim feminine subjectivity transpires. Once Woman – and by extension any ontological category silenced by discourses of Sameness – comes to know self-love, the compulsion to conform to the Law dissipates. Active engagement in the construction and re-construction of cultural practices replaces dutiful acquiescence to them.

Ideology, Illusion, and the Symptoms of Revolt

If the above discussion has conflated the paternal law and the Symbolic order, this conflation is circumstantial. The Symbolic order never signifies a monolithic, immutable structure. On the contrary, cultural constructs, as *constructs*, comprise synthetic fabrications that, though presented as organic and natural social Truths, consist of spatio-temporal contingencies that can, therefore, be dismantled and reconstructed. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek probes both the functions and the origins of reconfiguration. Žižek suggests that subjects interpellate, they *answer-the-call* of the Big Other, because ideology presents the illusion of ending all Lack and Desire.

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a

support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel... The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel. (45)

This *kernel* corresponds to core anxieties and fears that emerge upon the subject's realization that s/he is utterly alone, separate, and alienated from the world and from other human beings. Ideology, therefore, offers an unspoken contract: *law, order, culture, social practices, politics, religion will fill my void of aloneness. Assimilation into the Symbolic will alleviate all of my pain and isolation.* Alleviation of this condition is an illusion, but if I realize this, I risk "going crazy." For Žižek, all symbolic structures are manufactured around this void. Borrowing from Lacan, he refers to this void as the *symptom*.

This symptom... is literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, the symptom is the way we—the subjects—"avoid madness," the way we 'choose something... instead of nothing' through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum consistency to our being-in-the-world. (ibid. 75)

Ideology, therefore, prevents psychological erosion. Without a matrix of beliefs codified into law and grafted onto an ontological plane, the subject would be destroyed by the unbearable reality that no Desire can ever be satiated. The oblivion at the center of human psychological processes *must* be tempered by the illusion that ideology provides.

Crucially, however, *all* ideology bears witness to this illusion. One subscribes to ideological maxims under the auspice that they will provide a sense of wholeness that can be experienced as enjoyment. In other words, one embraces the law because the law appears to hold this promise. What happens, however, if the law does not enable enjoyment? What happens if the law oppresses, alienates, and totalizes? In short, what happens if the law is phallogentric, paternal? Further still, if one possesses the power to reshape the law, why would one *not* exercise this potential? For Žižek, the answer to this question is simple. From a Marxist perspective, ideology, once codified in law, becomes an end instead of a means. To a degree, ideology must “buy its own propaganda” in order to function effectively. Ideology must *appear* as that which can legitimately end all desire. If it does not, its viability disappears. Ideological structures, however, as the outgrowth of a psychological necessity, cannot function if construed only as psychological functions. As a result, they transmit and register as “reality.”

What is really at stake in ideology is its form, that we follow even the most dubious opinions once in our mind has been made up regarding them; but this ideological attitude can be achieved only as a ‘state that is essentially by-product’: the ideological subjects, ‘travelers lost in a forest,’ must conceal from themselves the fact that ‘it was possibly chance alone that first determined them in their choice’; they must believe that their decision is well, that it will lead to their Goal. As soon as they perceive that *the real goal is the consistency of the ideological attitude itself*, the effect is self-defeating. (ibid. 84)

Zizek's remarks here strike at the core of this project. By pulling away the veneer of ideology, one risks oblivion. As *travelers lost in a forest*, subjects cling to law as salvation. Clearly, however, if ideology functions to oppress, victimize, or thematize, the resulting law, itself only the illusion of salvation, ceases to provide even illusory salvation.

Do the assertions of Irigaray and Kristeva not awaken us to the urgent reality that we—the subjects—can no longer conceal from ourselves the illusory nature of ideology? To be sure, if ideology “functions properly,” its illusory nature remains concealed. Emerging now from our slumber, what must we do? Cling to inherited notions of order, law, and culture? Or spare ourselves oblivion and pursue alternate possibilities? As it stands, however, to reshape our Symbolic world, we must re-imagine the human psychological profile. Only then can we revolt. When trapped in the illusion of patriarchal order, we can tap the power of the maternal function.

Outline of the Work

At this point, a schematic is in order. This project divides into two sections. The first half probes literary depictions of what I call the dutiful mother and how this mother exacts a hefty toll on her child's psychical life. Chapter Two delves into Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* and attributes Adela's suicide, as well as the anxious malaise her four sisters experience, to Bernarda's unyielding attachment to dominant cultural practices. With blind devotion to her community and its conceptions of femininity, this dutiful mother, always deferring to the letter of Symbolic Law, denies her daughters access to Desire, agency, and power.

Chapter Three leads us through the troubling mother-daughter relation evident in Marsha Norman's *'night, Mother*. The interaction between Jessie and "Mama" Cates illustrates how a mother, when devoid of a Kristevan archaic father, derives self-worth through birthing a phallic child. By teaching Jessie that only motherhood provides access to feminine subjectivity and by suggesting to her that women are constitutionally fragile and in need of care, Mama Cates hurls her daughter into existential crisis.

Section 2 of my project focuses on the Kristevan and Irigarayan "correctives" to Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis that profoundly transform the maternal function. Before unpacking works in which we encounter the revolutionary mother, Chapter Four traces the extent to which both Irigaray and Kristeva proffer theories steeped in Heideggerian ontology and Arendtian socio-political action. In short, the dutiful, Freudian-Lacanian mother, entrenched in what Heidegger calls *the they*, prevents her child from experiencing an authentic ontological status, whereas the revolutionary, Irigarayan-Kristevan mother cultivates this status by articulating her ideological commitments and actively rejecting dominant cultural practices when they betray her ethical core. Chapters Five and Six, therefore, examine literary representations of this revolutionary mother.

We first encounter the potentially revolutionary mother in Lena Younger from Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. With Heideggerian resolve, Lena teaches her children to respect themselves and their ethnic heritage. Lena refuses to be intimidated by institutionalized racism and pursues economic security, and the freedom it offers, by extracting her family from the ghetto. The Younger children, Beneatha and Walter Lee,

ultimately inherit their mother's self-respect and ethnic pride, and, in so doing, experience the promise of authentic Being.

Chapter Six introduces us to the Homebody, the ambiguous mother in Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*. Disgusted by the commodity fetishism and obsession with scientific "truth" so abundant in the West, the Homebody literally abandons her husband, Milton, and her daughter, Priscilla, and departs for Afghanistan. The Homebody seeks in the Middle East an ontological freedom she has been denied in the Anglo-European world. Ironically, the mother's desertion initiates a chain of events through which the members of the Ceiling family experience the magic unintelligibility of the Other and, transformed by this magic, engage the authentic.

In the final chapter, I will first establish how Freudian and Lacanian theories of subjectivity emerge from a fundamental fear of Otherness, then link ethics to aesthetics, and conclude by explaining why drama best articulates the revolutionary potentialities of literary expression.

CHAPTER 2

BERNARDA ALBA AND FROGS WITH NO TONGUES

The *dutiful mother* is a maternal figure who enacts the Freudian-Lacanian dynamic of the maternal function. The *dutiful mother* is she who accepts and perpetuates prevailing ideology with unquestioning resolve. Although she is not necessarily cognizant of her compliance to the psychological dynamics proposed by Freud and Lacan, the *dutiful mother* is nevertheless a passive body through whom patriarchal cultural practices are transmitted, legitimated, and perpetuated. Since Freudian and Lacanian assertions are themselves the product of an inherited androcentric worldview, the maternal function has been equally susceptible to this philosophical inheritance. If the role of matriarch is shaped by social expectations and if a cultural body subscribes to patriarchal power structures, the *dutiful mother* is perceived as *the* maternal role. If a mother's "job" is to assimilate her child into culture, one might easily understand the mother, in such a context, as "obligated" to raise her child in accordance with prevailing values. If cultural practices deny women agency and reject feminine subjectivity, this "obligation" should be questioned. If the mother does not put the Symbolic order "on trial," if she does not examine and question its priorities, her collusion with injustice can produce horrendous results. The initial victim of this collusion is, of course, the child. The consequences, however, are not contained within the family unit. Conformity to an oppressive cultural machine enables oppressive conditions to continue unabated.

The House of Bernarda Alba is a rendition of both this collusion and the impact that unwavering compliance to tradition can have on subject formation. The very notion of *collusion*, however, indicates that subjects, in fact, can *choose the extent to which* they assimilate into the Symbolic order. If mothers do not speak themselves, articulate their own system of values, and instead voice existing notions of convention and propriety, they deny themselves subjectivity. If the mother perpetuates the notion that male subjectivity, the parameters of signification established by masculine discourse, is not simply *a* mode of signification but *the* standard for all psychical formation (as Freud and Lacan propose and as a phallogentric economy implicitly accepts), the power of the maternal function is limited. The maternal function occupies the position as that which can legitimate or reject paternal law. In this capacity, the maternal function possesses the potential energy to reshape and restructure the Symbolic order. By *speaking herself*, the mother inserts her own ideology into the matrix of the Symbolic order. Her self-assertion, therefore, is a safeguard against oppression. If she foregoes participation in the construction of the Symbolic and instead defers to inherited or prevailing ideology, she becomes not the judge of the law but its instrument. Bernarda Alba exemplifies a mother who foregoes this participation. In so doing, she reduces herself to an extension of a patriarchal state. Bernarda Alba is a gear in an androcentric machine and, as such, renders herself and her children mute.

In *The House of Bernardo Alba*, Lorca provides a disturbing portrait of the maternal function. The matriarch, recently widowed, grieves the death of her husband. In deference to custom, she announces to her five daughters that the family will mourn for eight years. She effectively mandates that, in homage to the patriarch, their lives will

be suspended for nearly a decade. With the exception of Augustias, courted by the young philanderer in the village, Pepe El Romano, Bernarda's daughters will be confined to the home, extracted from society and ineligible for marital union. The youngest of the daughters, Adela, resists most firmly her mother's authority. Involved in an unsanctioned affair with Pepe, she engages in open combat with her mother throughout the play. Were Adela's tryst to become public knowledge, the family's honor would be irreversibly damaged. Unwilling to sublimate her desire, Adela declares her allegiance to her lover and refuses to end the relationship. In an attempt to salvage the Benavides-Alba name, Bernarda chases Pepe El Romano out of town. Abandoned by her lover, defeated by her mother's unbending power, Adela kills herself to avoid a life of confinement.

The ideological closure represented by the *dutiful mother's* passive reception of patriarchal structures of authority registers, in part, by the relative closure of Lorca's dramatic form. We may observe that closed form by recognizing the remarkable extent to which the play conforms to Aristotle's analysis of tragedy in the *Poetics*. The Benavides-Albas are members of a landowning, aristocratic class. The drama transpires "within one revolution of the sun" (Aristotle 94). Adela experiences a moment of *recognition* during which she understands the gravity of her situation: her forbidden love for Pepe will never materialize into the relationship she desires. After Bernarda fires a gun at Pepe, he "raced away on his mare," presumably never to be heard from again (1038). Furthermore, Adela's *recognition*, in classical fashion, is accompanied by her *reversal* of fortune: the young woman kills herself immediately after discovering that she will never be united with her lover. Finally, the tragic climax of the play, the *catastrophic* suicide, stems from *hamartia*: Bernarda's decision to forcibly control her

daughters and Adela's refusal to conform to maternal (cultural) authority are the catalysts for Adela's destruction.

To be sure, however, a "tragedy" functions insofar as it conforms to a particular worldview. There must be dominant and clear-cut notions of concepts like justice and appropriate conduct to which the audience can relate so the audience can understand that which is "tragic" about the tragedy...so "that which is terrifying and pitiable can arise from spectacle" (Aristotle 101). For example, as subjects wholly indoctrinated by the notion that human and divine worlds interact with regularity, ancient viewers of *Oedipus Rex* would easily identify Oedipus' flaw: his sense that he can dodge fate or manipulate his destiny "by wit alone." Only because the audience understands the ideological context framing the drama can the play assume its tragic dimension. According to Lorca, therefore, the more accurately a theatrical production depicts "realistic" socio-material conditions, the more effectively the performance will impact the audience. Autor, from Lorca's *Play Without a Title*, articulates this notion: "reality begins because the author does not want you to feel that you are in the theater, but rather in the middle of the street" (qtd. in Soufas 14). Though his theater mimics the Symbolic order of which it is a part, it is also a *play* and therefore composed of script, performers, directions, strategically placed objects, artificial lighting, and spatial borders; it is a symbolic order in its own right. Anna Whiteside describes the Symbolic-symbolic interplay of drama as metatheatricality²⁸; any staged performance is "a hyphenated sign-referent: at once a sign of something and the thing or things referred to by the actors. Thus the concrete theatrical referent seen onstage refers, in turn, to itself as a mimetic theatrical sign...[and] to theatre as theatre" (27). In short, events depicted in performance, regardless of the

extent to which they parallel plausible scenarios of “the actual world,” are staged, contrived. Though a text is grounded in and by socio-cultural context, the action of a drama is only “real” in the finite universe of the stage. Signification and representation of anything beyond the walls of the theater must be extrapolated. Despite how compelling the story of the Benavides-Alba family may be, the audience knows that Bernarda and Adela are fictional. Lorca, however, by trying to situate the spectator *in the middle of the street*, by trying to replicate the “real world,” and by attempting to create verisimilitude onstage, seeks to blur borders between fiction and the material world. For Lorca, the viewer should never be reminded that s/he views the choreographed movements of an artificial universe. For this reason, Lorca adamantly declares that his drama must possess “not a drop of poetry!” and be only, “Reality! Realism!” (qtd. in Gibson 435). The more closely a work of art simulates the Symbolic, the more capable it is of eliciting empathy.

Though Lorca’s other tragedies in the rural trilogy, *Yerma* and *Blood Wedding*, contain poetic verse and lyrical language, in *The House of Bernarda Alba* the author attempts to convey authentic imagery and dialogue in order to attain some verisimilitude. In her biography of the dramatist, *Lorca: The Dream of Life*, Leslie Stainton’s research indicates that Lorca “noted that the work should resemble ‘a photographic document.’ In an effort to simulate photography, he set the play in black and white, with the exception of one costume, a green dress worn briefly, and to great theatrical effect, in the third act” (430).²⁹ This black and white effect is employed to produce a “snapshot” of rural life in Andalusia. This sense of photographic realism, however, still contains symbolism. Candelas Newton illuminates the metaphoric aspects of set design.

The “very white room” in act 1 changes to a “white room” in act 2, and while the walls were described as thick at the outset, suggesting seclusion and impenetrability, the stage directions here³⁰ indicate that “the doors on the left lead to the bedrooms”. A different perspective toward the depth or interior of Bernarda’s house is thus created, as if, with the photographic camera, the spectator were allowed to penetrate farther into the characters’ psyches. (74)

These *white walls*, suggestive of a sterile, clean, or virginal environment, starkly contrast the black dresses worn by the women of the home. As Newton claims, the color of the set transforms throughout the play. The “purity” of the home, at least the image of purity within the home, gradually decreases. Furthermore, this black and white effect that Lorca utilizes also conveys the sense of rigidity and dogmatic inflexibility that Bernarda articulates. She very much sees the world as “black and white.” Her truth reflects the Truth; deviation from her absolute yields taboo. Despite the gradual shift to bluish light by the third act, Bernarda herself cannot tolerate any departure from prevailing ideology. For the matriarch, there is no gray.

To accomplish his objective, Lorca himself described *The House of Bernarda Alba* as a drama containing “no literature,” as “pure theatre” in which the action on stage should appear “like a photographic documentary” (qtd. in Gibson 435). Some critics, despite Lorca’s admitted intent of producing photographic realism, argue that the play lacks believability. Scholar James T. Kiosses systematically dissects details of the plot’s structure and concludes that *The House of Bernarda Alba* is completely unrealistic.

Granted the context of a rural, tradition-bound and very strict household, how “real” is a woman, the mother of five daughters, who is as relentlessly brutal as Bernarda both in direct actions and in the judgment of her by her servants and daughters? How “real” is a situation in which this woman, Bernarda, herself married twice, keeps five daughters, ranging from age twenty to thirty-nine, imprisoned in her house with virtually no contact with men nor the community in general? How “real” is the situation, as La Poncia intimates, where no one has entered Bernarda’s house since the death of the father; or where two hundred women (according to stage directions) file through the house after the funeral of Bernarda’s husband; or where the house itself will be sealed off for eight years of mourning? (184)

This passage illustrates Kiosses’ rejection of the play’s literal representation of human interaction. Andrew Anderson follows the same tack.

La Casa de Bernarda Alba is not offered as a "slice of life," which it is patently not (Bernarda’s character and her daughters' lot are extreme, not typical), but rather as a transposition, a rendition, a stylization, this time principally ordered upon a basis of blacks and whites, which is precisely what a photograph from the period would offer. (221)

This *rendition* that is *principally ordered upon a basis of blacks and whites* is indicative of a photographic representation, but it is also reflective of dogmatic thought. Alba cannot compromise. The play presents stark ideological oppositions that cannot merge.

Though the play clearly conveys aspects of realism, in spite of Lorca's stated aesthetic mission, the drama is more than a representation of the "real world."

Were it to simply mirror the cultural practices it enacts—the harsh treatment of women in the rigidly patriarchal structure of rural Spain—*La Casa de Bernarda Alba* would be a one-dimensional period piece. The drama, however, exceeds such categorization. When Kiosses and Anderson question the plausibility of *Bernarda Alba*, do they not speak to the symbolic elements at work in the drama, metatheatrical elements (in Whiteside's sense) that critique a world *beyond* the "house" of *Bernarda Alba*?

Finalized in the summer of 1936, *The House of Bernarda Alba* was completed just months before Francisco Franco formally seized power as regent of the Kingdom of Spain. Dreams of the New Republic were shattered, and fascism ruled the day.³¹ Under totalitarian rule, freedom of expression evaporates. The dictator ensures that works of art, as "cultural manifestations," be "closely monitored and controlled by the military authority and the Roman Catholic Church. The control of text production, both native and translated, was exerted by *juntas de censura*, committees composed of Church representatives, lower-rank officials and men of letters functioning under the supervision of the authorities" (Marino and Rabadan 125). Lorca, therefore, was writing in an environment in which artistic production was regulated by state agencies, a process which had been slowly gathering steam prior to Franco's formal ascent to power. "Censorship under Franco was carried out in a bureaucratic fashion. For a play to reach the stage, a producer had to ask for official permission using a specific type of document. The same procedure applied to a publisher who wished to publish a novel" (ibid. 127). Franco's political agenda was articulated through policy, but it was also formally

published in the periodical, *El Fascio*. First appearing in Madrid on March 16, 1933, the publication stimulated support for the fascist political party, the *Falange*, and condemned Judaism and homosexuality, satirized leftist ideology, and often the publication's "favourite targets were Lorca and the Barraca"³² (Gibson 349). To be sure, Bernarda, like Franco, is obsessed with controlling the behaviors of those over which she wields authority. In this context, Lorca's drama is a critique of dominant ideology, and, as such, is "political theatre," a modality that "calls attention to power relationships, using performance to make the obscure visible, and to allegorize oppressive force" (Davis 152). Though *obscurely* set in the rural Andalusian countryside, far from the political turmoil in the streets of Madrid, the domestic strife in the Alba home *allegorically* corresponds to the oppressive mechanisms at work in the urban centers of the country, rendering the violent consequences of fascism *visible*. Considering the symbolism functioning in the drama, the play contains the poetic subtleties of expressionism, and the author's notion that *The House of Bernarda Alba* is *pure theatre*, merely a photographically real depiction of regional culture, conflicts with the content of the play.

In addition to its political dimensions in the conventional sense, the drama also explores sexual politics and "appropriate" manifestations of physical desire. Bernarda's staunch commitment to preserving the "purity" of her daughters reflects cultural practices shaped by dogmatic religious views. Lorca confronts these views directly in an early, unfinished play, *A Religious Tragedy* (c. 1917-18), in which Jesus declares that he has been "sad from birth" and that he is a figure "made for suffering" (qtd. in Gibson 67). Unable to express his sexual urges for Esther, Jesus is "trapped in a prison of frustrated desire" and consequently "sunk in a sea of erotic despair" (ibid. 67). Though Lorca's

works denounce the strict Catholic morality that dominates Spain, he was undoubtedly indoctrinated by the heterosexual norms of the Symbolic system of which he was a part, his homosexuality rendering him a “victim of an inner enemy that makes the achievement of a relaxed attitude to sex impossible” (ibid. 68). Jesus, the Son of God, must remain chaste. Adela, subjected to the tyrannical authority of her mother, must remain virginal. Lorca, as occupant of a theologically and politically conservative environment, must repress his “deviant” sexual desire. In a much broader sense, the play addresses how a Symbolic order often exists at odds with individual desire.

Fascist rule, forbidden desire, patriarchal culture: all are manifestations of how Symbolic structures stifle individual freedom. This conflict, for Lorca, is associated with death, the death of agency, the death of personal liberty. In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Adela’s suicide coincides with this loss of freedom. In his Buenos Aires lecture from 1933, “Play and Theory of the *Duende*,” Lorca describes the metaphorical function of death. “The *duende* does not come at all unless he sees that death is possible. The *duende* must know beforehand that he can serenade death’s house and rock those branches that we all wear, branches that do not have, will never have, any consolation” (qtd. in Reinholtz 136). The *duende* is a mythic figure in rural Spain, a hobgoblin, a harbinger of death. Lorca incorporates this motif from fairytales and folklore to express the arrival and presence of a force—political, spiritual, cultural—that signals the decay of individual freedom. Lorca biographer Ian Gibson asserts that, for Lorca, “*duende* (which in normal usage means a poltergeist-like spirit) came to denote a form of Dionysian inspiration always related to anguish, mystery and death, and which animates particularly the artist who performs in public—the musician, the dancer, the poet who recites his

work to a live audience, as was so often his own case” (114). Gibson also claims that Spain, home of a national *fiesta* in which bulls are sacrificially slaughtered, is the birthplace, the native terrain, of the *duende*. The *duende* is present when the subject is oppressed; the artist summons the *duende* when articulating this oppression. Since the *duende* is associated with death, with the materiality of human existence, the *duende* is associated with *performance*, with bodily expression. Lorca states, “We know the roads where we can search for God...But there are neither maps nor exercises to help us find the *duende*. We only know that he burns the blood like a poultice of broken glass, that he exhausts, that he rejects all the sweet geometry we have learned, that he smashes styles, that he leans on human pain with no consolation” (qtd. in Reinholtz 138). The *duende* is an ambiguous concept in Lorca’s aesthetic vision. Like the Kristevan deject, a figure that challenges the law or operates outside of it, the *duende* is that which exists beyond, outside, apart from the known *roads to God*, separate from any intelligibly transmittable codes for human conduct. Bringing death, the *duende* reminds us of the fragility of human life and, in *rejecting the sweet geometry we have learned*, renouncing the clean lines of cultural conduct we have been taught, exposes the tenuousness of Symbolic law.

House of Bernarda Alba exposes an audience to this death, to literal, metaphorical, and political oppression. Though the playwright explicitly states that his drama is transparently realistic, devoid of anything beyond photographic representation, there is much evidence to contradict Lorca’s own claims; the gaps between *intent* and *content* speak to this contradiction. At the same time, however, it is plausible to assume that Lorca could not “safely” express his “real” intention – the critique of political and moral fascism – so he instead depicts an intolerant (and intolerable) social reality.

While conforming to a “classic” Aristotelian definition of tragedy, while reproducing Scribe’s formula for the “well-made play,”³³ and by incorporating conventional Spanish folklore, Lorca produces a text that conforms structurally to a tradition it seeks to subvert. As Irigaray urges female subjects to incorporate dominant socio-linguistic practices, to mimic prevailing ideology in order to reshape ideological terrain, Lorca appropriates traditional modes of representation in an effort to undermine oppressive and hegemonic Symbolic structures. By depicting the subjugation of women, a dynamic familiar to occupants of a patriarchal society, Lorca explores how societal practices, when deeply embedded within the cultural psyche, impinge upon the subject’s capacity for agency. It is in this light that the play, as an artistic response to, as a performed expression of, Symbolic structures, can be positioned within a feminist-psychoanalytic framework.

Upon the death of her husband, Bernarda occupies a position of absolute power, and she wields her authority like a hammer. The matriarch imposes her command on the household; she confines her daughters to the domestic sphere as a gesture of respect for the patriarch. “For the eight years of mourning, not a breath of air will get in this house from the street. We’ll act as if we’d sealed up all the doors and windows with bricks. That’s what happened in my father’s house—and in my grandfather’s house” (1023). Bernarda exhibits total disregard for her children’s desire. Although they resist her rigid authority, she asserts her power relentlessly. “In this house,” she pronounces, “you’ll do as I order” (1023). Her command, of course, restricts the agency of her daughters in deference to paternal law. Critic Nina Scott argues, “the viewer becomes as much a prisoner of the house as the five daughters” (298). Since the entirety of the play’s action

takes place within the Alba home, the audience is as confined to the setting as the characters are. C.B. Morris echoes this sentiment by claiming that the house is “the space that encloses the reader or spectators together with the characters on stage” (“The Austere Abode: Lorca’s *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*” 129). Through this closure, the play enacts a dynamic of subjection. C. Christopher Soufas argues that this dynamic is so readily apparent because Lorca “uses the fourth-wall convention to include the spectator within the closed space of a house” (18). In contradistinction to the conventional notion that an invisible barrier exists between the stage and the audience, Lorca effectively extends this “fourth-wall” to a space behind the viewers; the “house” of Bernarda Alba is the enclosure of the theater itself. Soufas argues further that the spectator, inside this enclosure, becomes “a privileged witness to the action, only to use that very perspective to demonstrate the insufficiency of vision and extraordinary consciousness in the face of the authority of the hidden force” (ibid. 18). For Soufas, this *hidden force* is an “invisible presence” which “exercises considerable effect upon the space of the stage” (ibid. 13). It is socio-political-historic-ideological context; it is the unstageable. Though unstated by Soufas, this *hidden force* is the ghostly movement of the *duende*. Constricted and confined, spectators surrender their freedom in the enclosure; they are confronted by the oppression of imprisonment. Like the daughters in the Alba home, they are subjected to Bernarda’s fascistic rule. Bernarda is clearly unbending in her worldview; her mandates are direct and non-negotiable. Outside the enclosure, however, they are enclosed in the invisible walls of Symbolic law and cultural conduct.

Although Bernarda Alba exhibits absolute power in her home as Franco pursues absolute power in Spain, there is a key difference in these two dictatorships. Alba

imposes an order in which her own agency is sublimated; Franco sublimates all that opposes his absolute power. Alba is a representative of existing ideology; Franco undermines existing ideology to impose his own. Yet each figure enacts fascist domination of its subjects. In a tyrannical socio-political context, that which opposes or exists beyond the dominant order is marginalized and silenced. Moreover, the attributes of the dominant structure are normalized, and this normalization sanctions the legitimation of the structure's dominance. Alba instructs her daughters to behave according to the parameters established by cultural practices because these parameters reflect the way a woman is *supposed* to act. Any deviation from cultural codes, therefore, is unnatural, abnormal. A fascist order eradicates difference in favor of homogenization. The Freudian-Lacanian psychical model, with its phallogentric privilege, follows this same trajectory. By establishing the libido as fundamentally masculine in nature and by positioning the Phallus as the locus of wholeness and completion, a phallogentric economy effectively normalizes male subjectivity and eradicates sexual difference. In this sense, phallogentric psychical models possess a fascist dimension. It is imperative to note that the Symbolic order, as a concept, is not inherently fascist. The Symbolic order is an essential and inevitable component of human life. A Symbolic, however, that is rooted in phallic monism reduces the human psychical experience to idealization of the Same and rejection of the Other.

The House of Bernarda Alba takes place in a hermetically sealed environment. The characters are enclosed in the home. Furthermore, the village itself is isolated from urban progress and reform. This drama unfolds in an Andalusian Vega.³⁴ Further still, the audience observes the action from a position of confinement. Not only is the viewer

confined spatially, the viewer is subjected to the action on the stage, thus subjected to Bernarda's rigid ideological assertions. Thus the action on stage presents a fictionalized representation of a very "real" conflict, a conflict ongoing and not spatially or temporally contingent: all subjects are confronted by ideology and signifying practices that threaten to undermine agency and power. The stage encloses the players; the theater encloses the audience; the Symbolic Order encloses the subject. The inevitable question that Lorca's work presents is the extent to which the subject will be complicit in this enclosure.

Critic Bilha Blum proposes that Lorca's contemporary audience would immediately identify the implications of the set's physical appearance. Although Blum does not suggest that *The House of Bernarda Alba* is relevant only in historical context, she asserts that cultural artifacts indigenous to Lorca's time provide visual cues that assist the audience in deciphering the ideological, socio-economic, and political landscape that the Alba family occupies. For Blum, the items onstage assume an ideological function that

corresponds to traditional norms and takes the concrete form of the public rooms of the house where the dramatic action takes place, including its furniture and mundane objects, which Lorca's Spanish audience of the 1930s, albeit urban and middle class, could easily identify the peasant population's milieu, then considered the most genuinely loyal to tradition.

(72-3)

To be sure, Bernarda Alba is not a member of the lower class. She is the widow of a wealthy landowner. She is, however, entrenched in tradition. What resonates in Blum's point is that observers of the play, as contemporaries of Lorca, would recognize the

shapes and contours of Spanish tradition. To be sure, however, one need not be an occupant of early twentieth century Spain to internalize the prevalent themes in this work. Lorca is deliberate in his presentation of specific visual cues that represent local custom, but the details of tradition are obviously context-bound. The issue at hand is the potential oppression of inherited ideology.

Bernarda Alba is a paradoxical figure. On one hand, she articulates a fierce independence. When her loyal servant, Poncia, suggests that the mistress's five daughters are too old to be unwed, the matriarch proclaims, "None of them has ever had a beau and they've never needed one!" (1024). To be sure, the Alba house is devoid of men. Even the servants are women. The father is no more and the scene is set for the women to exist in harmonious autonomy from oppressive paternal law.³⁵ There is no specific, identifiable male authority figure to which she must defer. It is perhaps for this reason that critic John Gabriele proposes that Lorca:

portrays three generations of women who—except for reasons of procreation—have survived with no apparent dependency on men and only minimal contact with the outside world. Moreover, there is here every indication that the cloistered lives of the Benavides-Alba women will continue unaltered in the coming years. (188)

However, this reading endows these women with far more agency than they actually possess. First, the daughters have not actively elected to remain confined in the home. Secondly, and more importantly, the law that Bernarda imposes is not her own. Sequestering the women in the domicile after the death of the patriarch is a practice that has been transmitted through culture and tradition. Bernarda, after all, justifies the

sanctions she imposes on her children by claiming that the (in)action she demands of her daughters occurred in her *father's house* and in her *grandfather's house*. For the matriarch, then, history legitimates ideology. Most poignantly, it is, quite literally here, paternal law that validates codes of societal conduct. This is central to the dynamic of the play. Although Bernarda commands a house full of women, women whom she claims have no need for men, this house, contrary to the title, is not Bernarda's. She now owns the property, but the worldview she passes on to her children has been culturally inherited.

More troubling still, Bernarda not once explains the legitimacy of her belief system. Equally disturbing, Bernarda's third-term, her love-object outside of her children, is the desire to "fit in." Like the tortured heroine in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Bernarda Alba is terrified of scandal. When her own mother, Maria Josefa, wanders away from the house, Bernarda instructs a servant not to let the old widow near the well. The servant informs her mistress that Maria's safety is not at risk, and Bernarda exposes her real concern. "It's not that—but the neighbors can see her there from their windows" (1024). From this perspective, one conforms to the Symbolic order, one is interpellated, not because the Symbolic order offers refuge from the ontological void, but because one fears that deviation from cultural practices yields the consequence of being ostracized by the collective. From Bernarda's vantage point, Maria Josefa is a liability. As Bernarda transmits inherited ideology, her mother is the voice of dissent: "I don't want to see these single women, longing for marriage, turning their hearts to dust; and I want to go to my home town. Bernarda, I want a man to get married to and be happy with!" (1027). Maria Josefa, therefore, opposes the two primary sanctions that her daughter has imposed.

Bernarda has forbidden her children from seeking male companionship and confined them to the home. Maria Josefa yearns for both physical freedom and intimacy.

Bernarda cannot identify with her mother's desire. Josefa, after all, wants to liberate herself from the confines of tradition. She wants to remarry and pursue her own interests. She exclaims, "I want to get away from here! Bernarda! To get married by the shore of the sea—by the shore of the sea!" (1027). There is an obvious disconnection here between mother and daughter, a gulf that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, has profound implications. Psychologist Lisa Baraitser, obviously familiar with Kristevan psychodynamics, states that the child has a persuasive "need to recognize the mother's subjectivity as a locus of self-experiencing beyond that of the child. If the child does not have a mother whose subjectivity is recognizable, then the child cannot hope for recognition herself" (223). Although Josefa clearly possesses subjectivity, her subjectivity does not correspond to prevailing ideology. She wants to act in accordance with her own desire instead of buckling beneath the weight of social expectation. Morris argues that Josefa's "dreams of marriage on the seashore and of children imply an escape not only from the house in which she is a prisoner, but from the village in which that house stands as a fortress of stern values and stiff traditions" (139). Bernarda, however, cannot understand this impulse. Instead of internalizing her mother's revolutionary attitude, she perceives her mother as mad. Deviation from social expectations is construed as *madness*. Precisely who is insane here is ambiguous. Although Bernarda subscribes to the mandates of communal will, her unwavering resolve to perpetuate phallogocentric ideology at her own expense teeters on the brink of insanity. Since Bernarda cannot recognize her mother's unconventional subjectivity, she defaults to

prevailing ideology. This proves disastrous. Bernarda does not tolerate her mother's dissent and orders the servants to "Lock her up!" (1027). Once again, Bernarda relies on confinement to impose her power. If her *subjects* challenge her authority, their movements, their agency, must be restricted.

Bernarda's assertion of power is clearly problematic, but her motivations are even more disturbing. Not only does the matriarch physically confine her own mother and her own daughters, she does so because she does not want to deviate from societal standards. When Martirio steals Augustias' picture of Pepe El Romano, Bernarda is enraged to discover her daughters fighting. The hostility and antagonism between the two young women, however, is not of any concern to their mother. Bernarda worries instead about how this conflict could affect the family's image. "What scandal is this in my house in the heat's heavy silence? The neighbors must have their ears glued to the walls" (1031). As she did with Josefa, Bernarda tightens her controlling grip, telling the servants to "Search their rooms. Look in their beds. This comes of not tying you up with shorter leashes. But I'll teach you now!" (1031). The daughters contest their mother's rigid authority, and Bernarda explains to them that they "don't have any right except to obey" (1033). The maternal function here fortifies the existing ideological barriers that traditional practices have erected. Women are to follow a prescribed trajectory and are denied agency. Bernarda possesses absolute authority in her home, but she is a representative of an alien enterprise. She does not introduce a new law, her law, into the home; she dutifully broadcasts allegiance to an oppressive order.

Clearly, Bernarda Alba has a sense of propriety and adherence to cultural law. She has inherited conceptions of class and bars Martirio's marriage to Enrique Humanas

because his family is of inferior economic status. Bernarda defends her decision with vigor. “My blood won’t mingle with the Humanas’ while I live! His father was a shepherd” (1032). The relationship between wealth and morality is fixed for the protagonist. She cannot corrupt her aristocratic lineage by allowing it to be contaminated by the ethical inferiority of a commoner. This line of thinking is eerily akin to the rationale of phallogocentric psychoanalysis that suggests feminine inferiority. The poor do not have money and are therefore ethically inferior; women do not possess a penis and are therefore ethically inferior. For Bernarda, “The poor are like animals—they seem to be made of different stuff” (1022). These sharp delineations between subjects are not limited to the gap between rich and poor. Alba also possesses the traditional conception that feminine sexuality should be suppressed. At her husband’s funeral, she exclaims, “Women in church shouldn’t look at any man but the priest—and him only because he wears skirts” (1023). Bernarda chastises Augustias when the young woman expresses curiosity about the young men at the funeral. Female sexual desire should be tempered at all costs. Bernarda cannot allow her children to explore their desires. If one of her daughters marries beneath her class, that is taboo; if her daughters are promiscuous, that is unacceptable. Alba’s motives, however, do not stem from a concern to ensure the individual interests (or, in Heideggerian terms, the *authenticity*) of her children.³⁶ Instead, her motives are more self-serving. The matriarch is obsessed with maintaining her family’s honor. More than anything, Bernarda wants “to put up a good front and have family harmony” (1034). Clearly, however, public favor is far more important than is family harmony. She holds her family hostage in an effort to maintain the favor she so covets. Paradoxically, as a perpetuator of societal views and values, she conforms to

patriarchal expectations of maternal subjectivity, thus carving her family's niche in honorable social standing. The price for a good reputation, however, is enslavement to oppressive law.

Despite all her efforts to adhere to societal expectations and cultural practices, however, Bernarda Alba expresses a clear antagonism for the community. After the funeral for her husband, she immediately suspects that the townspeople that have come to pay their respects for the dead patriarch will find something about which they can gossip. Bernarda spurns them as they depart from her home. "Go back to your houses and criticize everything you've seen. I hope it'll be many years before you pass under the archway of my door again" (1023). Alba has obvious disdain for the community she goes to such great lengths to please.

Alba's hostility towards her community is understandable. Her culture's intolerance of deviation from tradition is both rigid and misogynistic.³⁷ In a culture in which women are commodities, subjects objectified to perpetuate wealth and pass on property, their conformity to traditional practices is paramount. Augustias, for example, is a high priority target for any single man of some social standing. She is the oldest daughter and will therefore be the beneficiary of the Alba fortune. "Augustias has all her father's money; she's the only rich one in the house and that's why, now that Father's dead and the money will be divided, they're coming for her" (1026). Amelia's insights here contain a staggering amount of subtext. First, the audience is aware of the fact that Augustias is Bernarda's daughter from a previous marriage. Her father was obviously a wealthy man, and, upon his death, the fortune would have changed hands, first left to Bernarda, then assumed by Bernarda's next, now recently deceased, husband. Bernarda,

in this sense, was a transmitter of property. That which Bernarda inherited, once she married, was no longer hers. It transformed into a dowry of sorts. Under these conditions, Bernarda was denied ownership; the husband, as male, legally acquired possession of her assets. Now Augustias is in the same situation. *They are now coming for her*. The language here suggests a siege. Augustias, as woman of worth, is to be plundered and possessed.

Luce Irigaray, in her critiques of western philosophy, virulently attacks this concept of marital union. Marriage has been traditionally employed as a means for acquiring wealth and property. “As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value” (“Women on the Market” 175). Females are chattel to be traded. They can expand empires, unify countries, and build dynasties. For Freud, “Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 59). As does Bernarda, Freud relegates the female to the domestic sphere. Political, theological, economic, ideological construction, the erection of culture, is to remain a masculine endeavor; building culture is a task for which Freud concludes *women are little capable*. Their incapacity, of course, originates in their absence of a penis, an absence that results in an ill-defined super-ego. Following this Freudian trajectory, legal codes that deny women ownership are in the best interests of a community. Lacanian assertions mirror the Freudian position. Lacan proposes:

Woman is introduced into the symbolic pact of marriage as an object of exchange along fundamentally androcentric and patriarchal lines. The woman is thus engaged in an order of exchange where she is an object; indeed is what causes the fundamentally conflictual character of her position—I would say without exit. The Symbolic order literally submerges her, transcends her. (*Seminar II* 304)

The fascistic elements of the Lacanian Symbolic are made manifest here. What is problematic about Lacan's position here is his conclusion. Women occupy this position of object *without exit*. The androcentric characteristics of a Symbolic order are only inescapable if they are accepted, endorsed, and perpetuated. Dutiful adherence to existing cultural practices *is* the exit-less scenario. Irigaray challenges the notion that patriarchal hierarchical social organization is the inescapable course that Lacan suggests. In Lacan's conception of marriage, he relies on his notion that women are devoid of *their own* subjectivity. "Women-as-commodities are thus subject to a schism that divides them into categories of usefulness and exchange value; into matter-body and an envelope that is precious but impenetrable, ungraspable, and not susceptible to appropriation by women themselves; into private use and social use" ("Women on the Market" 176). For Irigaray, the systematic erasure of feminine subjectivity enables the reduction of woman to a physical object that can be commodified and exchanged. Woman has been historically construed as only this *physical* creature that is to be exploited by males through the act of reproduction and through the act of exchange.³⁸

Bernarda Alba grounds herself in the phallogentric foundations of regional culture and local custom and respects the ideological constraints imposed on women by tradition.

It is only in this context that the androcentric features of a Symbolic order have no termination point. Ideas become as confining as concrete and barbed wire. Like Irigaray, Helene Cixous recognizes the cyclical nature of this perspective. Cixous identifies the problematic logic in phallogentric psychoanalytic theories.

Organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organizations subject to man. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between *activity* and *passivity*, which he uses to sustain himself. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity. (Cixous 38)

If women are unable to vote,³⁹ denied the right to contribute to the production of the Symbolic order, the suppression of the feminine is an institutionalized component of cultural formation. If forbidden the opportunity to participate in the construction of culture, culture is constructed for them by an outside force. Compliance in this process, unwillingness to revolt, renders woman mute—if she surrenders her subjectivity via assimilation into an oppressive order, she helps construct the bars of her own prison. Female non-participation in cultural construction, a right actively denied them by social practices and by law, is conflated with feminine passivity. For Cixous, “Philosophy is constructed on the premise of a woman’s abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery’s functioning” (ibid. 39). The machine to which Cixous refers is historically transmitted phallogentric ideology in all of its manifestations. A patriarchal construct is only possible when women are in collusion with their own oppression. This collusion is the prison in which Bernarda resides.

Bernarda actively endorses traditional values that have dismal effects on women. In Lorca's work, the matriarch, as an active participant in a repressive order, victimizes her daughters. At the same time, however, though Bernarda is directly responsible for transmitting oppressive cultural practices, she is not necessarily "to blame." Just as her daughters are born into a family in which rigid behavioral codes are in place, Bernarda has been indoctrinated by a culture in which the parameters for the maternal role are clearly delineated. Bernarda is clearly unwilling to deviate from the norm. This is *her* tragedy. This is the paradox. To avoid the pain of alienation and ostracism, Bernarda yields to the societal pressures that prevent the emergence of feminine agency. On an obvious level, therefore, the dutiful mother's passive deference is an act of both self-preservation and protection of the family since deviation from codes of conduct can result in corporal or capital punishment. This is first evident at the end of Act 2, when Poncia informs the household of a tumultuous event that is taking place beyond the walls of their abode.

Poncia: Librada's daughter, the unmarried one, had a child and no one knows whose it is.

Adela: A child?

Poncia: And to hide her shame she killed it and hid it under the rocks, but the dogs, with more heart than most Christians, dug it out and, as though directed by the hand of God, left it at her door. Now they want to kill her. They're dragging her through the streets—and running down the paths and across the olive groves the men are coming, shouting so the fields shake. (1033-34)

The community is reacting violently to a woman's deviation from cultural codes. *They* want to kill her; *they* drag her body. *They* are the men of the village. Just as *they* will lay siege on Augustias to possess her wealth and acquire her assets, *they* deliver rapid and ruthless punishment for a young woman's unsanctioned sexual conduct. Bernarda exhibits no pity for Librada's daughter. Although Bernarda does not literally beat Librada's daughter, the matriarch is in absolute collusion with the practices of her culture. "Let whoever loses her decency pay for it" (1034). Bernarda actively endorses the violence and oppression meted out by her community.

The standards for behavior, however, are not applied consistently to all subjects. Male sexuality can be expressed more freely. Adelaida's family history speaks to the freedom with which male subjects can satisfy their desires. "Her father killed his first wife's husband in Cuba so he could marry her himself. Then he left her there and went off with another woman who already had one daughter, and then he took up with this other girl, Adelaida's mother, and married her after his second wife died insane" (1025). This frivolous indulgence of sexual appetite is a luxury that only men can enjoy. Librada's daughter experiences this lesson with potentially fatal consequences. Bernarda articulates a clear alliance with this double standard. When the family stallion beats against the walls of its stable, in revolt against its confinement, Bernarda suspects that the animal is "too hot" from the sexual repression that has been imposed upon it. Her response to the horse is a crystallization of her views on sexual practices. "Let him out to roll in the straw [...] lock the mares in the corral, but let him run free" (1034). The parallel between the stallion and the Alba daughters is obvious. The young Alba women are as imprisoned as the horse, but the daughters, as *daughters*, are in a double bind.

They are relegated to the stable of cultural law, but they have even less freedom of movement. As women, they need to be locked up like mares; they cannot enjoy any reprieve from the harshness of their subjection. Men, however, appear exempt from rigid behavioral codes. Early in Act 1, a servant condemns the recently deceased master. As bells ring to indicate the death of this wealthy landowner, the servant enjoys a private moment to vent her rage.

Yes, yes—ring away. Let them pelt you in a coffin with gold inlay and brocade to carry it on—you're no less than I'll be, so take what's coming to you, Antonio Maria Benavides—stiff in your broadcloth suit and your high boots—take what's coming to you! You'll never again lift my skirts behind the corral door!" (1022)

This passage illustrates the wrath that results from horrific double standards. Her monologue begins as a rebuke of wealth and privilege. Though there exists an association between wealth and high moral ground, the servant bemoans the unjust distributions of material goods and property. The wealthy live in excess while the poor “suffer in silence” (1022). This *silence* is precisely the problem. Power structures rely on this ambivalence—revolution will never occur if subjects are convinced that they have no power to reshape the Symbolic order. Her wrath at hypocrisy and the consequences of this *silence* take on a far more tragic tenor when she condemns this “gentleman” for raping her. Like Adelaida's father, Master Benavides indulged in whatever brutal fantasy he found appealing. Pepe el Romano, too, basks in the warmth of unbridled sexuality. Although he courts Augustias, he enjoys physical liaisons with Adela.

As a microcosm of society at large, the Alba home mirrors the tensions of an androcentric culture. Though patriarchal practices are imbedded in ideological, religious, and community systems, and though “appropriate” feminine conduct, as Bernarda so clearly articulates, is to conform to these systems, there is inevitable resistance to oppressive traditional values. There are obvious instances of overt revolt; Librada’s daughter and Adela both refute the law and pursue their sexual impulses. These women, however, are destroyed by their open refusal to sublimate desire. Yet Librada’s daughter and Adela are outliers; they “stand out” insofar as they patently and publicly denounce cultural authority. In this oppressive environment, rueful conformity is the more common trajectory. Adela’s sisters verbalize the psychological impacts of assimilation. Magdalena declares, “Today people are more refined. Brides wear white veils, just as in the cities, and we drink bottled wine, but we rot inside because of what people might say” (1025). Although she is the daughter of a wealthy, aristocratic, landowning family, material privilege provides her little salvation. Obliging cultural norms has a far greater impact on her than do the luxuries of an aristocratic existence. Obviously, Bernarda, too, has been subjected to patriarchal codes throughout life. Though she has elected to wholeheartedly conform to the mandates of paternal law, the matriarch is clearly motivated by fear—Bernarda is motivated by the compulsion to “fit in,” *rotting inside because of what people might say*. Amelia goes so far as to claim, “To be born a woman’s the worst possible punishment” (1030). Woman must be subordinate to male authority; she must sublimate her desire. Although all subjects are subjected to the parameters of the order, women are far more confined in patriarchal social structure. The agency of these women is profoundly restricted. Not only must they answer to cultural

codes that demand their deferral to paternal law, they must endure the tyrannical reign of a mother that respects these codes to the letter. For Augustias, the injustice of the system produces jealousy and rage. “Envy gnaws on people” (1029). This gnawing effect results in gossip, vendettas, and violence. Bernarda, the rigid ruler of the home, is privy to the complaints of her daughters. The matriarch is the immediate source of her children’s angst. Alba, however, is unbending in her fidelity to oppressive traditions. At the same time, she articulates dissatisfaction similar to her daughters’. In a fit of frustration, Bernarda declares, “Things are never the way we want them!” (1033). This is a tragic moment. Bernarda displays overt hostility towards the system she goes to such great pains to perpetuate. Though dutifully endorsing the law of the land, she clearly recognizes, if only briefly in the work, that the cultural practices she transmits limit agency, suppress desire, and engender bitterness. Moreover, the “we” to whom she refers is ambiguous. Though she could be speaking to the experiences of the Benavides-Alba family unit, Bernarda is, knowingly or not, delving into the trauma of subject formation. The “we” is the subject confined to the limits imposed by a Symbolic order; as a participant in culture, one must conform to clearly delineated codes of conduct, an obligation that fundamentally suppresses agency and personal freedom. Further still, the “we” denotes women in particular, subjects who occupy a patriarchal Symbolic to which they must answer but which they have not constructed.

As we have seen, the Alba women navigate an order in which women are objects to be exchanged in marital unions. Feminine sexuality is taboo and must be repressed. Deviation from societal norms results in corporeal punishment or execution. The Law functions as a prison. This ideological confinement is physically manifested when the

Alba daughters are confined to the home. Furthermore, the vehicle for patriarchal oppression is, in the Alba case, a woman—the mother. Inevitably, the daughters develop a growing urge to escape the tyranny of phallogentric ideology. In the context of the play, liberation means getting out of the house. Since Bernarda, as a physical representation of the Law, restricts the movement of her subjects, the women in the Alba home seek freedom from the prison-house the only way they can get it—through marriage. Paradoxically, the very patriarchal order that has imposed limitations on feminine agency provides the illusion here that coupling with a man will provide free movement. Pepe El Romano, the man in this play that offers this “freedom,” is a prize for which the daughters compete. The young women are locked up together and battle ensues for the opportunity to become unshackled.

Although, as culture dictates, Augustias, the oldest daughter, has a monopoly on Pepe, her sisters wage war on one another in attempts to undermine the wedding. The antagonism between the young women is evident. Augustias defends the legitimacy of her pending union: “Pepe El Romano chose me!” (1032). Adela responds, “only for your money,” and Martirio replies, “for your fields and orchards” (1032). Martirio, of course, steals Augustias’ photograph of Pepe, and Adela actively pursues a physical relationship with Pepe. Luce Irigaray argues that this animosity among women is the direct result of a patriarchal order. The conditions of a phallogentric economy produce conflict among women. “If we are to be desired and loved by men, we must abandon our mothers, substitute for them, eliminate them in order to be *same*. All of which become at once accomplices and rivals in order to move into a single possible position in the desire of a man” (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 102). In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, rivalries are

clear. Martirio's rebuke of Adela captures the hostility among women in the Alba home. "My blood is no longer yours, and even though I try to think of you as a sister, I see you as just another woman" (1038). As *just another woman*, Adela is an obstacle to surmount. Once familial respect is abandoned, there is no kinship among women. The daughters are only emulating their mother's behavior. Bernarda throws down the gauntlet when her children resist her iron rule. "A daughter who's disobedient stops being a daughter and becomes an enemy" (1034). The Alba daughters jockey for the favor of a specific figure, Pepe El Romano. Bernarda, on the other hand, vies for the good graces of the community. Throughout Lorca's work, women are pitted against women in their plights to achieve personal goals. When the females align with paternal law (communal law and traditional values), their relationships with other women suffer. Maria Josefa, however, recognizes the damaging effects of feminine rivalry; again she is the voice of dissent. "Pepe el Romano is a giant. All of you love him. But he's going to devour you because you're grains of wheat. No, not grains of wheat. Frogs with no tongues!" (1037). To the Alba daughters, Pepe is a *giant* because he is the emblem of freedom from their mother's unrelenting domination. For Josefa, however, Pepe is massive as the personification of an oppressive order. He is the illusion of liberation and freedom.

Although Bernarda asserts herself vehemently through language of power and control, she speaks the Symbolic order. Through oppressive discourse, she transmits cultural practices that marginalize feminine subjectivity and profoundly limit female agency. Irigaray specifically targets this problem. "Consider the exemplary case of *father-son relationships*, which guarantee the transmission of patriarchal power and its

laws, its discourse, its social structures” (“Commodities among Themselves 193). The *father-son relationship* extends beyond the familial unit. This relationship is the generational transmission of power through exclusion. Women have been historically denied access to education, to property, and to the political process and have therefore been denied the opportunity to *contribute to the production of* law, discourse, and social structures. Men construct the law, organize political policy, and ensure that their power is maintained through perpetuity. For Irigaray and Cixous, this misogynistic system is not the natural state of social formation as Freud and Lacan propose. Instead, the patriarchal machine can only click and hum along undisturbed if women passively enable its operations. Maria Josefa suggests that Pepe el Romano is the embodiment of this machine that reduces women to insignificant “grains of wheat.” Irigaray notes that a phallogocentric economy is the product of linguistic systems. She asserts that an androcentric order “cannot be put into practice at all, except in language” (“Commodities among Themselves 193). In this claim, Irigaray accepts the Lacanian notion that subject formation is possible only through language. One speaks one’s self in order to become an assimilated member of the collective. At the same time, however, Irigaray posits that male domination, though evident in material practices, can be legitimated and perpetuated only within a linguistic matrix. Feminine passivity, the collusion to which Cixous refers, is the inarticulate woman—the woman who does not speak herself.

Bernarda Alba does not speak herself. By speaking the language of feminine erasure, she speaks her culture. The maternal function, we learn from Kristeva, enables subject formation. Alba forms subjects who yield to the pressures of the state. Maria Josefa is painfully aware of this reality. She rebukes her grand-children as “frogs with no

tongues.” Her granddaughters are subjects who defer to prevailing ideology. The young women in the Alba home have clearly inherited an outlook presented to them, by all around them but Josefa, which indicates that appropriate feminine conduct is not merely the result of context-bound, cultural designation but originates from a source with far more authority.

To be sure, Poncia presents tradition as divine mandate. When Adela endeavors to undermine a hierarchical organization that assigns Augustias as Pepe’s unquestioned bride, Poncia attempts to quell Adela’s dangerous noncompliance. The youngest daughter recoils from her mother’s rigid authority and proclaims, “My body will be for whomever I choose” (1029). Poncia admonishes Adela; unsanctioned female desire should not be articulated. A culture in which women are commodified through the trade of marriage requires its female subjects to be docile bodies. Poncia operates as a mechanism of patriarchal oppression even as she consoles the young woman.

Besides, who says you can’t marry him? Your sister Augustias is sickly. She’ll die with her first child. Narrow waisted, old—and out of my experience I can tell you she’ll die. Then Pepe will do what all widowers do in these parts: he’ll marry the youngest and most beautiful, and that’s you. Live on that hope, forget him, anything; but don’t go against God’s law. (1029)

In this passage, Poncia conflates traditional values, the Law of the Father, with divine authority. In this context, God’s law mandates the oldest daughter’s “right” to marry first. Augustias, already thirty-nine, will probably not survive labor. Upon her sister’s death, Adela would then, at least according to Poncia, be free to pursue, or be pursued by,

Pepe el Romano. Poncia's advises Adela to *live on that hope*. In this obscene moment, Augustias is reduced to an object of male desire and relegated to the producer of children. Irigaray associates this line of thinking with the erasure of feminine subjectivity. Once objectified, "her status as envelope and thing(s) has not been interpreted, she remains inseparable from the work or act of man, notable insofar as he defines her and creates *his* identity with her as his starting point or, correlatively, with this determination of her being" (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 10). Pepe needs a woman to produce his children. At the same time, Augustias is not the only woman objectified in this exchange. Adela conflates her happiness with Pepe's desire, so his actions dictate her mindset. She can hope that her sister dies during childbirth. She can hope that, if such an event were to occur, Pepe would then "choose" her.

Interestingly, Poncia articulates the fusion of cultural practices and divine law. As domestic servant and member of the peasant class, she has little, if any, hope for upward mobility. At the same time, however, she speaks the master's tongue. By merging social structure and the will of God, she legitimates her own oppression. Although Bernarda claims that the poor are made of "different stuff," Poncia and Bernarda both yield to a patriarchal structure that prescribes their social trajectories.⁴⁰ Lacan claims, "The symbolic is the basis of what was made into God" (*Seminar XX* 83). Although this statement inverts Christian logic, the result is the same. Cultural practices are respected if and when they are regarded as the expression of a prime mover. It is not just the will of mid-twentieth century Spain (or late nineteenth century Norway and Sweden) that women be relegated to the home and confined by the policies of patriarchal law; it is, as Poncia declares, the will of God.

The Lacanian claim that the Symbolic order coincides with the function of God re-contextualizes the socio-political landscape. The shapes and contours of the Symbolic order undeniably influence subject formation, and the legitimacy of that order is guaranteed by the illusory notion that the cultural practices within the order are divinely inspired. At the same time, however, the perpetuation of paternal law, as Kristeva informs us, is contingent upon maternal endorsement of the law. If that endorsement is provided unquestioningly, the maternal function is complicit in the production of potentially unjust law. That compliance, however, is obscured by the illusion that God has shaped and inspired the law. Maintaining this perception is a vital tool for institutions in power. Nietzsche, however, challenges this perspective. “Almost everything we call ‘higher culture’ is based on the spiritualization and intensification of *cruelty*—this is my proposition; the ‘wild beast’ has not been laid to rest at all, it lives, it flourishes, it has merely become—deified” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 229). Fifty years later, Lacan integrates this *spiritualization* into his psychological theory of subject formation. For Lacan, the Symbolic assumes the function of God in order to legitimate itself. As Žižek tells us, ideology only functions if it possesses the illusion that it can make us whole. For Nietzsche, the divine component of cultural construction is hugely problematic, and it is the instrument of oppression. This is the *cruelty* to which he refers. This cruelty is that which engenders a herd mentality, *slave morality*, in collusion with a force that confines its agency. This cruelty manifests itself in the Lacanian notions that the Symbolic order is fundamentally androcentric in its functioning and that woman is submerged in an oppressive order without exit.⁴¹ The *wild beast* is a culture in which agency is limited for any subjects.

For Nietzsche, there is an exit. There is a way to avoid collusion. This is expressed through the subject's *will to power*. "Freedom of the will"—that is the expression for the complex state of delight of the person exercising volition, who commands and at the same time identifies himself with the executor of the order—who as such, enjoys also the triumph over obstacles, but thinks within himself that it is really his will itself that overcame them" (ibid. 26). The will to power is a subject's assertion of self despite real or perceived social consequences. Bernarda is enslaved by her compulsion to please a society that already confines her movements. As culture perpetuates itself through law and tradition, Bernarda perpetuates this enslavement through her dutiful compliance to these laws and traditions. Bernarda, however, transmits this compliance to her children and demands that they acquiesce as well. This cycle, quite obviously, is what enables the patriarchal machine to function. Nietzsche's will to power is the will to disturb and disrupt the cycle. He vehemently proclaims that to adhere to cultural codes *because* they have been codified, to respect authority *because* it is authoritative is to embrace and ensure one's own incarceration. In a Nietzschean context, the trajectory of the subject is inhibited mainly by the restrictions and limitations the subject elects to impose on itself. Undeniably, there are often consequences for deviations from cultural practices. Librada's daughter, for example, is potentially murdered for her will to power. Her deviation from appropriate models of feminine behavior can be construed as insane. At the same time, there are undoubtedly consequences, as this play illustrates, for perpetuating unjust cultural practices. Punishment for self-assertion, however, continues only if it is tolerated. *The House of Bernarda Alba* is a play that enacts precisely how this toleration is solidified.

Like Librada's daughter, Adela resists authority when she speaks out against Bernarda's fascistic rule. "There'll be an end to prison voices here! (*Adela snatches away her mother's cane and breaks it in two.*) This is what I do with the tyrant's cane" (1036). In an act of defiance, Adela rejects the law of the home. Clearly, the youngest daughter expresses adamant revolt against maternal authority. She pursues her desire in spite of Bernarda's maniacal fidelity to tradition and cultural practices. For Robert Lima, Adela's revolt signals revolutionary self-assertion. "Adela is transformed into a heroine fighting boldly, if hopelessly, for her cause" (285). The young woman's resistance against the Symbolic order, although a futile endeavor, is an admirable and epiphanic moment. Gwynne Edwards suggests that Adela's behavior is autobiographical, indicative "in many ways of his resistance to the conservative value of Spain in which he lived, and to that extent the play was highly prophetic, Adela being a projection of Lorca himself" (181). If one reads *The House of Bernarda Alba* as the author's expression of socio-political concerns, Adela's revolt and subsequent suicide mimic the playwright's refusal to pander to an unjust regime.

This revolt is foreign to those around her. As such, it is construed as madness. For a woman to deviate from prescribed social codes is not revolutionary; it appears insane. When Josefa articulates personal desires that do not conform to conventional notions of propriety, she is deemed crazy and locked away by her mother. When Librada's daughter exercises her sexuality, she is beaten and punished as a lunatic. Adela appears to be a victim of this social sickness, this mental illness. Augustias describes the downward spiral to Amelia, "I can tell it in her eyes. She's getting the look of a crazy woman" (1029). In other words, Adela seems to have inherited her grandmother's

insanity. This pathology, however, is not a dangerously anti-social affect. On the contrary, this brand of insanity is possibly the by-product of a phallogocentric social structure.⁴² Although Freud associates excitability, emotional upheaval, and depression with women, this association is not the reflection of an organic predisposition. Freud may well have confronted a disproportionately high number of female patients exhibiting symptoms of hysteria and depression, but his conclusions are questionable. If women occupy a culture in which their agency is systematically limited, a variety of emotional responses can ensue. To be sure, in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, a woman's refusal to cooperate with oppressive patriarchal codes is equated with madness. "Acting out" against oppression, Josefa, Adela, and Librada's daughter are all deemed insane. Upon further analysis, however, Adela's revolt against maternal authority is *not* quite the exertion of power it may appear; despite her efforts or intent, she *does not* transcend cultural law. After all, in her cane-breaking rant, Adela shouts, "No one but Pepe commands me!" (1036). Adela has, in fact, internalized her mother's worldview; women are at the mercy of a patriarchal order. Adela clearly rejects her mother's "law," but maternal authority, in this play, controls insofar as it transmits male subjectivity. Accordingly, when Adela revolts against Bernarda's fascism, Adela is rejecting the messenger but not the message. Even in her act of insubordination and total disregard of her mother's authority, Adela embraces the role of that which enables male subjectivity. What on the surface may appear to be utter disregard for traditional values is, *tragically*, simply an unconventional endorsement of these values. Again, this inability to break out of ideological closure evidences itself in the very closure of "conventional" dramatic form Lorca employs.

Though Adela ignores Augustias' "right" to Pepe, though Adela bypasses the necessity for marriage in pursuit of her sexual satisfaction, she embraces the underlying structures of a phallogentric social economy. That is to say, she reduces herself to the status of object and is thus in collusion with her own oppression. "I'll wear, before them all, the crown of thorns that belongs to the mistress of a married man" (1036). This moment is even more powerful in Ian Gibson's translation of *The House of Bernarda Alba*, taken from the 20th edition of Lorca's *Obras Completas*, published in 1978, in which Adela states: "After tasting his mouth I can't stand the horror of these ceilings any longer. I'll be whatever he wants. With the whole village against me, pointing at me with their burning fingers, persecuted by people who claim to be decent—in full view of all of them I'll put on the crown of thorns worn by the mistresses of married men" (925-6). As in *A Religious Tragedy*, sexual frustration is associated with the sufferings of Christ. As Jesus rejects cultural law to follow a "higher calling," Adela sacrifices her reputation to "stay true" to her personal desires. Her reference to the Messiah here is foreboding; as Christ's resolve results in his martyrdom, Adela's resoluteness will be equally fatal. *The burning fingers of people who claim to be decent* eradicate or ostracize that which deviates. The spirit of the *duende* now whispers through the walls. At the same time, however, what appears to be Adela's will to power is actually an illusion. Claiming that she will be *whatever he wants*, she will mold her subjectivity around his projection of desire. Unwilling to be the daughter Bernarda demands, she elects to be the woman for whom Pepe El Romano yearns. Each "identity," however, is prescribed. She is merely changing the setting of her confinement. In other words, Adela's dramatic revolt is a lateral move. "I'll go off to a little house where he'll come to see me whenever

he wants, whenever he feels like it” (1036). Adela has been the occupant of a home in which her movement has been restricted; she has not been in control of her actions. Her relocation situates her in the same position. Only this time, her movements are restricted, not by her mother, but by Pepe El Romano. Essentially, she, as did her mother, dutifully conforms to the absolute power of male authority.

Just as Bernarda’s orders are not her own, but instead reflect the parameters of prevailing patriarchal ideology, Adela’s liberating climax illustrates her respect for male authority. Ironically, this male authority is the same authority against which she revolts; the mandates of this authority have simply been articulated from the mouth of her mother. Adela does revolt against her mother’s iron will, but Adela’s revolutionary actions are superficial. Bilha Blum argues that Adela’s suicide provides refuge from the harshness of prevailing ideology. By killing herself, Adela enacts the ultimate repudiation of unjust social conditions. For Blum, death “is so intimately intertwined with the ideal that only those characters who reject or are rejected by society are ‘allowed’ to die” (78). This reading is deeply troubling. On a symbolic or metaphorical level, one can associate suicide with a revolutionary act or perceive death as a welcome reprieve. One must not forget, however, that Adela’s suicide is an act of total desperation and hopelessness. Adela takes her own life because she can see no end to her imprisonment. Upon the departure of Pepe, Adela is left in her mother’s prison without even the illusion of escape. Blum’s reading of *The House of Bernarda Alba* is eerily akin to Evert Sprinchorn’s reading of Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*. In regards to Hedda’s fatal, self-inflicted gunshot wound, Sprinchorn concludes, “she escapes from the slave morality of those who surround her and [...] dies in beauty” (54). These readings appear to ignore

the profound ethical dimension at play here. The agency of these heroines is so limited that their only “choice” is how and where to die. Both Adela and Hedda yearn to escape the confines of social expectation. Neither woman, however, is capable of achieving true liberation. Adela is deluded by the notion that an adulterous affair with a man will provide some relief from an abysmal material reality; Hedda manipulates and dominates other people in an effort to experience some semblance of control and agency. The possibility for freedom and agency is shattered for both characters. These women are cornered and believe that suicide is the only answer to their problems. In a dramatic or literary context, suicide can function as an expression of power. These works, however, enact real social conditions. If we occupy a Symbolic order in which certain subjects can experience freedom only through suicide, we are in a grave situation. Suicide in no way indicates a solution; on the contrary, it marks the failure to break out of a closed patriarchal system.

Poncia, servant to the house of Benavides-Alba, recognizes the severity of this impasse. Although Poncia articulates fidelity to the Symbolic order, she recognizes the tumultuous dynamic surrounding her. To her mistress, she exclaims, “Something very grave is happening here. I don’t want to put the blame on your shoulders, but you’ve never given your daughters any freedom” (1032). This exchange is ambiguous. On one hand, Poncia suggests that Bernarda’s tyrannical rule engenders the insubordination in her daughters that the matriarch is so desperately trying to prevent. In this context, the *something grave* is rebellion against cultural norms and deviation from social expectation. Bernarda’s daughters, as a result of their mother’s rigid, unbending authority, fall short of their roles as dutiful subjects in a patriarchal culture. C.

Christopher Soufas suggests that this *grave something* is Bernarda's inability to actually possess any power in a patriarchal culture.

Bernarda's ability to direct her household is steadily undermined by the discourse on Pepe el Romano that erupts from the very space designated to embody her authority. Bernarda's pretensions to control are thus discredited almost from the outset since the spectator clearly understands that something more powerful ("something extremely large") is making its uninvited presence felt in her private scene. (133)

Thus, Bernarda's rule is not her own. She does not transmit her own ideology; she broadcasts pre-existing mandates that have been set by communal will. Ironically, as Soufas suggests, Bernarda is unable to wield her power without contest. In this context, Soufas claims that "Pepe el Romano, and not Bernarda," is the "play's true protagonist" (133). Strangely, however, Pepe is never actually present in the drama. He is an absent master. Soufas' claim that Pepe is the actual protagonist, though insightful, does not reach far enough. The protagonist of this drama is the Symbolic order, tradition, social expectation. Convention is that which shapes the movement of this play. Like Pepe, the Symbolic operates as an absent master. Though it is constantly present, constantly shaping the trajectory of subjectivity, the ubiquitous nature of ideology and "culture" renders it inaccessible, always already absent, shapeless.

At the same time, however, Poncia, though she endorses the Symbolic in her conversation with Adela and appears to be voicing legitimating social structure in this exchange with Bernarda, describes betrothal as a prison when speaking to Amelia. Poncia claims "that two weeks after the wedding a man gives up the bed for the table,

then the table for the tavern, and the woman who doesn't like it can just rot, weeping in the corner" (1029). What the servant describes here is a Freudian dynamic of intersexual relationships in a patriarchal order. Freud, as matter-of-factly as does Poncia, suggests that women are condemned to develop an antagonistic attitude towards social practices.

Since a man does not have unlimited quantities of psychological energy at his disposal, he has to accomplish his tasks by making an expedient distribution of his libido. What he employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with them, even estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it. (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 59).

Men gravitate towards relationships with other men at the expense of their familial obligations. For Freud, this is the result of the solemn responsibility men must bear...the responsibility to organize and construct culture, a responsibility only they are biologically ill equipped to handle. In this context, Poncia's notion that *something very grave is happening* corresponds to the effects that a repressive patriarchal order has on feminine subjectivity. Poncia sees the young women fighting among themselves. She witnesses Bernarda literally incarcerate Maria Josefa. She sees her mistress dutifully conforming to a Symbolic order despite the dismal impact that order has on herself, her children, and the women of the village.

The *something grave* that Poncia acknowledges is a totalitarian state. Bernarda, when questioned by Poncia about her parenting methods, responds in a way that elucidates her dutiful posture. Bernarda defends her fascist rule by stating, “I’m not thinking. These are things that shouldn’t and can’t be thought out. I give orders” (1032). On a fundamental level, the role of a parent is, in fact, to *give orders*. Either directly or indirectly, the parent teaches the child how to appropriately assimilate into culture. Bernarda, however, implies that the orders she commands are simply the prevailing ideology of her culture. This matriarch does not put culture on trial. She does not follow the Kristevan trajectory of only endorsing a Symbolic order if that order is just. By her own account, Bernarda puts no thought into the process at all. From a Kristevan perspective, dutiful acquiescence to cultural norms *because* they are the norm is dangerously problematic.

Feminine perversion (*pere-version*) is coiled up in the desire for law as desire for reproduction and continuity, it promotes feminine masochism to the rank of structure stabilizer (against its deviations); by assuring the mother that she may thus enter into an order that is above humans’ will it give her her reward of pleasure. Such coded perversion, such close combat between maternal masochism and the law have been utilized by totalitarian powers of all times to bring women to their side, of course, they have succeeded easily. (“Stabat Mater” 328)

Kristeva argues that feminine conformity to patriarchal social structure is perverse. More aptly, the mother who legitimates phallogocentric ideology is the *pere-version*, the maternal version of the father.⁴³ Feminine perversion, reflecting that which moves toward the

reproduction and continuity, sanctions the reproduction of continuity. Kristeva seems to be suggesting that a mother's willingness to step into that conceptual space points to the perverse. The most *perverse* about this drama is the fact that there are no men ever present in the drama. The patriarch has died, but he clearly lives on as an absent master. Pepe El Romano shapes the action of the play, but he never materializes *onstage*. *The House of Bernarda Alba* presents an exclusively feminine space, yet depicts a world of women shaped by invisible men, men invisible because a) in a literal sense, they never appear in the production, and b) as shapers and purveyors of the law in a patriarchal order, these men remain concealed as an abstract, unrepresentable mass (what will be later discussed as the Heideggerian they). Bernarda Alba portrays the effects of this omnipresent-invisible patriarchal force, and she characterizes its *version* of the maternal function, the *dutiful mother* upon which the androcentric social structure depends. Repression of the feminine follows when the mother uses her position to transmit and perpetuate the priorities and practices of patriarchal conditions. For Lacan, this *version* of the mother is not a version at all; passive deferral to paternal law *is* the maternal function. Since Lacan claims that women are devoid of "their own" subjectivity, the feminine-maternal is that which enables the Law of the Father, enables male subjectivity. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan posits that "there's no such thing as Woman because, in her essence...she is not-whole" (72-3). Since woman has no subjectivity that is *her own*, the Lacanian notion of the maternal function is eerily akin to Bernarda's own notion of her parental role.⁴⁴ Kristeva's concept of *pere-version* is her response to this disturbing aspect of Freudian-Lacanian psychodynamics, dynamics informed by inherited phallogocentric presuppositions. Bernarda's daughters have, from their mother, internalized

this message. Amelia laments, “I do things without any faith, but like clockwork” (1025). Just as Bernarda thinks that societal norms should not be questioned, Amelia has no faith in the legitimacy of her material reality, but she conforms to its expectations robotically.

Understanding now the *perversions* conveyed in this drama, we can return to historical context. *The House of Bernarda Alba* can be easily read as Lorca’s cautionary tale expressing the dangers of right-wing extremism. The work is the author’s last, completed a little more than two months before his death at the hands of Franco’s military executioners. Bernarda Alba, the unbending matriarch who imposes her authority with no compromise, is easily comparable to the emerging right-wing martial-political machine during the civil strife of early 1930s Spain. Bernarda, who unquestioningly accepts prevailing ideology, is indicative of socio-political conditions that enable fascism and totalitarian states. To have no faith, but follow like clockwork is the attitude necessary for right wing extremism to take hold. Bernarda’s first and last word in the play is “Silence.” When the matriarch enters with the mourners, she shouts at the servant who speaks out against the injustices of the Symbolic order. The servant speaks out against male authority, against violence towards women, against unjust class hierarchy. Bernarda shouts and shakes her cane; she wants to squelch any emotion that stems from a heart that beats outside the patriarchal order. To pacify the mistress of the house, the servant no longer speaks herself, no longer articulates her views. Bernarda demands that usurpation, in any form, be suppressed at all times. The servant, therefore, transforms; she *performs* for Bernarda. First the servant celebrated the death of a violent master; upon Bernarda’s scolding, the servant celebrates her rapist, claiming, “I’m the

one who loved you most of all your servants” (1022). The play ends with a similar scenario. As Martirio weeps for Adela’s suicide, she also weeps jealously over Adela’s physical union with Pepe. Adela experienced that about which Martirio could only fantasize. Bernarda, however, vehemently rejects Martirio’s emotion and denies Adela’s sexual encounter. “My daughter died a virgin.⁴⁵ Take her to another room and dress her as though she were a virgin. No one will say anything about this! She died a virgin. Tell them, so that at dawn, the bells will ring twice” (1039). One again, *they* emerge. The community must be notified that Adela did, in fact, live according to the established parameters of conventional conduct. This notification, however, is a *dutiful* gesture. Bernarda tells her children to dress Adela *as though she were a virgin*. Bernarda’s denial of reality, therefore, is calculated collusion. Bernarda chooses to act *as if* Adela died a virgin in order to ensure and protect her family’s reputation. If “reality” does not conform to social or political necessity, “reality” must be reshaped. This is often the tactic of a fascist regime.⁴⁶

What is fascinating here is that Lorca employs a scenario in which a mother holds her children hostage. Clearly, there is a link between Bernarda’s iron grasp and Franco’s martial law and terror tactics. More poignantly, however, is Lorca’s method for imparting his message. Through family relationships, Lorca presents a story of fascistic rule. More specifically, however, the repressive functions of a totalitarian state are correlated in this drama with the repressive function of patriarchal ideology. Lorca here is suggesting to his audience: *if you want to understand the potential oppression of a right-wing dictatorship, consider the limitations imposed on feminine agency by patriarchal traditions. In Franco’s Spain, or Mussolini’s Italy, or Hitler’s Germany,*

everybody is reduced to the status of woman. If you are not sure how limitation of agency and freedom is manifested, consider how society treats the female subject.

As previously discussed, the playwright sought “photographic realism.” In the final analysis, however, what is most “real” about *The House of Bernarda Alba* are the psychological consequences that subjects endure when confined to a Symbolic order in which oppression is normalized. Furthermore, when the horrors of material conditions are amplified, examined, and laid bare, we—the subjects—often uniformly recoil from the representation or reject them altogether. In a Lacanian sense, we are overwhelmed by exposure to the Real. We are traumatized by the phantasm of unmediated, unpolished, unadulterated access to this...this...thing.⁴⁷ These glimpses into reality result in denial and terror. In a recent *New York Times* editorial, “How China Got Religion,” Slavoj Žižek identifies this bizarre phenomenon.

“Culture” has commonly become the name for all those things we practice without really taking seriously. And this is why we dismiss fundamentalist believers as “barbarians” with a “medieval mindset”: they dare to take their beliefs seriously. Today, we seem to see the ultimate threat to culture as coming from those who live immediately in their culture, who lack the proper distance. (10/11/07)

Accordingly, Bernarda Alba is a *freakish* or *unrealistic* expression of conformity to traditional values or *medieval* (uncompromising, unflinching, unconditional) in her rigid adherence to the Law. In Bernarda’s case, as in our own, the Law is real. Traditional values exist. The repression of feminine agency, certainly in Andalusia during the mid-twentieth century, was not an invented set of circumstances employed merely for literary

technique. Bernarda, however, follows the *letter* of the Law. In so doing, she exposes its rawness, its weirdness, and its injustice. But she does more than that...she *dutifully* inculcates the Law in her children. This process functions as a perverse revelation for the audience/reader. For this matriarch, men and women exist on different planes; society views and treats them differently. Women should propagate existing ideology regardless of its impact on them. As reader, as audience member, as critical thinker, one seemingly cannot help but ask *why* these circumstances could be tolerated. One cannot help but ask why any master-slave dialectic is perpetuated.⁴⁸ One either asks these questions, or one dismisses the entire situation as absurd, unrealistic, or unbelievable. Culture, as Žižek claims, signifies that which we exercise without taking seriously. *If* we take it seriously, if we behave like the atavistic Bernarda, we risk uncovering its strange contents and complying with them without question. Characters like Bernarda Alba do not disturb us because they are implausible or unrecognizable; they are disturbing because they are “so outrageous” and “because they spill the secret of what we have done for so long: respectfully tolerating what we don’t take quite seriously, and trying to contain its political consequences through the law” (Žižek *New York Times* 10/11/07). Bernarda shatters our capacity to enjoy the comfortable lie...the illusion that law and order and justice are synonymous, interchangeable.

To the extent that she reveals to us that which is concealed is the extent to which we recoil in horror from Bernarda Alba. She may well be emblematic of a terrible mother, a horrific oppressor, or an intolerant tyrant, but this woman is a powerful manifestation of cultural conditions. If women are denied subjectivity, if culture, via philosophy, psychoanalysis, law, politics, or tradition, sends women a message that they

are passive bodies that are to perpetuate existing norms, the maternal function is reduced to an instrument of the state. If one is tempted to read Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, or Kristeva as purveyors of theoretical abstractions with little relevance for the person waiting at the bus stop, consider Bernarda Alba. If phallogentric ideology is transmitted indiscriminately from society to its subjects, from parent to child, from mother to daughter, the machine rumbles forward.

CHAPTER 3

GETTING OFF THE BUS: THE DEATH OF JESSIE CATES

Marsha Norman's *'night, Mother*, like Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, is a "domestic" drama that examines the tumultuous mother-daughter relationship. Both works transpire entirely within the home and both plays are devoid of an on-stage male presence. Furthermore, these dramas conclude with a daughter's suicide. In Lorca's work, Bernarda Alba is an overbearing and aggressive woman who rigidly outlines the parameters of acceptable behavior for her children. Alba overtly endorses a phallogentric Symbolic order and endeavors to engender in her girls the willingness to subscribe to cultural norms and tradition. Unable to *speak herself*, opting instead to voice prevailing ideology, Alba perpetuates the oppressive social conditions that repress both her and her children. Thelma Cates appears to be a far cry from the angry Bernarda Alba; Thelma is a soft-spoken woman who, isolated and insulated on a country road, desperately endeavors to prevent her daughter, Jessie, from committing suicide. Although in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Adela's suicide is the climactic moment in the play, the moment during which the familial conflict crescendos, the structure of *'night, Mother* is decidedly anti-climactic. The audience is made aware of Jessie's intent to kill herself at the onset of the play. What drives Norman's work, therefore, is the *reason* that Jessie kills herself. Ultimately, Jessie articulates that in a world in which she feels powerless, suicide is the ultimate act of power and self-assertion.

As the one-act, two-character play develops, it becomes apparent that, tragically, Thelma's approach to parenting is and has been instrumental in Jessie's demise. On one hand, Mama is a passive and docile body who expresses little interest in anything at all. She exhibits no desire to *participate* in life. Unemployed and uninvolved in her community, she relegates herself to the domestic sphere and positions herself as in need of caretaking. On the other hand, when Thelma does take direct action, she strives not to redefine *her own* psychosocial space; instead, she elects to construct a false reality for her daughter. Through lies and misrepresentation, Thelma fabricates a fictional world for Jessie, a world in which Jessie's life might be more palatable. Mama's passivity and deceit stem from her lack of a Third Term; Thelma conflates her maternal role and her "identity." As a result, she treats her daughter as an extension of herself, denying Jessie the ability to individuate. Mama implicitly perceives the female subject as one that cannot function independently. Operating from this assumption, she transmits this notion to her daughter. The result is disastrous. Once denied her "actual" ontological circumstances, provided instead with only distorted and idealized projections of a world her mother has constructed, Jessie is deprived any opportunity to confront the Symbolic landscape *as it is*. How can one revolt if one is unaware of that which must be rejected?

Thelma Cates is trapped by her perception of the world. She is convinced that the female subject is fragile and in need of protection. The mother shelters her daughter from the "real" conditions of the "actual" world. She lies to Jessie about Jessie's illness; she shields Jessie from the fact that Cecil, Jessie's former husband, was unfaithful. Thelma carefully constructs a world in which her daughter can remain oblivious to any and all unpleasant aspects of life. Thelma, however, sequesters herself with equal resolve. She

spends most of her time in quiet anonymity, tucked away in her home and away from that which she cannot control. As Bernarda Alba forcibly confines her daughters, Thelma Cates, via manipulation and dishonesty, psychologically contains her child. *'night, Mother*, therefore, depicts a toxic dyad. The events unfold in the home; never in the play do these women venture outside the house. Furthermore, though men are mentioned, they never appear on stage. They are not part of the dyad and therefore superfluous figures. Jessie's relationships with her son, Ricky, with her ex-husband, Cecil, and with her brother, Dawson, are all marginalized by the mother-daughter dynamic. This confinement is at the root of Jessie's tragedy. Devoured by a phallic mother, Jessie is denied freedom to maneuver. Denied her own ontological fulfillment, Thelma consumes her child.

'night, Mother has garnered a wide array of critical attention. Marsha Norman won the Pulitzer Prize for the play in 1983, but responses to her work have not been consistently positive by any means. In a *New York Daily News* review of the play, Douglas Watt condemns *'night, Mother* as too unbelievable to take seriously, claiming, "the circumstances strike me as alien, pat, and unlikely" (qtd. in Kintz 197). Howard Kissel argues that Thelma and Jessie are uninspired figures who "have led plain, unlyric lives" (ibid. 197). These reviewers both essentialize the play as unimaginative "domestic drama" that offers little literary value. When critic Robert Brustein argues that the play "satisfies Aristotle's requirements for tragic drama," his acclaim was problematic for some feminists (qtd in Kintz 198). Linda Kintz suggests that Brustein's appraisal "recuperated it to a masculine definition of universality, defined as the ability to speak as a generic spectator" (198). It is for this reason that some feminist critics reject Norman's

play as an extension of masculine priorities. For Jeanie Forte, *'night, Mother* is “a reinscription of the dominant order” and therefore “could not be useful for feminists interested in the subversion of a patriarchal social structure” (116). Forte continues, “*'night, Mother* may be *perceived* as a feminist text, in that it challenges on some material level the reality of male power” (123). In her final analysis, however, Forte takes issue with Norman’s work. For Forte, although *'night, Mother* acknowledges the issues women face in a patriarchal culture, the play does little more than *describe* an obvious problem. Jill Dolan echoes Forte’s sentiments. For Dolan, “Norman’s play can be considered for canonical membership because Norman is still writing for male spectators under the guise of universality” (39). If the problem of feminine oppression is reduced to the problem of oppression, the drama is denied its gender specific message. For both of these critics, Norman’s form imitates its content. The “classic realism”⁴⁹ Norman employs mimics prevailing theatrical technique just as Jessie’s suicide and Thelma’s helplessness perpetuate existing notions of feminine subjectivity as inevitably and inescapably engaged. Though these critics clearly identify problems with the text, blanket dismissal of the work is unwarranted.

Acknowledging that men and women have responded to the play differently, critic Jenny Spencer proposes that an audience member’s gender weighs heavily in her or his interpretation of Norman’s work.

[This play]...both self-consciously addresses a female audience and subconsciously works upon the female psyche in powerful ways, positioning male and female viewers differently in the process. Indeed, because of the way in which the text foregrounds issues of female identity

and female autonomy, focuses on the mother-daughter relationship, and controls the narrative movement; the relatively detached position available (however tentatively) to male viewers simply cannot (without great risk) be taken up by women. (“*'night, Mother: Psycho-drama of Female Identity*” 365)

Though Spencer recognizes that sexual difference plays a key role in one's experience of symbolic structures such as linguistic, literary, and artistic representation, she subtly makes the assumption here that males may be predisposed to a *detached position* as spectator. Though a male reader/audience member obviously has no sense of what life is like as a woman, a male certainly is capable of understanding repressive social forces, yet Spencer proposes that the male subject is psychologically prone to *miss the point* of the play. Her claim suggests a structural antagonism that puts men and women on “opposing sides” of a psycho-political continuum. Does not this notion of a closed psychical space potentially position men as powerless to participate in the endeavor to emancipate woman from oppressive cultural practices?

Other critics read *'night, Mother* as an expression of female empowerment. For Linda Ginter Brown, “the final gunshot” signals the moment “Jessie assumes control over her life,” and “during the play's action, she and Thelma connect in a way they never could before” (73). The suicide in this play, however, terminates the possibility for control. When Jessie ends her life, she forfeits any possibility *for* control. She does control the materiality of her existence and exerts power over the circumstances, the time, and the place for her death, but what is most compelling about the act is that she effectively rejects the familial and social forces that have for so long controlled her. At

the same time, though Brown argues “both women experience psychic hunger brought about by the helplessness women have historically experienced as part of a patriarchal cultures that offers little hope for personal power,”⁵⁰ her argument problematically suggests a *biological* link between women and the domestic sphere. “Traditionally, we tend to view the kitchen as the heart of the house, symbolizing mother, warmth, and nurturance. We break bread, which mother prepares, in the bosom of our family” (74). Brown qualifies this *tradition* by asserting that, “the kitchen, usually smaller than the other rooms in the house, functions as a womb—a warm and safe place” (74). Part of the powerlessness to which Brown refers is doubtlessly the patriarchal power structures that relegate the female subject to the domestic sphere. Brown, however, *maternalizes* the domestic space and does so through anatomical reference.

Katherine Burkman also meditates on food and “hunger” in the play. Burkman argues that Jessie recognizes “her mother’s greater appetite for life,” arranges “for the continued availability of the sweets her mother craves as a consolation for her empty existence,” and offers Mama “more nourishing truths that may sustain her after her daughter’s death” (255). Clearly, Jessie does possess a *greater appetite for life*; she yearns for agency. Thelma’s desire for something more, however, is suspect. Thelma’s complacent acceptance of her ontological and material conditions directly contributes to Jessie’s desperation.

’night, Mother is, at its heart, a play about power and representation. Jessie Cates is a young woman no longer willing to endure a world in which her agency is stifled. In an act of defiance and self-assertion, Jessie decides to end her life, assuming, therefore, complete control over the materiality of her existence. Thelma Cates, Jessie’s mother,

rejects her daughter's decision and pleads with her child to rethink such a desperate undertaking. In a grueling one-act play, a work that transpires in "real time," Jessie's will to take action is juxtaposed by Thelma's powerlessness. In an immediate sense, Thelma is powerless to dissuade her daughter from killing herself, for the play concludes with Jessie's presumably fatal, self-inflicted gunshot wound. In a philosophical context, however, Thelma's powerlessness is profoundly more far-reaching. Thelma has resigned herself to an androcentric socio-political matrix; she has passively accepted a trajectory established *for* her instead of actively pursuing her interests or actively rejecting any obstacle that would prevent such a pursuit. Jessie refuses to re-enact this complacency. Lynda Hart describes this tension as the conflict resulting when "one woman who has passively integrated into a delimiting and oppressive society is pitted against another who wildly rebels, even at the risk of self-destruction, against the rigid system" (68). Having never been provided with examples of resistance, moreover, having a mother who never articulates even a need for this resistance, Jessie's means for rebellion are profoundly limited.

Undeniably, in any Symbolic Order grounded in Lacanian assumptions, the psychical "destiny" of the female subject is perceived as a non-negotiable, inescapable reality.⁵¹ As Kristeva and Irigaray, among many others, tell us, a Symbolic Order is variable; its "validity" depends upon the willingness of its subjects to endorse, accept, and conform to its parameters.⁵² Though phallic monism is deeply ingrained in prevailing ideology, feminine revolt, more specifically, *maternal* revolt against this oppression is the means for restructuring the Symbolic. In *'night, Mother*, however, Thelma Cates leaves the potential revolutionary energy of motherhood unexplored. Mama swallows

prevailing ideology as she does snowballs and Hershey bars. In so doing, she secures her position as object, as subordinate. This process, however, has a rippling effect. Thelma Cates does not live in a vacuum; she is rearing a child.

Thelma's acquiescence to prevailing ideology cannot be entirely perceived as a *choice*. To assimilate into the Symbolic Order is to become successfully indoctrinated with the "appropriate" cultural data, information that enables a subject to function within a social network. As Slavoj Žižek explains, assimilation into the Symbolic is inevitable if the subject perceives existing social structures as natural, organic outgrowths of the "reality" upon which these structures are built.

Ideology is not simply a 'false consciousness,' an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological'—'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence...

'Ideological' is not the 'false consciousness' of a social being but this being in so far as it is supported by 'false consciousness.' (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 21)

Ideology, therefore, as the epicenter of Symbolic structures, is not the subject's perception of social landscape, but is instead the landscape itself as endowed with the ideological. In other words, Thelma does not deliberately *choose* to be a *dutiful mother*. She does, however, make a choice. By uncritically following the road that lay before her, by taking the path of least resistance, Thelma's chooses inaction; she elects to embrace ideological structures *because* these structures are pervasive, authoritative. The first step

in revolt, a step Thelma Cates is clearly incapable of taking, is to scrutinize cultural practices, to put them “on trial.”

Confounding matters, not conforming to prevailing ideology is often construed as *madness*. To *go off-road* is to *stray from the path*. In *'night, Mother*, this psychological sickness is made manifest through physical illness. Jessie is “crippled” by epilepsy. Furthermore, when Jessie proclaims her intent to kill herself, her mother’s initial response is, “It must be time for your medicine” (1492). Jessie’s decision to kill herself is *crazy*, and, as a result, she is first not taken seriously. Her insanity, however, is not simply her desire to destroy herself. She is mad insofar as she deviates from cultural codes—unlike her mother, Jessie rejects the Symbolic. She speaks her desire. As Irigaray notes, speaking such desire is taboo in a patriarchal culture. In regards to woman, “Desire for her, her desire, that is what is forbidden by the law of the father, of all fathers: fathers of families, fathers of nations, religious fathers, professor-fathers, doctor-fathers, lover-fathers, etc. Moral or immoral, they always intervene to censor, to repress, the desire of/for the mother” (“The Bodily Encounter with the Mother” 36).

Refusal to assimilate, rejection of androcentric codes is *the choice*; revolt is the choice. As evidenced by the fate of Librada’s daughter in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, however, deviation from culturally constructed and historically transmitted conceptions of appropriate female conduct can have violent consequences.⁵³ The revolutionary can face physical harm, social exile, and psychological alienation. For Julia Kristeva, revolt is associated with the *abject*, that which “has only one quality” which is “that of being opposed to the *I*” and, as such, is “the place where meaning collapses” (“Approaching Abjection” 230). The abject operates in absolute conflict with phallic wholeness, in total

opposition to the subject's desire for paternal law.⁵⁴ For Kristeva, the *deject* is s/he who puts the legitimacy of cultural law "on trial," refusing to conflate its perpetuity with validity.

A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved. ("Approaching Abjection" 235).

Thelma's approach to the world is antithetical to this position. When Jessie expresses curiosity about Agnes and about Thelma's marriage, Thelma replies, "Why do you have to know so much about things, Jessie? There's just not that much *to* things that I could ever see" (1499). It is at this point that the gulf between mother and daughter is so clear. Jessie, no longer willing to endure an existence in which she feels powerless, is the daughter of a woman who passively accepts the world.

For Thelma, this notion that *there's just not that much to things* has deep ramifications. At age fifteen, Thelma marries Jessie's father, but confesses to her daughter that she never loved the man. "It was a big fat lie, the whole thing" (1499). Her marriage to this man, therefore, is not the result of romantic love or physical attraction. If her wedding is one of obligation, one of role fulfillment, one of a young woman doing what is expected, it is perhaps a pivotal moment in her integration into the Symbolic. For Kristeva, a romantic relationship to an Other is more than an obligatory gesture; it is an essential component in subject formation. "There is an idealized other who returns his own ideal image (that is the narcissistic moment), but he is nevertheless an other. It is

essential for the lover to maintain the existence of that ideal other and to be able to imagine himself similar, merging with him, and even indistinguishable from him” (“Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents” 147). In other words, when engaged in a romantic relationship, a subject is exposed to an idealized “self,” an altogether other version of the self, the self that is loved by the partner, the self as seen through the eyes of the other. This other, however, is not the objectifying male gaze. In short, this idealized other is the Father of Individual Prehistory, a conceptualization:

Endowed with the sexual attributes of both parents, and by that very token a totalizing, phallic figure, it provides satisfactions that are already psychical and not simply immediate, existential requests; that archaic vortex of idealization is immediately an *other* who gives rise to a powerful, already psychic transference of the previous semiotic body in the process of becoming a narcissistic Ego. (“Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents” 147)

This idealized other is a third term in a relationship. *In a relationship, I project an idealized version of my partner, and my partner projects an idealized version of me. An integral component of my psychical formation is my attempt to fuse with my partner’s idealized version of me. Likewise, my partner undergoes the same process.*⁵⁵

For a mother, this idealized other is the third term, something outside and beyond the child, which enables *the process of becoming a narcissistic Ego*. This third term can be the husband, the lover, art, politics, religion. It does not matter *what* it is, only *that it is*. Without this third term, the mother’s subjectivity is subsumed in the materiality of the

child, and, more tragic still, the mother cannot exhibit for the child her capacity to love.⁵⁶ Without a love-object beyond the child, the narrative of “identity” will remain unwritten.

Sadly, Thelma’s construction of subjectivity is reliant solely on her status as mother. In regards to her loveless marriage to Jessie’s father, Thelma claims, “It didn’t matter whether I loved him. It didn’t matter to me and it didn’t matter to him. And it didn’t mean that we didn’t get along. It wasn’t important. We didn’t talk about it” (1500). These statements typify Thelma’s ambivalence. What is of utmost importance to Thelma is her child. This devotion, however, is a problematic perversion of maternal love. Irigaray accounts for this phenomenon as the outgrowth of a patriarchal order in which “the dominant fantasy of the mother” is that of a “volume, a receptacle for reproduction” (Whitford 28). In a socio-political structure in which this notion is inherited and subsequently transmitted, female agency, freedom, and subjectivity are confined to the maternal function. Ironically, as Kristeva illuminates, if a mother’s identity is inseparable from her maternal function, there are dire consequences for both mother and child.

Thelma assimilates into an Order in which her subjectivity is conflated with maternal responsibility. Thelma’s passivity is *not* merely metaphoric or theoretical. Thelma’s complacency is made manifest—embodied in, gestures, tones, and expression, incarnate in language. As this production begins, Jessie is foraging through the house for the gun with which she intends to commit suicide. Thelma, focused first on eating a cupcake and then on preparation for her weekly Saturday night manicure, answers her daughter’s questions inattentively. As if the object of Jessie’s search becomes suddenly apparent, Thelma asks why Jessie needs the weapon, and her daughter evasively responds

that she wants it for protection against would-be burglars. Mama exclaims, “We don’t have anything anybody’d want, Jessie,” and proposes that, were the situation to arise, they simply, “hand it over to them when they come, how’s that? Whatever they want, the criminals” (1492). In an immediate sense, Thelma’s approach to this scenario of home invasion is practical. At the same time, however, Thelma articulates her worldview: conflict must be avoided at all costs. Only seconds later in this discussion, as talk of criminals reminds Mama of Jessie’s delinquent son, Thelma’s avoidance comes through in her advice to Jessie on parenting. “It’s just something Ricky’s going through. Maybe he’s in with some bad people. He just needs some time, sugar. He’ll get back in school or get a job or one day you’ll get a call and he’ll say he’s sorry for all the trouble he’s caused you and invite you out for supper someplace dress-up” (1492). At this point, Thelma’s consolation revolves around that which is edible. First, she refers to her daughter as *sugar*. Though a common term of affection, Thelma’s pet name for Jessie is psychologically charged. This mother, having forfeited her desires, having swallowed notions of feminine fragility and dependence, sweetens a stale and unfulfilled existence with processed cakes and chocolates. Having denied herself ontological sustenance, she gratifies herself by consuming treats. This displacement is also apparent in her relationship with Jessie. Sheltering her daughter in a fictional world, she consumes Jessie as she devours sugary snacks. Second, in Thelma’s vision of reconciliation, Ricky will invite Jessie out for a meal...take his mother *out for supper*. For Thelma, food is compensatory. Jessie craves agency and freedom; her mother salivates for the immediate pleasures of indulgence. This is evident in Thelma advice; she tells her daughter to *do* nothing. She transmits her passivity to her child. *Somehow*, Ricky will experience an

epiphany or conversion after which his priorities will be dramatically re-arranged. Not only is Mama's passivity readily apparent, her inaction is garnished by delusion. Neither Mama, neither she nor her daughter need to *do* anything to initiate change. It will just happen. Moreover, Ricky will be penitent and his reparations lavish—and, of course, edible.

Thelma's perspective is sadly consistent. When Jessie announces her intent to kill herself, Thelma is inert. Her impulse is to rely on someone else to alleviate Jessie's distress. "Dawson will put a stop to this. Yes he will. He'll take the gun away" (1493). Thelma appeals to her son. For Freud, deferral to male subjectivity is "typical" because the female super-ego is "unsatisfactory, incomplete and vague" ("The Dissolution of the Oedipal Complex" 665). Following suit, Lacan asserts that woman's "relation to the signifier" is that of "Other" and that she "can but remain forever Other" (*Seminar II* 81). This signifier, for both Freud and Lacan, is a masculine libido; that is to say, male subjectivity. As Other, as outlier, as distortion of masculine norm, feminine trajectory becomes one of deferral. Though Freud and Lacan present their theories as psychological absolutes, their postulations are simultaneously products of and justifications for a phallogocentric economy. For a patriarchal Order to function, feminine deferral, what Helene Cixous refers to as collusion, is essential.⁵⁷

Mama's passivity is a characteristic that dominates her interaction with the world. She tells Jessie, "I didn't know enough to do half the things I did in my life. Things happen. You do what you can about them and you see what happens next" (1501). This notion that *things happen* indicates that Thelma has resigned any sense of agency or power. Sadly, Thelma's insights here are attempts to console Jessie. Ironically, however,

it is precisely feelings of powerlessness against which Jessie recoils. In a moment of Sartrean clarity,⁵⁸ Jessie explains to her mother that suicide is the ultimate act of power:

I can't do anything either, about my life, to change it, make it better, make me feel better about it. Like it better, make it work. But I can stop it. Shut it down, turn it off like the radio when there's nothing on I want to listen to. It's all I really have that belongs to me and I'm going to say what happens to it. And it's going to stop. And I'm going to stop it.
(1497)

The desperate act of self-destruction is Jessie's only recourse. This conclusion is, of course, the ultimate tragedy of the play. For Jessie, there is no anodyne. Sadly, from her perspective, she is perhaps correct, for she has never been provided with a model for revolt.

Thelma, after all, is seemingly anesthetized by powerlessness. On the one hand, mother tells daughter, "whatever else you find to do, you're still mainly waiting. The waiting's the worst part of it. The waiting's what you pay someone else to do if you can" (1495). Though the topic of conversation here is doing laundry, Thelma's assessment is analogous to her worldview. Thelma is grounded in inaction. As she would defer to criminals and allow them to steal her belongings, as she is first inclined to have Dawson "fix" the problem of Jessie's suicidal ideations, Thelma occupies a psychical space in which she is constantly *waiting* for things to happen. *Whatever else she finds to do*, such as knitting doilies, consuming sweets, or thumbing through a *TV Guide*, is merely a distraction from the waiting. Moreover, if Thelma could, she would have someone else do the waiting for her. This degree of complacency is disturbing. The lesson here,

though only in the subtext, is that Jessie's suicide is the result of fighting an inevitably losing battle.

On the other hand, Thelma reacts to Jessie's conflict with angry outbursts. "You're not having a good time! Whoever promised you a good time?" (1497). Thelma treats Jessie as an entitled and spoiled little girl who is quitting "the game" because "the rules" are unfair. "You're acting like some little brat, Jessie. You're mad and everybody's boring and you don't have anything to do and you don't like me and you don't like going out and you don't like staying in and you never talk on the phone and you don't watch TV and you're miserable and it's your own sweet fault" (1497). Jessie is *at fault* because she has not combated ontological malaise with an interest of some kind.⁵⁹ This is ironic first because Thelma has no Third Term, no substantive interest of her own, and second, because the interests available to Jessie, as listed by her mother, are nothing more than distractions.

Jessie, however, is clearly different than her mother. Jessie cannot abide the sense of powerlessness to which her mother has grown accustomed. Through metaphor, Jessie attempts to articulate the gulf between mother and daughter:

Mama, I know you used to ride the bus. Riding the bus and its hot and bumpy and crowded and too noisy and more than anything in the world you want to get off and the only reason in the world you don't get off is it's still fifty blocks from where you're going. Well, I can get off right now if I want to, because even if I ride fifty more years and get off then, it's still the same place when I step down to it. Whenever I feel like it, I

can get off. As soon as I've had enough, it's my stop. I've had enough.
(1497)

In the last hours of her life, Jessie speaks openly and honestly to her mother. Jessie explicitly compares herself to Mama and implicitly rejects her passivity. Thelma has spent a lifetime going along for the ride. She verbalizes this complacency when she tells Jessie, "I don't like things to think about. I like things to go on" (1500). The predictability of routine, the safety of familiarity, is of greater import to this mother than is identifying and resolving conflict.

For Thelma, *getting off the bus* would expose the material and ontological conditions of her existence, expose her to the Real. As a passenger, Thelma's agency is limited by the driver of the vehicle and by the route to which the bus is dedicated. Under these circumstances, powerlessness can engender acceptance. Consciously or not, if one perceives material, socio-economic, or political conditions as pre-existing and absolute, and if one concedes that personal desire is inherently repressed by these conditions, tacit acceptance of these conditions is perhaps inevitable. Moreover, such acceptance may even be construed as attractive, for it can permit complete deferral of responsibility. In this context, Jessie suggests that staying on the bus, surrendering power to the machine's velocity and trajectory, is conforming wholeheartedly and unquestioningly to an oppressive Symbolic Order.⁶⁰ Jessie will not enact this conformity. Jessie refuses to replicate her mother's passivity. For Jessie, leaving the bus, rejecting the Symbolic, is revolt. In the drama, revolt is physically represented. In Jessie's analogy, she draws metaphorically on an object and its movement to explain symbolic usurpation to her mother. In *'night, Mother*, set design provides space wherein the physicality of Jessie's

revolt is apparent. Norman's stage directions indicate that a bedroom "opens directly into the hall, and its entry should be visible to everyone in the audience. It should be, in fact, the focal point of the entire set, and the lighting should make it disappear completely at times and draw the entire set to it at others. It is a point of both threat and promise. It is an ordinary door that opens onto absolute nothingness" (1491). Jessie's compulsion to *get off the bus* is synonymous with her desire to enter this portal to the void. To be sure, Jessie's refusal to endorse an Order in which she feels paralyzed is noble. At the same time, however, her notion that self-annihilation is her only recourse is horrific. For Timothy Wiles, the "performance does not just end with an act of aggression or denunciation of the audience; instead, the audience is drawn in, and in the case of Norman's play, it is our consent for Jessie's self-destruction which is elicited" (113). His conclusion is deeply disturbing. If we support Jessie's decision, her choice is robbed of its tragic elements.

Jessie's role model, her mother and caregiver, has never provided an example of anything similar to revolt. Mama has remained on the bus throughout life. In this drama, *the bus* is the domestic sphere, *the bus* is the role ascribed to woman in a patriarchal system. Thelma has grown comfortable in this system; she plays her "part." Irigaray asserts that an androcentric culture cultivates this role in woman. "The woman, for her part, owing to her seclusion in the 'home,' the place of private property, has long been nothing but a mother," and she concludes that "the use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualized bodies underwrite the organization and the reproduction of the social order, in which they have never taken part as 'subjects'" ("The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" 130-1). If feminine subjectivity is relegated to the

maternal role, if the *feminine* is construed only as a distortion of male subjectivity, woman remains unsignified. Furthermore, when woman is partitioned to a subjectivity produced for her by patriarchal social systems, femininity is understood “in terms of deficiency or atrophy” (ibid. 119). It is precisely this atrophy, expressed via passivity and inaction, Thelma embodies. She is most comfortable as a mother in the home, but this comfort is not the result of any deliberate choice. On the contrary, Thelma makes it quite clear throughout the drama that she has put little thought into the life she has made for herself. She simply goes along to get along. Therefore, in an effort to thwart Jessie’s suicidal plan, Mama presents other, less violent and altogether *domestic* options that might assuage Jessie’s profound dissatisfaction. Jessie might rearrange the furniture, buy new dishes, or get a dog in an effort to inject purpose into a life devoid of meaning. Sadly, these are the only *actions* Mama can imagine.

There have been moments in her life during which she has taken direct action, but these periods have been deliberate attempts to construct a false reality for Jessie. In conversation during the few hours before Jessie’s suicide, the extent to which Thelma has gone to manipulate her daughter’s world becomes apparent. The first incident establishes the dynamic of Thelma’s maternal role. The topic of discussion turns to Agnes, a friend of Thelma’s, and when Jessie asks about the woman, Thelma weaves an intricate tale in order to protect her daughter from a potentially painful truth. Jessie asks, “Why won’t she ever come over here?” (1498). Mama first tells her daughter that there is no rational reason. “She’s as crazy as they come. She’s a lunatic” (1498). Agnes’ “insanity” is established by Thelma’s description of her. The woman has “burned down every house she ever lived in,” has “a house full of birds,” wears “whistles around her neck,” and eats

nothing but “okra two meals a day” (1498). When Jessie probes Mama for facts, however, a different story emerges. Agnes is scared of Jessie’s cold hands. Years ago, Agnes told Thelma, “Jessie shook the hand of death and I can’t take the chance it’s catching, Thelma, so I ain’t comin’ over, and you can understand or not, but I ain’t comin’. I’ll come up the driveway, but that’s as far as I’ll go” (1498). Mama, protecting Jessie from the actual situation, concocts a fictional explanation. Essentially, she deprives her daughter of the opportunity to cope with circumstances as they are. Moreover, this deprivation implicitly suggests that Thelma perceives her daughter as incapable of handling reality as it is. On the contrary, Jessie, as the stage notes indicate, is *relieved* and states, “I thought she didn’t like me! She’s scared of me! How about that!” (1498). Jessie does not emotionally crumble as perhaps her mother thought. She is not angry or hurt by Agnes’ fear. She is, however, upset with her mother. “You lied about setting fire to all those houses and about how many birds she has and how much okra she eats and why she won’t come over here. If I have to keep dragging the truth out of you, this is going to take all night” (1498). *This* is the act of open and honest communication, the act of intimacy, a dimension that has been absent in the Cates mother-daughter dyad.

As the drama continues, it is evident that Thelma has insulated Jessie throughout life. The crisis of impending suicide shatters the world that Mama has constructed. Thelma “comes clean” about the lies she has kept hidden for so long. Cecil, Jessie’s former husband, had an affair with Carlene, Agnes’ daughter. Thelma has been aware of this adulterous relationship but has kept it hidden from Jessie. On this night, the truth comes out. “He had a girl, Jessie. I walked right in on them in the toolshed” (1501).

Thelma, however, did not tell her daughter about Cecil's infidelity because, as Mama proclaims, "I wanted you to have a husband" (1501). At this moment, the tragic consequences that the *dutiful mother* has on her child's psychical formation comes to bear. Not only has Thelma embraced her "role" in a patriarchal social structure, she endeavors to position her daughter to play this "part." Thelma marries a man whom she does not love; presumably, she pursues this relationship to access financial security and to produce a child.⁶¹ Incapable of or oblivious to revolt against cultural practices that stifle feminine agency, Thelma assimilates into an Order of feminine deferral to male authority. Irigaray describes the phallogentric privilege of this patriarchal structure.

Their discourses, their values, their dreams and their desires have the force of law, everywhere and in all things. Everywhere and in all things, they define women's function and social role, and the sexual identity they are, or are not, to have. They know, they have access to the truth; we do not. ("The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" 35)

Accordingly, Thelma is convinced that Jessie, too, *needs* a man in her life. Moreover, Thelma concludes that having *a* husband is far more important than having a devoted partner. Mama goes so far as to hide Cecil's extra-marital exploits from Jessie to ensure the continuation of their marriage. Mama tacitly endorses the notion that a man can provide a woman with a (social, political, ideological) wholeness that she cannot experience in solitude. In other words, in Lacanian terms, "Man [here] acts as the relay whereby the woman becomes this Other for herself as she is this Other for him" (*Ecrits* 732). In this androcentric paradigm, feminine signification is engendered, enabled by male subjectivity. To subscribe to such a theory is to disempower the female subject.

Thelma sanctions this disempowerment. On this evening, Jessie addresses her mother's manipulation and guile. "You flirted him out here to build your porch or I'd never even met him at all" because "I couldn't get [a husband] on my own, of course" (1501).

Jessie's anger is emerging. Thelma's controlling behavior stems from her sense that Jessie is a fragile woman who cannot function on her own.

In the last hours of Jessie's life, buried truths are systematically disinterred. By far, Thelma's most powerful confession involves Jessie's epilepsy. For what appears to be the first time, mother and daughter discuss the nature of Jessie's illness, and describing the fits to her daughter, Thelma says, "You just...crumple, in a heap, like a puppet and somebody cuts the strings all at once, or like the firing squad in some Mexican movie, you just slide down the wall" (1503). Mama describes her daughter as a *puppet*.

Interestingly enough, Mama, through manipulation and control, has endeavored to operate her daughter's *strings*, to determine Jessie's movements. Thelma claims that Jessie would wind up unconscious on the floor after an episode. Mama, however, would move her daughter to the bed or to a chair, so Jessie could "wake up someplace nice" (1503). Since Jessie states that, "most of the time I wouldn't even know that I had one," Thelma could safely prop her daughter up and hide the fact that a seizure occurred at all. If Jessie's circumstances are harsh, Thelma hides them from her daughter. This is no more evident than the ultimate lie that Thelma tells Jessie. Throughout life, Jessie has had seizures; she did not get sick from falling off a horse. Jessie was born with an illness and Thelma allowed her daughter to think that a particular event, an event prompted by Cecil, led to her malady.

Mama: Your daddy gave you those fits, Jessie. He passed it down to you like your green eyes and your straight hair. It's not my fault!

Jessie: So what if he had little fits? It's not inherited. I fell off the horse. It was an accident.

Mama: The horse wasn't the first time, Jessie. You had a fit when you were five years old. (1503)

This revelation is hugely problematic. Trying to shield her daughter from the emotional discomfort of knowing she is "sick" or "crippled," Thelma constructs an imaginary world and holds Jessie hostage in it. This world cleaves Jessie from the material conditions of her existence. Jessie finds herself lost and powerless. She feels inept at coping with the world around her. Tragically, however, she has been denied the actual terrain of the landscape she navigates. The topography of her map is incorrect. As a mother, Thelma has tried to protect a daughter she perceives as fragile. The end result is a fragile daughter.

Jessie's relationship with her father, however, was different. Jessie was drawn to her father because the two connected on a level that she and her mother never could. With her father, Jessie could experience honest exchange. Father and daughter discussed the remedial, the everyday, but Jessie appreciated the dialogue. "We talked about why black socks are warmer than blue socks" (1499). Mama, however, resents that relationship, and her anger betrays her envy. "You loved him enough for both of us. You followed him around like some...Jessie, all the man ever did was farm and sit...and try to think of somebody to sell the farm to" (1499). Thelma's disdain for her husband is amplified by his closeness to Jessie. "You had those quiet little conversations after

supper every night. What were you whispering about?" (1499). Mama makes it clear that she has always been jealous of their father-daughter bond, and Jessie has always known. "You were just jealous because I'd rather talk to him than wash the dishes with you" (1499). The antagonism here is readily apparent. Thelma either perceives the father-daughter relationship as one that impinges on the husband-wife relationship, or she views the father-daughter relationship as a threat to the mother-daughter dyad. In both scenarios, the interaction between these women is complicated by the presence of a man. Irigaray attributes the subsequent hostility to a patriarchal Symbolic Order:

If we are to be desired and loved by men, we must abandon our mothers, substitute for them, eliminate them in order to be same. All of which destroys the possibility of a love between mother and daughter. The two become at once accomplices and rivals in order to move into a single possible position in the desire of a man. (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 102)

In this passage, Irigaray is speaking to dependence on male subjectivity. Jessie's *abandonment* of her mother occurs only through suicide. Thelma's conception of feminine dependence, however, is so deeply ingrained that she raises her daughter as a delicate and dysfunctional figure that cannot survive without protection.⁶²

The Cates mother-daughter dyad is badly damaged. The dialogue in *'night, Mother* makes this clear. The manipulation, lies, and deceit are the foundation of Thelma's relationship with Jessie. For Irigaray, the problem is a philosophical one. An androcentric Symbolic Order destroys intimacy between women. There are, however, psychological components of this problematic relationship. Primarily, Mama Cates is

unwilling or incapable of permitting the *matricide* that is essential for subject formation.⁶³

Thelma Cates is what Kristeva describes as the *virgin mother*, a woman who, unable to develop a third term and therefore unable to establish an idealized other, conceives a child “as antidote against depression” (“Illustrations of Feminine Depression” 392).⁶⁴

The child, under these circumstances, bears the burden of providing ontological fulfillment for the mother. Endowing a child with this charge is a traumatic burden:

If love stems from narcissistic idealization, it has nothing to do with the protective wrappings over skin and sphincters that maternal care provides for the baby. Worse yet, if that protection continues, if the mother “clings” to her offspring, laying on it the request that originates in her own request as confused neoteinic and hysteric in want of love, the chances are that neither love nor psychic life will ever hatch from such an egg. (“Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents” 147)

Thelma Cates, however, enacts precisely this distorted Oedipal drama. In the play, Thelma Cates’ linguistic identity, her *name*, is available only in Norman’s production notes. As a result, only the reader is privy to the term: “Thelma.” An audience member only knows this woman as “Mama.” As far as the dialogue indicates, this woman has no identity beyond her maternal role.

Psychologist Nancy Chodorow addresses the complexities of matricide, and she theorizes that the mother-daughter relationship wreaks far more emotional havoc than does the mother-son.

Because they are the same gender as their daughters and have been girls, mothers of daughters tend not to experience these infant daughters as

separate from them in the same way as do mothers of infant sons. In both cases, a mother is likely to experience a sense of oneness and continuity with her infant. However, this sense is stronger, and lasts longer, vis a vis daughters. Primary identification and symbiosis with daughters tend to be stronger and cathexis of daughters is more likely to retain and emphasize narcissistic elements, that is, to be based on experiencing a daughter as an extension or double of a mother herself. (109)⁶⁵

As Kristeva points to the dangers of a mother who absorbs her daughter's identity, Chodorow suggests that such absorption is potentially inevitable. What Chodorow's assessment lacks is the Kristevan Third Term. It is this outside love-object that keeps this absorption in check.

In this context, Mama Cates' identity, her very notion of signification, is entangled in her maternal role. This entanglement, however, is limited to her relationship with her daughter. There is no indication that Thelma experiences any psychological fusion with her son, Dawson. Moreover, Dawson is present only through dialogue; he exists independent from the family structure, yet Thelma is enmeshed with Jessie to the point that her daughter's otherness is blurred. The precipice of self-destruction is epiphanic; Jessie clearly sees the toxicity of their partnership. When asked by her mother just what it is that is so horrible about life, Jessie responds that "everything from you and me to Red China" has contributed to her decision. In one breath, Jessie condemns the toxic mother-daughter dyad in the Cates home and the totalitarian political apparatus in China. As Thelma protects her daughter from information, Chinese practices of censorship prevent widespread dissemination of information that contradicts the country's ideological

agenda.⁶⁶ When Jessie proclaims, “I read the paper. I don’t like how things are. And they’re not any better out there than they are in here” (1496). Thelma realizes that her attempts to contain and confine are clearly failing, and she suggests they stop getting the newspaper and stop watching television. Begging her to reconsider suicide, Mama continues her unsuccessful bargaining. “You don’t have to do another thing in this house if you don’t want to. You don’t have to take care of me, Jessie” (1496). Thelma cannot understand Jessie’s terms; she cannot conceptualize her daughter’s deep malaise. Thelma’s compromise is futile. Jessie responds, “You’ve just been letting me do it so I’ll have something to do” (1496). Once again, the absence of a third term is damaging. Just as Thelma has constructed her “selfhood” around her daughter, Thelma urges her daughter to assemble an ontological identity around Thelma. Though at this point, Thelma appears to take steps toward separation from her child, Mama is ultimately too entrenched in physical and emotional dependence on her daughter:

Jessie, how can I live here without you? I need you! You’re supposed to tell me to stand up straight and say how nice I look in my pink dress, and drink my milk. You’re supposed to go around and lock up so I know we’re safe for the night, and when I wake up, you’re supposed to be out there making coffee and watching me get older every day, and you’re supposed to help me die when the time comes. I can’t do that by myself.
(1504)

This desperate plea to Jessie exposes Mama’s inability to recognize Jessie’s psychological independence from her. She treats her daughter as an extension of herself. The result of Thelma’s delusional grasp is destructive. First, there is an obvious role-reversal.

Thelma's childlike regression is apparent throughout the text as she constantly eats snowballs and cupcakes. Second, Mama becomes an object of loathing for her daughter. Jessie is inevitably imprisoned by her mother's total dependence on her. Kristeva observes, "without the maternal 'diversion' toward a Third Party, the bodily exchange is abjection or devouring; the eventual schizophrenic, whether phobic or borderline, will keep its hot-iron brand against which his only recourse will be hatred" ("Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents" 148). The *eventual schizophrenic* here is the child denied the opportunity to individuate, tugged between personal desire and those of an overbearing mother. Without a Father of Individual Prehistory, Thelma is completely invested in her child. This investment stifles the psychical growth of *both* mother *and* daughter. Unable to individuate, confined to a subjectivity infused with the dyad, Jessie is *devoured*. Jessie, however, acknowledges that she has participated in this dynamic. "If it was a mistake, we made it together" (1496). Jessie, after all, chose to come back home after the dissolution of her marriage.

Critic Lana Whited does not regard the relationship between Thelma and Jessie as problematic or smothering. On the contrary, she condemns Jessie's suicide because it effectively ends the mother-daughter connection. "Although Marsha Norman insists that the reader view Jessie's suicide as a heroic act, perhaps the only true independent act of her life, a reader has difficulty not seeing the act as profoundly selfish. Ultimately, Jessie's suicide separates her from her mother, terminating the possibility of further communication between the two" (65). Whited's claim is troubling because the emotional depth of their dialogue on this night is prompted by Jessie's ominous declaration at the beginning of the play. Katherine Burkman describes the play as "more

cathartic than depressing” because it “reveals a bond between mother and daughter and a mythical sense of their oneness” (255). This *oneness* is precisely the problem; it is not *mythical* but destructive. Sally Browder, on the other hand, recognizes that what is psychologically at stake in the drama is:

The horrible bleakness of life, the emptiness Jessie experiences is not a peculiarity of female existence. But the significance of the mother-daughter relationship in the daughter’s sense of powerlessness is unique to women. This play is not merely about the perils of parenthood or, more specifically, even the precariousness of motherhood in regard to daughters. It is about the problem and the elusiveness of autonomy. (110)

To add to Browder’s claim, *the sense of powerlessness unique to women* can and should be directly linked to the *elusiveness of autonomy*. Lacanian psychodynamics and parenting techniques that are derivations thereof deny woman the illusion of autonomy and justify this exclusion biologically. Although autonomy, complete independence and absolute agency, is unachievable, for psychical, cultural, and ideological factors pre-exist the subject and produce individuals always already entrenched within the Symbolic matrix, the *illusion of psychical autonomy* is essential for psychical health. Choices are always confined to the material conditions of the “chooser” and to the material reality of that from which the “chooser” can choose. The endgame, therefore, is to reshape this reality and broaden the choices. Again, as Žižek reminds us, *ideology is not simply an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ideological*. Reality reshaped by ideology reconfigured would still be sublime, would still present the illusion of wholeness. Once redefined, however,

interpellation, though fundamentally dominated by insatiable Lack, would be that much more fulfilling, that much more satisfying.

Erroneously, until Jessie's suicide, neither of these women developed a love-object outside of and beyond the mother-child dyad. Jessie tells her mother, "I thought it might be better for you after he died. You'd get interested in things. Breathe better. Change somehow" (1500). Dawson, Jessie's brother, articulates similar hopes for Jessie. When she told him she needed a gun to protect the house against burglars, he told her where she could get one because he thought she "might be taking an interest in things" (1493). In the play, this *interest in things* is conveyed as a positive event. Quite simply, an *interest in things* is the emergence of a Third Term. While Thelma remains resistant to this transformative concept, Jessie does break the bonds with her *virgin mother*. Though Kristeva does not posit suicide as a viable third term, Jessie's suicide is indicative of her unwillingness to conform to oppressive conditions. Jessie puts culture on trial; she puts her mother on trial. Though her solution is disastrous, her impulse to question and rebuke stems from her sense of justice that exists beyond and independently of her material conditions.

To be sure, the entire drama, the entire evening, the suicide itself, chronicles this separation. Jessie rejects her mother's worldview; she rejects all of that to which she has been exposed. As a mother herself, Jessie is unwilling to reenact with her son the damaging mother-child dynamic she has experienced with Thelma. Jessie does not live in denial. Robbie is a burgeoning criminal, and Jessie tells her mother, "I'd turn him in myself if I knew where he was" (1492). This is in no way akin to Thelma's obsessive, hyper-vigilant attempts to protect Jessie from the "real world" and the consequences of

living in it. Furthermore, Robbie is all but absent in the play. He is not physically present, and his existence is acknowledged and minimally discussed, indicating that Jessie is not consumed by motherhood.

Lies, deceit, and deferral to male authority, signifying practices employed by Thelma, are not acceptable to Jessie. The moment during which mother and daughter share a cup of hot chocolate provides insights into differences between Thelma and Jessie. Mama prepares the drink “the old way,” a recipe calling for milk, despite the fact that Mama “hate(s) milk” and finds “something just downright disgusting about it” (1498). Critic Laura Morrow determines that Thelma’s loathing of milk indicates Mama’s “dissatisfaction with motherhood” (26). Lana Whited adds, “Thelma’s and Jessie’s mutual rejection of that substance suggests the breakdown of their mother-daughter relationship” (69). Thelma’s disdain for milk is transparently ironic. This woman has denied herself an identity beyond motherhood but is nauseated by the fluid with which a mother sustains her infant. As it turns out, the milk is “bad” and ruins the drink. “It’s the milk, all right,” Jessie says (1498). It is literally the mother’s milk, the carton pulled from her fridge, which spoils the brew. The “old way” is no longer good. In fact, the “old way” is unbearable.

Though Jessie’s rejection of maternal milk subtly reflects her separation from a smothering dyad, her most compelling revolt is when she *speaks herself*. To be sure, without separation, there is no *self* to speak. Language is an orienting function. In a Lacanian sense, a linguistic system produces The Imaginary, The Symbolic, and The Real. Quite literally, signifiers express intelligible meaning. Conceptually, language constructs the illusion of autonomy. Language is only possible upon entry into the

Symbolic, upon exit from the Imaginary. The Real, as the unfathomable, is that which exists beyond language. In Irigaray's conceptual rhetoric, when a woman *speaks herself*, she escapes the confines of a patriarchal ideological lexicon; she refuses "to let her desire be annihilated by the law of the father" and claims her "right to pleasure, to *jouissance*, to passion" ("The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" 43). Essentially, Irigaray argues that, through self-speaking, a woman can escape a subjectivity determined for her by hegemonic parameters. This emancipation, however, requires separation. Jessie Cates *performs* Irigaray's hypothetical, philosophical scenario. For Thelma's daughter, suicide is self-assertion, an absolute unwillingness to participate in a stifling Symbolic Order. "This is how I have my say. This is how I say what I thought about it *all* and I say no. To Dawson and Loretta and the Red Chinese and epilepsy and Ricky and Cecil and you" (1505). Jessie has been rendered powerless by forces beyond her control. She is born into a culture, born into a family, born into an ideological matrix. Furthermore, she is physically ill; she is powerless over her body. Finally, Jessie is born of a mother who exhibits no dissatisfaction with the oppressiveness of power structures that subsume them both. When Jessie *speaks herself*, she speaks of her right to power, to representation, and she clearly articulates her *right to jouissance*:

I found an old baby picture of me. And it was somebody else, not me. It was somebody pink and fat who never heard of sick or lonely, somebody who cried and got fed, and reached up and got held and kicked but didn't hurt anybody, and slept whenever she wanted to, just by closing her eyes. Somebody who mainly just laid there and laughed at the colors waving around over her head and chewed on a polka-dot whale and woke up

knowing some new trick every day, and rolled over and drooled on the sheet. (1505)

In this reflective passage, Jessie yearns for the profound ontological satisfaction that is only “available” during infancy, during the period of pre-subjectivity.⁶⁷ Subjectivity is only possible when *jouissance*, a period in infancy during which all needs are met and a sense of wholeness is *experienced* though not intelligible, is destroyed and rendered forever inaccessible. Irigaray, however, proposes that a woman’s sense of *Lack* is amplified by existing signifying practices.

When a girl begins to talk, she is already unable to speak of/to herself.

Being exiled in man’s speech, she is already unable to auto-affect. Man’s language [*ce parler homme*] separates her from her mother and from other women, and she speaks it without speaking in it. (“The Poverty of Psychoanalysis” 101).

Language is *man’s* because it is enabled by the Law of the Father and is rooted in the privilege of *presence*.⁶⁸ The story of Jessie Cates is the story of this double bind. She yearns for agency, power, and signification from within a Symbolic system that curtails her freedom and from within a familial system that discounts her yearning.

Jessie’s alienation and despair are at the heart of *’night, Mother*. Early in the play, when Jessie announces her intent to commit suicide, she justifies this desperate act by proclaiming her deep disconnection to the world around her. “Dead is everybody and everything I ever knew” (1493). This *deadness* is characterized by a routine, quotidian existence that consists of being her mother’s caretaker. This *deadness* is life *on the bus*. This *deadness* is subjectivity limited by outside forces; *deadness* is the absence of a Third

Term. The sentiments Jessie expresses are remarkably congruent with Kristeva's description of feminine depression:

Depressive behavior develops on the basis of and within a void. Blank activity, lacking meaning, may just as well follow a death-bearing course (killing the rival who steals the partner), or an innocuous one (wearing herself out doing housework or checking the kids homework). She remains constantly restrained by an aching psychic wrapping, anesthetized, as if 'dead.' ("Illustrations of Feminine Depression" 388)

Jessie *does* possess a love-object outside of Ricky; Jessie loves her former husband, Cecil. At the same time, Jessie's relationship with Cecil is a perversion of the *idealized other*. Just as Thelma failed to be "the plain country girl" that her husband desired, Jessie failed to be the wife that Cecil wanted. "I tried to get more exercise and I tried to stay awake. I tried to learn to ride a horse. And I tried to stay outside with him, but he always knew I was trying, so it didn't work" (1501). Neither Thelma nor Jessie engages in romantic relationships in which man and woman are on equal footing. Under these circumstances, the idealized other is not a concept independent of the couple, a concept pursued by *both* parties. On the contrary, the idealized other is a projection of male desire. Jenny Spencer recognizes the extent to which projected male desire imposes itself on the women in *'night, Mother*:

The self-defeating nature of female desire itself provides the tragic dimension to Norman's plays....The male gaze that defines female identity, validates female behavior, and empowers women to act is represented as both necessary (desirable) and unattainable (absent). In

other words, what women want (a strong sense of self) and what women need to have it (male recognition) is contradictory. (“Marsha Norman’s She-tragedies” 161)

When a woman defines herself in accordance with this projection, Kristeva claims argues that wholeness and *jouissance* are conflated with becoming that which the man desires. In this context, loss of the lover is equated to castration. “Even though a woman has no penis to lose, it is her entire being—body and especially soul—that she feels threatened by castration. *As if her phallus were her psyche*, the loss of erotic object breaks up and threatens to empty her whole psychic life” (“Illustrations of Feminine Depression” 388). In this scenario, the Third Term is not her own; it is the value system of an Other. Once again, therefore, Jessie’s subjectivity, *feminine subjectivity*, is determined by external factors. Further still, Jessie’s relationship with Cecil is one enabled, one arranged and constructed by Thelma’s manipulation.

Jessie pursues suicide because self-destruction is an act she can claim as her own. Comically, she legitimates her decision by claiming, “Jesus was a suicide, if you ask me” (1493). On the one hand, this is a darkly ironic claim. If one subscribes to the notion that Jesus is the personification of God, a God that denounces suicide as sin against both humanity and divinity,⁶⁹ calling Jesus’ death a suicide disturbs Christian logic. On the other hand, Jesus, if understood as a Kristevan *deject*, is a figure who opposes Levitical Law. Biblical history indicates that Jesus rejects contemporary religious practices and seeks to reshape theological conceptions.⁷⁰ In this light, Jessie’s comparison cannot be ignored. The Christian narrative positions Jesus’ death as the catalyst for human salvation. His unwillingness to tolerate his Symbolic structure directly resulted in a death

he did nothing to prevent. If this is not suicide, Jesus is certainly complicit in his death. As was Jesus, Jessie is clearly dissatisfied with Symbolic structures. Throughout the drama, Jessie provides a detailed outline for *why* suicide is her option.

If *'night, Mother*, therefore, is read as a cautionary tale, as a work in which the consequences of *feminine erasure* are examined, as a text in which the dangers of the *dutiful mother* are illuminated, Jessie's suicide can be construed as a sacrifice. Just as Jessie leaves her belongings to her friends, her calculator to Loretta, a letter to Dawson, her watch to Ricky, her destruction is her parting gift to the audience; she exposes the gravity of that which is at stake. To be sure, her suicide can only be so understood *because* she explains its motive and its origins. Jessie elects death over entrapment in an Order in which she has no power. In this context, Jessie's death is decidedly different than the suicides of Adela Alba and Hedda Gabler. Adela and Hedda experience the powerlessness that Jessie articulates, but their suicides are spontaneous, passionate acts. Neither Adela nor Hedda explains her self-destruction; the reader/audience member must extrapolate how an unjust Symbolic Order contributed to each heroine's demise. Jessie, on the other hand, is methodical, calculated, and acts with deliberate foresight; she effectively describes the conditions that have led her to this dreadful act. If one can perceive Jessie's destruction in this way, her death can effectively prompt change, can dissuade women from enacting the role of *the dutiful mother*, can dissuade men from encouraging this role.

These circumstances are punctuated by the surviving figure in the play. It is only Thelma who remains. Sadly, the character who goes on to live another day is a woman who has contributed directly to Jessie's destruction. This significance cannot be lost for

the audience member. Moreover, the closing lines of the work are Thelma's grief-stricken words, "Jessie, Jessie, child...Forgive me. I thought you were mine" (1508). From a Kristevan vista, *I thought you were an extension of myself, a component of my being, and I therefore denied your psychical autonomy*. From an ideological perspective, *I thought you subscribed to my worldview. I thought you tacitly endorsed prevailing ideology as I do. I thought you were a passive, docile body that could silently accept, withstand, and perpetuate oppressive conditions*. What remains unclear is whether or not Thelma experiences any transformation resulting from her daughter's death. John Kundert-Gibbs states, "Jessie's death is an actual rebirth for Thelma" (60). Essentially, he suggests that the very dialogue preceding Jessie's suicide quickens in Mama a sense of her own failings. Katherine Burkman has a similar reading:

Mama's slow acceptance of Jessie's decision to die is a movement toward acceptance of her own mortality. That this is a life-giving experience becomes clear as Thelma begins to accept the impending separation and hence the death of her dependency...Mother and daughter merge as they separate, the death of one giving life to the other. (260)

It is possible that Thelma is confronted by the psychical and material consequences of adhering to a patriarchal order. Her daughter's corpse would be the radical catalyst for such awareness. Or Thelma may remain oblivious to her contributions to Jessie's demise. Either case is compelling. Either outcome elicits a sense of urgency in the audience. Changes must be made. Jessie's death cannot be a senseless act.

In any event, this reading of *'night, Mother*, while highlighting the problems the *dutiful mother* presents, introduces us to *the revolutionary mother*. Jessie Cates, by

enacting the ultimate act of self-destruction, finally commits herself to a Third Term. She devotes herself to revolt. She rejects the Law. The value of her death is this rejection. There is a clear danger, as scholarship on the play indicates, that the play imparts a message that injustice is inevitable and incurable, resulting in destruction and hopelessness. That message is only possible if one determines that the method by which Jessie revolts undermines her revolutionary stand. Jenny Spencer clearly takes this position. She argues that *'night, Mother* documents

the interactions of a mother-daughter pair who talk about themselves, their family, their relationships, their domestic life, and their past; and who reveal through their conversation the unworked-through grief that the talking itself is intended to alleviate. However, the promised emotional catharsis is undermined by an ending that stops the conversation without solving the problems, a structure that reinforces the very irresolvability of the problems as they are posed in Norman's plays. ("Marsha Norman's She-tragedies" 156).

The *irresolvability* of the problems of female representation and empowerment under the tutelage of the *dutiful mother* is the dynamism of this work. Norman presents the audience with the devastating quandary in which women find themselves when occupying a patriarchal order seemingly *without exit*. Although Jessie's suicide is a negation of the self, it only negates the revolt if we—as audience members, as readers, as subjects—do not realize that her destruction can be repeated if our conceptions of motherhood, of subjectivity, of power, of representation are not rethought. If the revolt dies with Jessie, then her destruction serves only to reinscribe the dominant order.

William Demastes recognizes this danger. “If female defiance leads simply to feminine eradication, then the challenge is not really threatening to the social order” (111).

Obviously, Jessie is eradicated in death. Her revolt, however, is not necessarily lost with her. It can be internalized and continued by her mother, by her son, by the audience.

Jessie signals to us that injustice does not have to be tolerated; it does not have to be endured. Only by tolerating oppression can oppression exist. Her destruction possesses the potential to be our salvation. As Nora Helmer abandons her family to remain faithful to her values, as *Homebody* deserts her husband and daughter to pursue a higher good, Jessie Cates opts to relinquish her life instead of conforming to the models of femininity presented her by her mother and by historical, social, and psychological inheritance.

As Christian mythology is contingent on a Christian’s recognition that Jesus died to prevent moral, political, and ideological decay, Norman’s fictional world presents an audience with a character whose death can serve to prompt reform. Jessie’s death is tragic in that she perceives suicide to be her only option. Her fate is more tragic still in that it perhaps *is* her only method for self-assertion. Yet the deepest tragedy would be if her death were in vain.

CHAPTER 4

AUTHENTIC ALLIANCE: HEIDEGGER AND CONTINENTAL FEMINISM

Thus far, this discussion has hinged on the psychoanalytic paradigms of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. Freudian-Lacanian assertions position the phallus at the *center* of biological, social, and psychical development. In both models, the feminine is a deviation from the phallic norm. All emotional and psychological maturation revolves around the *presence* or *absence* of a penis. Its presence connotes power, agency, law; its absence corresponds to hysteria, instability, nothingness. The phallogocentric assumptions underpinning this school of subjectivation depict interpellation as a *closed loop*. The individual answers the call of the Symbolic hail in order to signify. For Freud and Lacan, however, cultural constructs are fixed; though societies evolve, their evolutions are limited to immutable biological factors. Though the Law shapes every speaking being, signification, as outlined in the Freudian-Lacanian paradigm, has a profoundly negative impact on female agency. Kristeva and Irigaray, by presenting notions of a third term, a conceptual field apart from an exclusively phallogocentric economy, propose feminine “correctives” to the Lacanian paradigm. Heideggerian ontology, specifically Heidegger’s perception of *the they* and of authenticity, provides the theoretical framework from which these “correctives” are possible. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s conception of *natalità* and her reconfiguration of Heideggerian thought, the Continental feminist polemic recognizes the power inherent in the maternal role and transforms psychical development.

Furthermore, these “correctives” are that which enable the maternal function to assume and express its revolutionary potential.

Heidegger’s contribution, distilled here as the possibility for authentic Being, is the potent conceptual framework from which the revolutionary mother can emerge. The revolutionary mother, as she who operates in accordance with her own ethical system and, when necessary, rejects prevailing ideology, constitutes a *specific* example of the authentic mode. As will be discussed in this chapter, authenticity is not a sustainable condition. The revolutionary mother, as do all human beings, stumbles along the way. Though susceptible to Heideggerian fallenness and human frailty, the revolutionary mother has at some point encountered and experienced *exposure* to the authentic mode. This exposure enables her to speak herself and rear her children to be authentic subjects.

In order to accomplish my objective, a series of theoretical connections and conceptual differences must be elucidated. First, though condensing a work as complex as *Being and Time* to a few pages inevitably ignores large amounts of material some might find essential to Heidegger’s project, I have limited my focus on Heidegger’s contributions to those which relate to this project. In so doing, I can only hope that the violence of reduction is minimal. After a brief rehearsal of Heidegger’s conception of the human being, I will present Da-sein in context with the Lacanian subject. When establishing key distinctions between the two, Heidegger’s role in Irigarayan and Kristevan transformations of the Lacanian paradigm becomes more apparent. Finally, an analysis of Hannah Arendt, positioned alongside both Heidegger and Lacan, presents further similarities between Continental feminist philosophy and fundamental ontology

thus, via Arendt, linkage between Heideggerian ontology and the revolutionary mother is solidified.

Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology

Heidegger's primary philosophical project is to expose the extent to which the Western tradition has systematically distanced Being from beings. Any episteme that seeks to unveil the meaning of Being through the subject-object relation presupposes the subject's capacity to conceptualize Being.⁷¹ *If I can detach myself from the madness and confusion of "the world," if I can sequester myself in the quiet precision of meditation, I can understand the true nature of things.* Since this process conflates one's sense of things with the thing itself, Heidegger radically contends that "one of our first tasks will be to show that the point of departure from an initially given *ego* and subject totally fails to see the phenomenal content" of Being (*Being and Time* 43) [46]. In short, since Being pre-exists all beings, the human mind is, by definition, insufficiently designed to understand the essence of Being.

For Heidegger, the legacy of metaphysics, by valorizing human reason, has perpetrated a critical error. Instead of perceiving "the world" (or Being) as that which enables meaning, the Western tradition has been seduced by the notion, the fantasy, that the subject inscribes meaning onto the world. For Heidegger, this problem crystallizes in Cartesian assertions.⁷² *I think therefore I am*; the human mental surface provides the ontological ground from which Being can emerge. Heidegger asserts that Being is a concept our cognitive processes cannot represent, and the Cartesian formula should be reversed: *I am therefore I think*. "Philosophy, even when it becomes 'critical' through Descartes and Kant, always follows the course of metaphysical representation. It thinks

from beings back to beings with a glance in passing toward Being” (“Letter on Humanism” 234). As the centerpiece of ontological investigation, the Cartesian ego-self-subject initiates the quest for, legitimates the existence of, and determines the nature of “reality.” Under these circumstances, ontology, the exploration of Being, digresses into the ontic, the analysis of beings.

Heidegger, therefore, embarks on a task consistently overlooked: the investigation into the meaning of Being. In so doing, his first order of business consist of “clearing away the conceptual rubbish that has collected over our history in order to recover a clearer, richer understanding of what things are all about” (Guignon 2). This *rubbish* includes an inherited lexicon – from Plato’s forms and ideas to Aristotelian *mimesis* to the Cartesian *cogitare* – through which philosophical discourse is articulated and in which, therefore, ontological investigation has heretofore been confined. For Heidegger, these terms produce a conceptual distance between the human being and the everyday world in which this being resides, and the resulting gulf (the canon of Western metaphysics) compiles “one extended misinterpretation of the nature of reality” (ibid. 5). The very purpose of philosophy, to uncover the character of Being, vaporizes in this misinterpretation. Since Being, he determines, despite millennia of philosophical analysis, has to some extent been construed as “the self-evident concept” because “everybody understands, ‘The sky *is* blue,’ ‘I *am* happy’...but this average comprehensibility only demonstrates the incomprehensibility...The fact that we already live in an understanding of being and that the meaning of being is at the same time shrouded in darkness proves the fundamental necessity of repeating the question of the meaning of ‘being’” (*Being and Time* 3) [4]. Immersed entirely in the act of *being*,

precisely what it means for humans *to be* has been lost in the shuffle. Heidegger intends to reclaim the nature of Being, reclaim the original objective of philosophy. Since philosophy has been so misled, his call for an *end of philosophy* signals a new way of approaching Being. This new way, *fundamental or hermeneutic ontology*, requires a discarding of the traditional language of philosophical discourse.⁷³

Since Heidegger asserts that Being cannot be conceptualized and that a unified theory of Being cannot be constructed (for we lack the intellectual hardware *and* we lack the luxury of objectivity required to produce such a theory), he limits his ontological inquiry to the specifically human *mode of being*. This existential mode he labels *Da-sein*.⁷⁴ *Da-sein* is unique insofar as it is self-aware, and, as an entity which interprets itself, *Da-sein* “tends to understand its own being in terms of that being to which it is essentially, continually, and most closely related – the ‘world’” (*Being and Time* 14) [15]. The mind is not in a vat; it is embodied in “the world.” In *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, Heidegger outlines key aspects of *Da-sein*.

The term “man” was not used for that being which is the theme of the analysis. Instead, the neutral term *Dasein* was chosen. By this we designate the being for which its own proper mode of being is a definite sense is not indifferent. The peculiar “neutrality” of the term “*Dasein*” is essential, because the interpretation of this being must be carried out prior to every factual concretion” (qtd. in Dreyfus 41).

Heidegger, however, explains that this *prior* state is unknowable because “neutral *Da-sein* is never what exists; *Da-sein* exists in each case only in its factual concretion...in each case dispersed in a body” (ibid. 41). *Factual concretion* is the materiality of *Da-*

sein's *bodily dispersal*, its embodied reality. *Factual concretion* refers to the spatio-temporal contingencies of this embodiment. *Not only do I have a body, I exist in a particular time and in a particular place.* For Heidegger, *facticity* (*Faktizität*), an individual's particular spatio-temporal contingencies, is the ideological matter from which subjectivity is assembled. Da-sein's interpretation of itself, its auto-disclosure, never exists apart from the immediacy of "the world."

Da-sein can never escape the everyday way of being interpreted into which Da-sein has grown initially. All genuine understanding, interpreting and communication, rediscovery and new appropriation come about in it and out of it and against it. It is not the case that a Da-sein, untouched and unseduced by this way of interpreting, was ever confronted by the free land of a "world," merely to look at what it encounters (*Being and Time* 159) [169].

If we divorce ourselves from the everyday realities of the world, we miss the forest through the trees. There is no atomic core, no essential humanness that can be revealed by transcending the mundane aspects of daily life. On the contrary, since human beings are factually constructed, the Being of beings can only be disclosed by examining the human relationship to the material world. For Hubert Dreyfus, therefore,

it makes no sense to ask whether we are essentially rational animals, creatures of God, organisms with built-in needs, sexual beings or complex computers. Human beings can interpret themselves in any of these ways and many more, and they can, in varying degrees, become any of these things, but to be human is not to be *essentially* any of them" (23).

Instead of having a central core, Da-sein possesses *preontological* (*Ursprunglich*) knowledge.⁷⁵

The preontological attunes Da-sein insofar as it enables the human animal to be self-interpretive. Since Heidegger distinguishes Da-sein as the only being that wields this power of auto-disclosure, “the meaning of being must therefore already be available to us in a certain way” (*Being and Time* 4) [5]. Drawing from this *a priori*, preontological knowledge, Da-sein integrates into the network of “the world” and this knowledge enables Da-sein to understand, quite simply, *how* “to be”: we intrinsically know how to physically function, utilize tools, and adapt to social structures by emulating the behavioral models of those around us. These intrinsic characteristics constitute primordial, preontological knowledge. In short, Da-sein is neither a blank canvas nor an individual soul trailing clouds of glory.

At birth, the subject is *thrown* (*Geworfen*) into culture, hurled into a particular place at a particular point in time. Subsequently, a subject is immersed in the traditions and cultural practices that pre-exist it. One is born into a “factual objective presence,” that is to say an individual is powerless over the temporal, cultural, economic, and political conditions into which it comes to be (*Being and Time* 52) [55]. This facticity dominates the subject’s trajectory only insofar as the subject comes to “understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the being of those beings which it encounters within its own world” (*ibid.* 52) [55]. Heidegger argues that the human being is predisposed to conflate its facticity and its destiny. It is easy for one to perceive any pervasive ideological “reality” as the expression of an authoritative and immutable Truth. As a result, the human being “has the inclination to be entangled in the world by its reflected

light; at the same time Da-sein is also entangled in a tradition which it more or less explicitly grasps. This tradition deprives Da-sein of its own leadership in questioning and choosing” (ibid. 18) [21]. As a character like Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler indicates, absolute conformity to prevailing ideology can have devastating effects on an individual’s sense of freedom. Hedda’s enslavement to propriety and decorum results in her physical destruction; Hedda, in collusion with factual structures and operating within the factually legitimated and normalized parameters for “appropriate” behavior, becomes fully *entangled in the world*. Entanglement, however, is ensnarement; socialization breeds entrapment if one’s facticity is encumbered by oppressive elements and can hamper agency and limit one’s *questioning and choosing*.

Heidegger and Lacan

Familiar now with a brief overview of Heidegger’s notion of Da-sein, we can explore Heideggerian assertions alongside Lacanian theories of subjectivity. Like Heidegger, Lacan clearly asserts that the subject is the product of culture. The Symbolic order, the synthetic world of ideas, codes, traditions, and law, is a frame grafted over the abysmally terrifying Real conditions of material existence (death, decay, chaos). This frame makes the Real traversable; it makes human life bearable. The Symbolic order hails the subject and beckons the individual to assimilate. This Symbolic call to the subject possesses an implicit promise; *if you interpellate, your sense of Lack will dissipate and socialization will be compensation for the horrors of your material and ontological separation from your mother.*⁷⁶ For Lacan, however, the subject’s relationship to the Symbolic is *a closed loop*. The Phallus, as master signifier, dominates all human interaction. “What matters to the subject, what he desires..., he does so, in the

final analysis, with the phallus” (“Les Formations de L’Inconscient” qtd in Borsch-Jacobsen 211). The Phallus *matters most* to the subject because the penis can be seen. On the contrary, the female sex organ is a painful reminder of human misery, of lack, of insatiable desire, whereas everywhere else—the male genital, the linguistic system, cultural constructs, material reality—there *appear* to be prevalent symbols of presence. “What is sought in the phallus,” therefore, “is not a sexual object or organ, but rather that very peculiar ‘object’: the specular or ideal ego, that is, the ob-ject in which the subject can see himself ‘before’ himself and thus ‘represent his identity to himself’ (ibid. 218). For Lacan, the subject, driven by the urge for phallic wholeness, *erects* a patriarchal culture. The Symbolic is shaped “along fundamentally androcentric and patriarchal lines” (*Seminar II* 304). In a Lacanian schema, therefore, a pre-determined cultural trajectory is inevitable.

With his phallogocentric paradigm, Lacan simultaneously legitimates an androcentric cultural trajectory with his psychoanalytic and legitimates his psychoanalytic by referring to a historically consistent androcentric cultural trajectory. In this refracted light, legacy and heritage are idealized as the cradle from which self-knowledge comes of age. For Heidegger, the association between history and understanding is problematic.

The tradition that hereby gains dominance makes what it “transmits” so little accessible that initially and for the most part it covers over instead. What has been handed down it hands over to obviousness; it bars access to those original “wellsprings” out of which the traditional categories and concepts were in part genuinely drawn. The tradition even makes us

forget such a provenance altogether. Indeed, it makes us wholly incapable of even understanding that such a return is necessary. (*Being and Time* 19) [22]

In short, tradition inevitably corrodes to a point in which the *preservation* of conventional maxims and approaches to understanding the world—the continuity of the tradition itself—becomes more important than investigating any “truth” that originally shaped the practices, methodologies, and objectives that coalesced over time into “tradition.” Moreover, a specific tradition *gains dominance* over other cultural practices vying for the mantle of perpetuity. Hegemonic forces, therefore, not divine sanction or biological determinism, plot the trajectory of history.

Though Heidegger claims that tradition conceals and corrodes the “Truth” it transmits, Lacan suggests that the patriarchal tradition is the unavoidable externalization of human psychological wiring. As Borsch-Jacobson explains, “the phallus is raised in the center of the city” (in the form of the scepter, the statue, the temple) “because man’s is the only sexual organ capable of being publicly exhibited and therefore communicated and symbolized” (217). Lacan, like Heidegger, argues that subject formation is contingent on cultural context; unlike Heidegger, however, Lacan asserts biological and psychological forces predetermine that cultural context.

In Heideggerian terms, therefore, for Lacan, preontological knowledge (though he never uses such a term), the *a priori* conditions of Being, compels the subject toward a sense of wholeness. The human being is “programmed” to associate this wholeness with the male genital (the phallus), so the subject gravitates toward any emblem of this wholeness (the Phallus). It thus follows that in the Lacanian paradigm, the fear of losing

the phallus (castration anxiety) inaugurates the subject into the Symbolic.⁷⁷ The subject, however, has no “identity” or “selfhood” until it acquires language. For Lacan, this Lack culminates in his notion that “there is no such thing as pre-discursive reality. Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse” (*Seminar XX* 32). Again, meaning is contingent on speech.

In his analysis of the Real, Žižek exposes the paradox of this Lacanian position. Though the Real, that is to say unmediated Being, provides the foundation for the Symbolic, Žižek asserts that The Real is *produced by* the Symbolic.⁷⁸ Though the Real necessitates the emergence of the Symbolic, “the Real is simultaneously *presupposed and posed by* the symbolic,” or the Real is “a cause which in itself does not exist” that is “present only in a series of effects” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 169, 163). It appears that Lacan wants it both ways. By rejecting pre-discursive reality, Lacan refutes the Heideggerian notion of the pre-ontological, yet Lacan’s entire project hinges on the human impulse to revere the Phallus. Lacan regards the Phallus as the polestar by which all human action and interaction are navigated. If the desire for wholeness is innate and if this desire inevitably manifests in language, as Lacan posits, Phallic monism *is* pre-discursive reality. For Patricia Huntington, therefore, “Lacanian theory lapses into a form of *symbolic fatalism* when it collapses the fact that there is no pre-discursive reality into the conclusion that the acquisition of identity necessarily occurs within the preexisting phallographic symbolic order” (136). This *collapse* is the closed loop and an obvious contradiction. How does one reconcile the absence of pre-discursive reality with a preexisting patriarchal order?

For Heidegger, the interaction between the subject and the world is not *as* closed a system. The trajectory of culture is not pre-determined (culture is as self-interpretive as Da-sein⁷⁹), and such a notion of pre-determination is indicative of how traditions function to confine the human philosophical project. Heideggerian ontology provides the speaking being with a freedom of movement that Lacanian psychoanalysis prevents. For Lacan, there is one way of Being: humans are consumed by Lack and dominated by the Desire to achieve an unattainable sense of oneness. The subject seeks (unattainable) identity in the sanctity of language and refuge from materiality in the clarity of the Symbolic. Though Heidegger maintains that functioning within the matrix of culture is unavoidable, he identifies *three* compartments of human existence.

“Because Da-sein is always essentially its possibility, it *can* ‘choose’ itself in its being, (1) it can win itself, (2) it can lose itself, or (3) it can never and only ‘apparently’ win itself” (enumeration mine *Being and Time* 40) [42]. Capable of *choosing* its mode of Being, Heidegger endows the subject with a greater degree of agency than does the Lacanian paradigm. By *winning itself*, Dasein identifies the socio-historic contingencies of cultural practices *as* socio-historic contingencies and understands that, if embraced unconditionally, prevailing ideology can prevent access to the authentic mode of Being. To win oneself is to experience the *authentic* mode (*Eigentlich*). The “self” that one wins is not a primordial identity. Living authentically, the individual takes ownership for his or her decisions and approach to living. To the contrary, by *losing itself*, Da-sein is thoughtlessly consumed by facticity. In this compartment of Being, Da-sein is *undifferentiated* (*Gleichgültigkeit*).⁸⁰ Heidegger argues that “initially and for the most part,” humans exist in “this indifference of everydayness” (ibid. 43) [41]. This

undifferentiated mode is a way of Being in which the question of Being floats unexamined but from which authentic Being emerges. By *only apparently winning itself*, Da-sein limits its self-interpretation to the parameters established by prevailing ideology. “Instead of simply accepting passively the social role it grew up in,” as it does in the undifferentiated mode, “it actively identifies with some social role such as lawyer, father, or lover or some socially sanctioned identity... which allows it to disown, or cover up, its true self-interpreting structure” (Dreyfus 26). Though social structures are not inherently oppressive or unjust, Heidegger contends that when one limits oneself to that which is presently available, one lives an *inauthentic (Uneigentlich)* life. Inauthenticity is grounded in what Heidegger calls *the they (Das Man)*, the nebulous, amorphous mass that spawns prevailing ideology. Though by no means identical to the Lacanian Symbolic, the Heideggerian *they* functions similarly to the Symbolic order; *the they*, as will be discussed in further detail shortly, is the factual world of social structures and ideological constructs into which the subject integrates.⁸¹ For Heidegger, if the subject yields to societal pressures without questioning them, it risks an existence in which *being with*, “fitting in,” takes precedent over *being toward (Sein zu)*, pursuing “its utmost potentiality-for-being” (*Seinkönnen*) (*Being and Time* 179) [191].

Denying the speaking being the dimensions of agency that Heidegger permits, Lacanian subjectivation renders authenticity impossible. In Heideggerian terms, Lacan proposes that human beings exist *only* in the inauthentic and undifferentiated modes. As a void, as an always already failed signifier, any concept of “self” is remote and illusory. This illusion prompts the Lack so prevalent in the Lacanian subject and produces the anxiety that human beings experience and that clinical therapy may treat. For Heidegger,

on the other hand, this anxiety, *angst* (*Angst*), constitutes a positive condition; it “provides the phenomenal basis for explicitly grasping the primordial totality of being of Da-sein” (*Being and Time* 171) [182]. *Angst* results when one fails to pursue the authentic mode. For Lacan, the Lack-Desire dynamic constitutes the subject’s *totality of being*. For Heidegger, however, the Lack, to use Lacanian rhetoric, of authentic Being yields the *angst* that only the pursuit of potentiality can alleviate. *Angst* is the feeling of unsettledness precipitated by a life dominated by *the they*. Unlike Lacanian subjectivation, Heideggerian ontology positions the individual as capable of moving beyond Lack.

Though Heideggerian authenticity (potentiality) and the Lacanian Real (materiality) are very different concepts, they are similar in how they are *experienced*: each emerges only in bursts. Consider the mythological monster at Loch-ness. Any time individuals present “eye-witness” accounts of their experiences with this Leviathan, they describe only movement in the water, or they speak of seeing a massive fin. The blurry photographs that allegedly capture the creature merely depict cloudy images and only *sections* of the beast. It is as if the animal is both massive and elusive. This is akin to the Lacanian Real. The subject encounters only brief glimpses into the materiality of existence, the world beyond the Law; the vast ocean of the Symbolic prevents access to the monstrous Real. Heideggerian authenticity follows this trajectory. One’s *utmost potentiality-for-being*, one’s *authenticity*, is always already unsustainable. Since the human being operates within a social matrix, and since that matrix is constructed by cultural-ideological formations (*the they*), complete emancipation from societal pressures is impossible. We live in “the world” and can never extract ourselves from its conditions.

At the same time, however, while Freud and Lacan propose that biology determines the formation of subjects and of culture, rendering them both, therefore, inevitable and foreclosed, Heidegger asserts that the *extent to which* the individual is willing to assimilate into the societal matrix governs the human trajectory.

The authentic subject does not, cannot, discard some brilliant disguise and reveal its prime-originality in the revel of authenticity. As Tina Chanter indicates, “the best that can happen is that Dasein oscillates, in a constant tension, between inauthentic involvement in things in the world, which induces Dasein to see itself as on par with the things to which it relates, and an authentic attunement to its true character, as possibility, as freedom” (*Time, Death, and the Feminine* 94). There are only moments during which the subject is temporarily jettisoned from the inauthentic. For Heidegger, however, the human being should live for these moments. In this sense, authenticity is not voluntarism or autonomous selfhood. Nancy J. Holland explains, “the they-self is necessary because it provides the terms in which we can engage with other Dasein in mutually meaningful social interactions...to live entirely outside *the they-self*, to make up one’s own meanings in every case, would be one definition of madness” (133). Though Heidegger clearly relies on the existence of and the power of the human will, agency is always tempered by the subject’s status as a being integrated in a public world, as a being that exists with others.

The they is central to this public world.⁸² *The they* occupies, produces, and maintains the ontic realm. As the germ of prevailing ideology and cultural practices, *the they* can have a profoundly negative impact on the individual. Conforming to the demands of *the they* can prevent a subject’s authenticity if or when

being with one-another dissolves one's own Da-sein completely into the kind of being of "the others" in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the they unfolds its true dictatorship. We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way they enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way they see and judge. But we also withdraw from "the great mass" the way they withdraw, we find "shocking" what they find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness. (*Being and Time* 119) [126,127]

Like Kierkegaard's notion of "the crowd,"⁸³ *the they* functions to mold the subject to its will. Furthermore, *the they* produces a double bind. If one deviates from societal norms, one is ostracized or punished. If one commits wholeheartedly to the zeitgeist, one risks ontological anonymity or destruction. In the Lacanian context, however, *the they*, the Symbolic order, the Big Other is that which enables signification. Moreover, for Lacan, to reject interpellation yields the oblivion of unbearable isolation. In Lacanian subjectivation, Symbolic structure is historically, linguistically, and biologically sanctioned. Its shapes and contours are "right" because they are inevitable. This inevitability is what Žižek calls the Lacanian "forced choice."

The subject emerges out of the act of freely choosing the inevitable—that is, in which she/he is given the freedom of choice on condition that she/he makes the right choice: when an individual is addressed by an interpellation, she/he is invited to play a role in such a way that the

invitation appears to have already been answered by the subject before it was proposed, but at the same time the invitation could not be refused (*The Ticklish Subject* 19).

Socialization is pre-determined. Agency and freedom are illusions; to experience the “freedom of choice” is to *follow a mandatory path*.

Heidegger has a completely different understanding of authority. *The they*, interchangeable for our purposes with the Symbolic, is not guaranteed by any prime-original factors. The primacy of the Phallus (or anything other than *Being*, for that matter) is not a priori. In Lacan’s case, phallogentric philosophy springs from philosophical maxims inherited and articulated by *the great mass*. These articulations produce what Heidegger refers to as *publicness (Öffentlichkeit)*.

Publicness initially controls every way in which the world and Da-sein are interpreted, and it is always right, not because of an eminent and primary relation of being to “things,” not because it has an explicitly appropriate transparency of Da-sein at its disposal, but because it does not get to “the heart of the matter,” because it is insensitive to every difference of level and genuineness. Publicness obscures everything, and then claims that what has been thus covered over is what is familiar and accessible to everybody. (*Being and Time* 119) [127]

The they, the Symbolic, the Law, dominates the trajectory of the subject. It is constantly “levelling down”⁸⁴ the subject’s “possibilities of being” (ibid. 119) [127]. *The they*, however, sanctions its own authority. Its power stems from its ubiquity. *The they* urges the subject to conflate, in Lacanian terms, the Symbolic and the Real...to fuse the Law

with the Truth. *The they* functions insofar as it can present a picture-of-reality as that which is universally and unquestionably True. As prevailing ideology, as zeitgeist, *the they* exemplifies a temporal, factual structure. At the same time, however, its temporality must be concealed; *the they* must be articulated as trans-historic reality. Were its variability revealed, its power would diminish. Similarly, the Lacanian Symbolic, like a fragile web of synthetic fibers, suspends the subject above the heaving chaos of the Real. The subject only assimilates if it perceives the Symbolic as refuge from chaos. In this sense, *I am rescued because I believe myself to be rescued*. Yet I can only subscribe to this belief if I conflate the fragile web with the heaving sea of unintelligibility; I can only interpellate if I substitute the Symbolic for the Real and, in so doing, determine that the Symbolic *is* the Real. With Law, with culture, the material conditions of human experience, the always already inaccessible Real fundamentals of existence, are suppressed. This suppression preconditions subjectivation; the human psyche must protect itself from the horrors of the Real in order to successfully navigate the world. At the same time, however, as Nietzsche suggests, only through *forgetting* this chaos does the human being ever arrive at any concept of absolute Truth.⁸⁵ One has to sublimate the variability and contingencies of truths in order to fabricate the Truth. *The they*, the Law, and the Symbolic are all mechanisms for sublimation. Each wields this power *not because of an eminent and primary relation of being to “things,” not because it has an explicitly appropriate transparency of Da-sein at its disposal, but because it does not get to “the heart of the matter,” because it is insensitive to every difference of level and genuineness*. Heidegger urges the subject to acknowledge this sublimation.

Only by *remembering* the variability of *the they* (the fragility of the Law) can the subject embrace the pursuit for potentiality.

In his philosophical investigations, Žižek echoes this Heideggerian notion of the Law. He clearly describes the arbitrary characteristics of the Symbolic and its countless ideological manifestations. Exposing the mutability and fragility upon which the Lacanian subject is built, Žižek describes the Law as possessing a fundamentally “senseless character” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 37). The Symbolic operates as a force exerted onto the subject, but the Symbolic—*the they*—is imperative not because it provides Justice (Truth) but because it provides Order (the very fabric from which subjectivity is woven); the disparity between Justice and Order, however, must remain concealed for the Law to function effectively.

What is “repressed” then, is not some obscure origin of the Law but the very fact that the Law is not to be accepted as true, only as necessary—the fact that its authority is without truth. The necessary structural illusion which drives people to believe that truth can be found in laws describes precisely the mechanism of transference: transference is this supposition of a Truth, of a Meaning, behind the stupid, traumatic, inconsistent fact of the Law. In other words, “transference” names the vicious circle of belief: the reasons why we should believe are persuasive only to those who already believe. (ibid. 38)

This *vicious circle of belief* constitutes the engine of *the they*. As the sun generates its own energy through the process of fusion, the Symbolic manufactures its authority with its authority. This is how the logic of the native’s “savagery,” or of woman’s “hysteria,”

of the Ethnic Other's "inferiority," can be conceived. Once the authority of the Law becomes stripped away, the closed loop of Lacanian psychodynamics explodes.

Authenticity remains inconceivable within the context of the "forced choice." In Lacanian conceptual architecture, the subject cannot escape a phallogentric economy and has no hope of signifying itself, no hope for auto-disclosure. For the subject to escape the corrosive influence of *the they*, for the subject to reject the Symbolic, there must exist some *accessible* space outside Symbolic structures. There must be a *third term* apart from the binary configuration of subject as product of prevailing ideology. This third term corresponds to the authentic mode. To be sure, the "freedom" that the authentic subject experiences is undeniably limited. Despite its rejection of dominant signifying practices, the authentic subject is *still* the product of prevailing ideology. *If I choose to revolt against the status quo, my decision to deviate is informed by the status quo; my actions are reactions; my choices are bound to and by the societal norms that I reject.* Context dominates human experience. In this sense, Heidegger broadens the possibilities of that which can be forcibly chosen. Furthermore, Heidegger undercuts the guarantor(s)—metaphysics, history—of the context within which "choices" are made.

Heidegger and Feminism

Understanding now some key differences between Lacanian theories of subject formation and Heideggerian conceptions of agency, the influence of fundamental ontology on the works of Kristeva and Irigaray becomes more apparent. The emergence of a conceptual field in which a third term, an authentic position "beyond" prevailing ideology, permits reconfiguration of Lacanian philosophical framework. When Heidegger disturbs the binary relationship between the individual and the collective, a

structure upon which Freudian psychology is built and a structure around which Lacan fashions his theories of subject formation, he paves the way for figures like Irigaray and Kristeva. Once phallogocentric notions of subjectivation are re-contextualized as factually constituted, feminist “correctives” to the Lacanian paradigm become possible.

By rejecting Cartesian dualism and the subject-object relation, Heidegger inserts the human body into his philosophical project. The nature of Being can be addressed only through an examination of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. Clearly, a physical, material, embodied experience comprises our worldly existence. Furthermore, though Heidegger asserts that authenticity springs from the angst of undifferentiated Being, he also proposes that the finitude of human life propels Dasein towards its potentiality. For Heidegger, “Being-toward death is the anticipation of a potentiality-of-being of *that* being whose kind of being is anticipation itself. In this anticipatory revealing of this potentiality-of-being, Da-sein discloses itself to itself with regard to its most extreme possibilities” (*Being and Time* 242) [263]. The reality of, or exposure to, one’s mortality powerfully motivates a subject to pursue authenticity, endeavor to emancipate itself from *the they*, and to experience itself in its *most extreme possibilities*. Heidegger’s hermeneutic ontology, therefore, is corporeal. As *philosophy of the flesh*, Heidegger calls for an end to abstract metaphysical meditation. Finally, by proposing the comportment of authenticity, Heidegger empowers the human being to step “outside” the enclosures of prevailing ideology.

Irigaray’s entire philosophical approach emulates Heideggerian ontology. As Heidegger indicts the metaphysical tradition for conflating Being and beings, Irigaray asserts that this conflation confuses Being with masculine subjectivity. Summarizing

“The Age of the World Picture,” Huntington states, “Heidegger defines modernity as the age in which three interrelated phenomena occur: (a) reality becomes reduced to a mirror image of human being; (b) reason mimetically re-presents reality as a picture of world view; and (c) reason forecloses real historical possibilities for change when it reduces reality to its mirror image” (174). This reflected *image* coincides with the Lacanian Imaginary and the resulting mirror stage of development. Irigaray, in a Heideggerian trajectory, proposes that, by always returning “back to the necessities of the self-representation of phallic desire,” the Lacanian paradigm succumbs to understanding Being as that which is visible (“The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine” 125). The impulse toward *phallic desire* upon which Lacanian discourse rests revolves around “an introjected, internalized mirror, in which the ‘subject’ ensures, in the most subtle, most secret, manner possible, the immortal preservation of his auto-eroticism” (“Volume Without Contours” 59). In this light, when *reality becomes reduced to a mirror image of human being*, the subsequent “reality” is shaped by the illusion of Phallic wholeness and limited therefore to masculine subjectivity, to what Irigaray thus refers to throughout her work as the *male Imaginary*. For Irigaray, the *picture of the world* is a *masculine world*, and, as such, *forecloses real historical possibilities for change*. Since a woman possesses no visible sex organ, the Lacanian schema renders her incomplete, not whole. Consequently, Irigaray maintains, “women lack a mirror for becoming women” (qtd. in Whitford 159).⁸⁶

Irigaray’s project, therefore, zeroes in on how the Western tradition has sublimated the feminine. As Heidegger critiques a philosophical canon for idealizing beings and only *glancing in passing toward Being*, Irigaray determines that the

metaphysical tradition in the West has perpetuated itself with mere fleeting glimpses at sexual difference. For her, too many notions of the subject are “heir to an ‘ideology’ that...asserts that the ‘masculine’ is the sexual model, that no representation of desire can fail to take it as the standard, can fail to submit to it. (“The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine” 121). One way of reading Heidegger’s rendering Dasein a *neutral* entity, however, is to see that Heidegger breaks the mold and *implicitly* acknowledges sexual difference by avoiding terms that privilege either sex.

In “Sexual Difference,” Irigaray posits, “sexual difference is one of the important questions of our age, if not in fact the burning issue. According to Heidegger, each age is preoccupied with one thing, and one alone. Sexual difference is probably that issue in our own age which could be our salvation on an intellectual level” (165). If woman acknowledges and embraces *her own* subjectivity, a psychical state apart from the masculine position, the third term, “Woman,” emerges to (re)shape culture. Once liberated, the female becomes an active agent for change. In a phallogentric economy, the feminine corresponds to authentic Being. The conceptual space beyond masculine subjectivity and Symbolic Law is a key component for agency and “self-actualization.” The authentic mode of Being *is* this space beyond. A patriarchal social system, to put it in Heideggerian terms, is a factual contingency. It is as much a product of *the they* and of publicness as any other cultural practice. Thusly, the “they-self,” as conceptualized by Irigaray, denotes the female “self” as constructed by phallogentric parameters. Following Heideggerian ontology, therefore, woman can emancipate herself from the clutches of phallic monism by embracing authenticity and can come to experience her potentiality that has been historically negated by phallogentric conceptions of Being. Perhaps these

Heideggerian assertions contribute to why, when speaking of the philosopher, Irigaray claims, “his thought enlightened me at a certain level more than any other and it has done so in a way that awakened my vigilance, political as well as philosophical, rather than constraining me to submit to any program” (“The Forgetting of Air to To Be Two” 315).

As Irigaray examines the absence of the (female) body in philosophy, Kristeva’s project reintroduces the physical body into psychological processes. More “concrete” than Irigaray’s theoretical abstractions, Kristeva conceives bodily processes as integral components of subject formation. Returning to Heidegger’s notion of preontological knowledge, Dasein’s predisposition to function in its *factual* and *factual concretion*, Kristeva posits that the subject-to-be, due to the embodied reality of its material configuration, experiences *primary narcissism*, the pre-linguistic state during which bodily drives and somatic states prepare the (pre) subject how “to be” in the world.⁸⁷

More compatible with Lacanian theory than are either Heideggerian or Irigarayan philosophical assertions, Kristeva agrees that the mirror stage is the developmental phase during which otherness is initially confronted, but Kristeva proposes that there are biological functions at work that prepare the subject-to-be for the traumatic realization of its own autonomy.⁸⁸ For Kristeva, a sense of autonomy and otherness, however, the *result* of the mirror stage, cannot occur without the biological precedent for these concepts. As does Heidegger’s conception of preontological knowledge, Kristeva’s semiotic theory maintains that *the material preconditions the abstract*.

For Lacan, these material conditions, designated as the Real, must be sublimated by Symbolic structures so subjectivation can occur. Heidegger, on the other hand, asserts that attuning one’s self to the impermanence of human life engenders the authentic mode

of Being. Kristeva, situated within the Lacanian model, draws from Heideggerian conceptions of being-toward-death with her theory of *the abject*. As exposure to death propels Dasein to pursue its authentic mode, the abject “draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (*Powers of Horror* 230). This *meaning* signifies not the “self;” the *collapse* signals the *meaninglessness* of the Law. Like an authentic subject mindful of its fragility and resolutely aware of *the they*, the Kristevan deject *is* authentic insofar as it willfully strays from prevailing ideology and sets itself apart from dominant cultural practices. The deject’s freedom of movement fuses key aspects of fundamental ontology with Lacanian subject formation. Kristeva’s deviations from Lacan build on Heideggerian presuppositions. Furthermore, as Heidegger proposes three modes of being (undifferentiated, inauthentic, and authentic), Kristeva posits, the deject “is never *one*,⁸⁹ nor *homogenous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic” (ibid. 235). For Kristeva, the subject is in process. Never a fixed state, the individual moves not only through space and time but also through varying conceptions of itself and others.

Fundamental ontology re-imagines the way the subject interacts with the world. Though it may *seem as if* the individual is foreclosed to an existence in which prevailing ideology molds subjectivity, the individual always has a choice. “Heidegger regards subjectivity as historically embedded in ways that constantly lull humans into complacent acceptance of current beliefs,” so, as an entity capable of choice, the Heideggerian subject can clear away ideologically inherited debris and disentangle its “self” in order to become authentic (Huntington xviii). Da-sein can never *fully* disentangle itself; it will fall and fall again. Heidegger, however, presents the possibilities of breaking free from

cultural practices. When these practices are oppressive, “to live authentically” is “to live ethically” and is “to become aware of the possibilities that have been foreclosed” by “the Symbolic world of the ‘they’” (Ingram 50). Heideggerian auto-disclosure enables the individual to interpret its own mode of Being; this process wields the power to reshape culture. It is for this reason that Gail Stenstad celebrates Heidegger as a cornerstone of social reform. “Heidegger’s historical reflection enables us to go deeply into the origins of the presuppositions undergirding the entrenched ideas and values that so often get in the way of even beginning to think or discuss alternatives” to dominant ideology and reigning cultural practices (349). When *presuppositions* and *entrenched ideas* indoctrinate subjects into phallogocentric ideology, the notion that concepts are factual and therefore variable opens the door to re-conceiving and re-ordering the way we live.

Heidegger’s contributions to a feminist project, however, are hotly contested among feminist theorists. Elizabeth Grosz radically contends that Heidegger is among “the most misogynist of male writers;” since he reduces all human experience to Da-sein, Heidegger attempts to “‘master feminist discourse’ because feminist discourses do not provide the texts he cites and are not the objects of his investigations” (82). Though her charge that *Being and Time* does not refer to texts authored, or arguments mounted, by women is accurate, Heidegger simply alludes to the philosophical canon he refutes. As Irigaray’s body of work illustrates, that tradition has systematically silenced the female voice. Since the thrust of Heidegger’s project revolves around his rejection of philosophical history, part of Heidegger’s task is to disassemble the very tradition that has effectively silenced the feminine. Furthermore, since *Being and Time* focuses on the irreducible Being of all humans and celebrates authentic Being, a mode in which the

subject *is not* silenced by prevailing ideology, though Heidegger does not refer to *feminist discourse*, his ontological endeavor certainly permits and arguably encourages that dialogue.⁹⁰ Finally, as my reading of Heidegger in contradistinction to Lacanian subjectivation elucidates, Heidegger's ontology emancipates philosophy from phallogentric enclosure.

Extending Grosz's argument, Carol Bigwood claims, "Heidegger meditates on the ontological difference (the relationship of beings with Being) but ignores sexual difference. By ignoring sexual difference, he remains bound to the body-denying...tradition of Western metaphysics, despite his groundbreaking efforts to release ontological thinking from that tradition" (170). One can refer to Derrida when countering this charge. In "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference," Derrida interprets the neutrality of Dasein as *pre-sexual* sexuality. As the Being of human being, Dasein animates the human body. Derrida suggests that Dasein's neutrality speaks to primordial sexuality that ultimately manifests, via factual concretion, as sexual difference. "If *Dasein* as such belongs to neither of the two sexes, that doesn't mean that its being is deprived of sex. On the contrary, here one must think of a pre-differential, rather than a pre-dual, sexuality – which doesn't necessarily mean unitary, homogeneous, or undifferentiated" (60). Although Heidegger does not discuss sexual difference per se, Derrida argues that the Heideggerian conception of Dasein preserves, or better, prepares the way for philosophies of sexual difference. To be sure, the fundamental component of *being (t)here*, in the world, consists of having an anatomically distinct human frame.

Tina Chanter critiques Heidegger from a different vista. Assuming a Levinasian stance⁹¹ toward fundamental ontology, Chanter regards *Being and Time* as egocentric.

Chanter argues, “in order to be authentic, Dasein must sever its ties from *the they*, cut itself off from others – in short, it must approximate itself, at least in some respects, to the isolated Cartesian I from which Heidegger seems to be trying so hard to get away” (“Assumptions of Heidegger’s Ontology” 92). Following Chanter, Mechthild Nagel is critical of what she views as solipsism in Heidegger’s work. She envisions authenticity as “an image of a radically isolated, monologically positioned player” in a “game” that “celebrates the solitary (male) hero” who exists “at odds with a feminist perspective” (291).

These critiques, however, overlook or misinterpret two key aspects of *Being and Time*: *mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*) and *fallenness* (*Verfallen*).⁹² Heidegger establishes that mineness does not pertain to an egocentric and individualized mode of Being. Instead, mineness refers to the incontestable reality that, given the agency Heidegger with which endows the subject, only the individual can *choose* its mode of Being. In asserting, “*the ‘essence’ of Da-sein lies in its existence,*” Heidegger suggests that the *choices* that I make determine *how* I live in the world; these choices, like my Being, are “always my own” (*Being and Time* 40) [42]. Mineness, as Heidegger presents it, involves the way in which one owns a comportment of Being. In a 1923 lecture, Heidegger overtly cautions against perceiving mineness as narcissistic self-involvement. “Dasein as its own does not mean an isolating relativization to...the individual (*solus ipse*), rather ‘ownness’ is a way of Being” (qtd. in Dreyfus 26). Further still, Heidegger reduces Dasein’s Being to mineness because, though I interact in a world of others and project myself onto and into the network social roles that comprise my being-in-the-world, “the complete identity that I envision as attributable to me remains *my* identity. For my first-person sense of death

establishes my life not only as a *totality*, but also uniquely *mine*” (Hoffman 198). My life is *totalized* by its being-unto-death. To state the obvious, only I can die my death.

Understanding mineness, we can move into fallenness. Since my life is *mine*, I ideally choose to pursue the authentic mode. As previously established, however, authenticity can be only intermittently achieved. Periods of authenticity are always followed by *fallenness*; the subject that has experienced the sublimation of authenticity relapses into the world of *the they*. “Falling prey to the ‘world’ means being absorbed in being-with-one-another as it is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. What we called inauthenticity of Da-sein may now be defined more precisely through the interpretation of falling prey. (*Being and Time* 164) [175-76]. Through its fallenness, the subject re-enters the world of being-with, the world of *the they*. This return, however, is colored by the fact that the subject has experienced moments of authenticity. Upon its return, the ethical subject becomes devoted to helping the other escape *the they* and experience potentiality.

There is the possibility of a concern which does not so much *leap in* for the other as *leap ahead* of him, not in order to take “care” away from him, but to first give it back to him as such. This concern which essentially pertains to authentic care; that is, the existence of the other, and not a *what* which it takes care of, helps the other become transparent to himself *in* his care and *free for* it. (ibid. 115) [122]

Unlike the solipsistic ego as conceived by Chanter and Nagel, authentic Dasein does not adopt an antagonistic view of the Other. Though the authentic subject rejects *the they*, *the they* is never a particularized individual; *the they* is an *idea*, the concept of obligatory

conformity. Operating in the authentic mode, the subject is devoted to the Other and “frees the other for himself in his freedom” (ibid. 115) [122]. With concern for the Other, authentic Dasein, like a living example, functions as a catalyst by which other human can experience the authentic mode. Penelope Ingram argues, “coming into authenticity means awakening oneself to the possibility of other paths and other subjectivities” (50). At the same time, the authentic individual aspires to awaken others to their potentialities. Finally, as the work of Hannah Arendt proposes, the methods by which these authentic *awakenings* occur are verbal communication and ethical action.

Heidegger and Arendt

Hannah Arendt, a student of Heidegger’s, conveys philosophical meditations that reverberate with his fundamental ontology. At the same time, however, her re-imagining of Heidegger furthers the connection between his existential phenomenology and the Continental feminist project and, furthermore, between the maternal function and the authentic mode of Being. Patricia Huntington determines that, “Heidegger’s allergic reaction to the social sphere drains authenticity of...rich ethical connotations” (xxi), and her work, *Ecstatic Subjects, Utiopia and Recognition: Kristeva, Heidegger, Irigaray*, appropriately designates Continental feminism as the socio-political outgrowth of Heideggerian assertions. Though, as previously discussed, his project is decidedly *not* focused exclusively on the experience of individual Da-sein, Heidegger’s analysis of the individual’s relation to the Other is localized and microcosmic; the authentic subject endeavors to help fellow subjects acknowledge the dangers *the they* and achieve their own potentialities. The work of Irigaray and Kristeva, as influenced by Heidegger, expand on the power of authenticity. Once the fragility of the Law becomes evident, the

entirety of culture can, at least theoretically, grapple with the burden of inauthenticity. Huntington, however, overlooks the role of Hannah Arendt in the *politicalization* of fundamental ontology.

The focus of Arendt's work in *The Human Condition* examines the three properties of Being: labor, work, and action. "Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body;" as such, "the human condition of labor is life itself" (7). "Work provides an 'artificial' world of things;" as such, "the human condition of work is worldliness" (ibid. 7). "Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that man, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world;" as such, "plurality is the condition of human action" (ibid. 7-8). Labor is *being*, the world of the self; Heidegger refers to this phenomenon as *Eigenwelt*. Work is the synthetic realm (material, ideological, legal, etc) *produced* by Da-sein and parallels what Heidegger terms *Umwelt*, or worldliness. Action is discourse, communication, interaction; for Heidegger, *Mitwelt*, the social world, enables action.

Action, as being-in-the-world, is a pivotal component in fundamental ontology. Regarding the work-world, Heidegger asserts that "things," as the "pre-phenomenal basis" for being, establish "our preliminary theme" (*Being and Time* 63) [67]. Only through acting in congress with the thing in the world, respecting the Being *of* the thing, can we treat things less like objects and more like "material for living" (ibid. 64) [67]. The Zen-like harmony of being-in-the-world (seamless integration and attunement with the world-around as opposed to the ensnarement of being-with *the they*) stems from an act as seemingly mundane as hammering.⁹³ In short, any task the human being executes

accomplishes the objective of *living*. For Arendt, this notion of work has been lost in the modern age.

The perplexity of utilitarianism is that it gets caught in an unending chain of means and ends without ever arriving at some principle which could justify the category of means and end, that is, of utility itself. The “in order to” has become the content of the “for the sake of”; in other words, utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness. (*The Human Condition* 154)

If our work is for the sake of itself, if we do our work without thinking, we do whatever works. Since Work is a projection of our being and the context for our interaction with human beings, Work is the fruit of our Labor.

Labor, the act of and conditions for *living*, is finite. Congruent with Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, *the human condition* must be examined in context with the human temporal-material “reality.” We are born; we live; we die. Whereas Heidegger situates death as the event *Da-sein* is *being toward*, Arendt posits that humans derive meaning from a *being from*. Potentiality is contingent not on the end of life, but on birth. Consequently, Arendt grounds the subject in *natality*.

On the one hand, the concept of natality is self-evident; the human being is born into the world, born into an environment of Others, of community. It is upon the creation of a human life when an individual is confronted with the question of authenticity and presented with the responsibility to assess the conditions of the socio-political world (what Lacan terms the Symbolic). “The new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of being something

anew, that is, of acting” (*The Human Condition* 24). It is here that Arendt’s term, “Labor,” comes sharply into focus. Arendt re-imagines Heideggerian ontology, and in so doing, establishes a notion of the maternal function as the guardian of alterity. As producer and the protector of life, the mother is the origin of all that is Other. The newborn is Other insofar as it is as of yet untouched by *the they*, as of yet uninterpellated. The baby is the undeveloped human being that will occupy a new society, an as-of-yet determined future world. “To transform the nascent being into a speaking being and thinking being, the maternal psyche takes the form of a passageway between the *zoe* and *bios*, between physiology and biography, and between nature and spirit” (*Hannah Arendt* 47). If, via the “forced choice” and Symbolic structures, the subject is constantly threatened by thematization and inherited phallogocentric conceptions that obliterate the Other in favor of the Same, “maternal love could be seen as the dawning of the bond with the Other” (*ibid.* 46). This Other is the child; this Other is the undisclosedness of tomorrow.

On the other hand, natality corresponds to the very notion of representation. Peg Birmingham describes natality as “the event” that “carries with it the desire to appear” (55). Martin Allison identifies natality as “the beginning” that “cannot be equated with the beginning of the earth-world which is *something* but is rather the beginning of *someone* who is identified with the capacity to begin, so that men do not *possess* the capacity for beginning but *are* the beginning” (37). Nowhere is this more evident than in Arendt’s own assertions. “Everything that is alive—in addition to the fact that its surface is made for appearance, fit to be seen and meant to appear to others—has the *urge to appear*, to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its

‘inner self’ but itself as an individual” (*Life of the Mind* 29). Part of *being human* is the compulsion to be recognized as a distinct and viable creature, as member of the world. For Arendt, this world is a fundamentally political sphere. For this reason, in her schema of Labor, Work, Action, she privileges *action*. Through active engagement, the subject can *appear* before the world and *participate* in the ongoing narrative that is life.

As Lacan proposes the Symbolic world of human ideological structures, Arendt presents the realm of the political. For Lacan, the subject is dominated by Lack, traumatically shaped by an act of misrecognition; as a child, the human being perceives its reflection as something complete and is forever seduced by this idealized ego, and, as a result, stumbles through its existence in search of an impossible fullness. For Lacan, therefore, human action is all compensatory. *Since I am haunted by ontological emptiness, I’ll take whatever I can get*. The ultimate consolation is integration into the Symbolic world. For Heidegger and Arendt, however, this consolation exacts a profound toll on the speaking being. Though neither Heidegger nor Arendt situate the human being within the Lacanian schema, both thinkers presciently examine the impact of “Lacanian” integration. As discussed, Heidegger identifies *the they* as the nexus of ontological trauma. The compulsion to “fit” into the teeming mass results in inauthentic being. For Arendt, the inauthentic subject is the inactive subject. For both Heidegger and Arendt, however, the very social structures into which human beings integrate, what Lacan designates as the Symbolic and presents as a subject’s refuge from the Real, do not provide salvation. On the contrary, they conceal from the subject its potentialities for being. In short, as Lacan grounds subjectivation in misrecognition, Heidegger and Arendt argue that subject formation is rooted in *recognition*. Heideggerian ontology

demands that the individual recognize the oppressive characteristics of *the they*. Arendt urges the subject to appear before the crowd, to act and *be recognized*.

The intelligibility of the “self,” authenticity, however, can be profoundly stifled in an oppressive environment. As witness to the Holocaust, Arendt engages this problem of evil. For Arendt, tyrannical political systems do more than limit the freedom of their subjects; they limit the development of the subject. Since Arendt conceives subjectivity as possible through the processes of speech and action, any regime that stifles or destroys opposing ideological views results in a thematization of the cultural body and renders “individuality” superfluous.

Radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become superfluous. The manipulators of this system believe in their own superfluosity as much as in that of all others, and the totalitarian murderers are all the more dangerous because they do not care if they themselves are dead or alive, if they ever lived or never were born. The danger of the corpse factories and holes of oblivion is that today, with populations of homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous if we continue to think of our world in utilitarian terms. Political, social, and economic events everywhere are in a silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous. (*Origins of Totalitarianism* 459)

In this passage, Arendt is responding to the surge of fascism in the early twentieth century and the horrors that these regimes perpetrated. In this context, the phenomenon to which she refers is historically specific. At the same time, however, Arendt

contextualizes totalitarianism with a system that renders subjects *superfluous*. *The they*, the political sphere, the Symbolic order, are not inherently oppressive, totalitarian, or evil. Undeniably, however, these mechanisms possess the potential to materialize as oppressive mechanisms.

To counter the potential for social injustice, each subject is responsible to take Action. Only by living the *vita activa*, the life of labor, work, and action, can the subject participate in revitalizing the world. Action has two dimensions: physical engagement and discourse.

In man, otherness, which it shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, becomes uniqueness, the human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings. Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. (*The Human Condition* 176).

Though Lacan asserts that a linguistic system produces the subject, Arendt determines that Language *articulates* subjectivity. The human animal speaks its “self.” For Heidegger, there are two ways to communicate. There is idle chatter or gossip, a form of *speaking*. “One can speak, speak endlessly, and it may all say nothing” (“The Way to Language 408). On the other hand, there is *saying*, an act of communication and connection with another human being during which “something like a way unfolds essentially” (ibid. 413). Saying is an ethical act. It is inspired by thought and provokes authentic dialogue that transpires in a clearing beyond *the they*. “Every thinking that is on

the trail of something is a poetizing, and all poetry is thinking” (ibid. 425). Heidegger therefore calls for a new discourse, a discourse of poetry, of thinking, of authenticity. Arendt echoes this sentiment in her own conceptions of signification. “The chief characteristic of this specifically human life, whose appearance and disappearance constitutes worldly events, is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography” (*The Human Condition* 97). We communicate with Others through narrative; we tell our stories; we listen to them tell their own. This is an act of reciprocity. It is an act of speaking and *of listening*. Dialogue, therefore, not the univocality of masculine subjectivity, enables potentiality.

Arendt, Irigaray, and Kristeva

Ironically, and like her predecessor Heidegger, Arendt does not discuss sexual difference. On the contrary, she refers to the human animal as “man,” linguistically classifying all beings as male. Moreover, Arendt omits the specifics of the human body from her meditations. Mary G. Dietz, therefore, accuses Arendt of “gender blindness” (“Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics” 240). Like Dietz, Linda M. G. Zerilli critiques the philosopher for “treating the body as genderless,” but acknowledges that Arendt departs from the specifics of gender to explore “the sheer terror associated with mortality” (173-4). In this regard, though Arendt does not engage the anatomical specifics of the sexes, her philosophical project hinges on *the body*. “There is in fact no thing that does not in some way transcend its functional use, and its transcendence, its beauty or ugliness, is identical with appearing publicly and being seen” (*The Human Condition* 171). The *thing* here is human physical form. It is the body that takes action; it is the body that speaks and participates. “If left to themselves, human affairs can only

follow the law of mortality, which is the most certain and only reliable law of a life spent between birth and death. It is the faculty of action that interferes with this law because it interrupts the inexorable automatic course of daily life” (ibid. 246). *The automatic course of daily life* is what Heidegger regards as ensnarement in *the they*. The action that Arendt deems essential for representation is akin to the resoluteness that Heidegger celebrates. Though the human trajectory inevitably terminates, our species is motivated not by dying, as Heidegger indicates, but by *living*. For Arendt, living is acting. “The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of action interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin” (ibid. 246). This beginning occurs through natality. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt boldly asserts, “To think is to be fully alive” (178). To be *fully alive* is to resist the compulsion to unflinchingly integrate into social structures, to resist Heideggerian inauthenticity. For Arendt, however, to think is not to merely engage the philosophical. Like Heidegger, Arendt perceives the philosophical tradition as “concentrated on the same ever-repeated subject” and ripe with “abstractions of philosophy and its concept of man as an *animal rationale*” (qtd. in Dietz, *Turning Operations* 2). Instead of recycling philosophical material, Arendt urges us to think and rethink. To perpetuate prevailing notions of subjectivity is to act without thinking.

Joanne Cutting-Gray asserts that only by ignoring gender can Arendt accomplish her “politics of alterity,” claiming that “she implicitly understood (female) alterity as belonging to the public person, not an autonomous, private self” (35). Cutting-Gray

maintains that philosophies that focus on sexual difference risk producing “a sympathetic sisterhood” which only “erases the historically specific differences of race, ethnicity, and gender” (36). At the same time, however, Arendt argues that “one can resist only in terms of the identity that is under attack” (*Men in Dark Times* 18). In this regard, Arendt identifies herself to be “A Jew” because the label, in her historical context, is the “political fact” that “outweighed all other questions of personal identity” (ibid. 17, 18). At the time of overt and violent anti-Semitism in Europe, Judaism was *under attack*, and the assault prevented a Jewish subject from taking the action necessary to participate in the political sphere “as a distinct and unique being among equals” (*The Human Condition* 178). Though Arendt refers to a political body and not to a male or female body, her “politics of alterity,” her concept of natality, and her emphasis on individual freedom inform the philosophical projects of both Irigaray and Kristeva.

Irigaray questions the linguistic structures of a Symbolic order that denies female subjects a language of their own. Moreover, Irigaray asserts that feminine *biography* is inconceivable within a phallogocentric economy. Drawing from Heideggerian conceptions of the third term, of a space beyond *the they*, and gleaned from Arendt the notion that narrative articulates subjectivity, Irigaray urges the female subject to *speak herself*, to tell her own story instead of enacting a scripted version of herself transmitted through history. In short, Irigaray employs the Arendtian concept of natality. All beings possess the urge to appear, the compulsion to participate. For Irigaray, however, patriarchal culture, grounded in androcentric perceptions of subjectivity, prevents “the feminine” from making an appearance. Irigaray, therefore, argues that woman needs to love herself and this self-love produces its own expression, its own narrative. This requires:

- detachment from what is, from the situation in which woman has been traditionally placed;
- love for the child that she once was, that she still is, and a shared enveloping of the child by the mother and of the mother by the child;
- an openness, *in addition* to that mutual love, which allows access to difference. (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 69)

Though relegated to an ontological void by Lacanian theories of subject-formation, Heideggerian authenticity and Arendtian natality enable feminine subjectivity to emerge and proliferate. Though Heidegger asserts that my life is always *mine*, Irigaray transforms that which is mine into something that can be *ours*. Once operating within the authentic space established by Heidegger, Irigaray launches, by way of Arendtian biography and *self-speak*, feminine subjectivity into the openness of the terrain beyond phallogocentric law. The possibility for feminine subjectivity beyond the phallogocentric enclosure, however, permits the promise of multiple subjectivities, multiple modes of Being, apart from (the phallogocentric) pressures exerted by the closed loop of the Lacanian paradigm. Under these conditions, any theoretical mechanism that “allows” feminine subjectivity, a mode apart from phallogocentric enclosure, paves the way for legitimating *any* deviation from prevailing ideology. This is what Derrida suggests when he claims, “that which will not be pinned down by truth [truth?] is, in truth, *feminine*,” but this concept of the feminine “should not...be hastily mistaken for a woman’s femininity, for female sexuality” (“Choreographies” 163).

Kristeva is indebted to Heideggerian notions of the third term. Her bio-linguistic psychoanalytic is rooted in the terrain beyond the Law. The semiotic component of

language, the bodily dimension of signification that threatens to destroy the stability of symbolic linguistic codes, is a third term that she applies to the process of representation. The semiotic originates in the human body, an organic mass that excretes that which is other. On the one hand, these excretions are vomit and human waste and when the human body expels organic material from the body, s/he does so in preparation for psychological separation from the mother. On the other hand, the body, specifically the female body, expels the human baby through labor. As Arendt proposes, this child is the ultimate Other. As the Other possesses the threat to revolutionize cultural practices, the semiotic, as that which exists beyond the confines of the order of symbolic language, threatens to render linguistic meaning unintelligible. The semiotic component of language, as abject, as associated with the feminine body, threatens to undermine the stability of paternal law. The semiotic is taboo because “it is within the economy of signification itself that the questionable subject-in-process appropriates to itself this archaic, instinctual, and maternal territory; thus it simultaneously prevents the word from becoming mere sign and the mother from becoming an object like any other—forbidden” (“From One Identity to an Other” 104). Any attempts to erase the maternal from cultural formation can be catastrophic. If the Law-of-the-Father operates unchecked, if patriarchy becomes useful or convenient, if its consequences are unquestioned, oppression looms.

For Arendt, the distinctness and uniqueness of the individual is a *third term*. There is the world of prevailing ideology, *the same ever-repeated subject*; there is the world of integration into this ideology, the world of thoughtlessness and *mere talk*; and there is the world of the active agent, the *who*. Kristeva expands on the concept of natality, of action, of engagement, of resistance, and positions the mother *as* the third

term. Since she wields the power to put paternal law “on trial,” her very status as mother *is* the space beyond. She can raise her child in accordance with her *archaic father*, her material or ideological love-object apart from the mother-child dyad, or she can forfeit her powers of judgment and rear her child in accordance with dominant signifying practices, in accordance with the will of *the they*. Since Arendt establishes that, through labor, the human being gives birth to the world of material goods, culture, ideology, and Law, humanity has a maternal relation to the Symbolic. Kristeva, therefore, concludes that the “woman-mother” is “the guarantor of both the social order and the continuation of the species” (*The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* 104). As beings, we should be mindful of our progeny. We should take heed to produce a Work-world that protects the sanctity of life. Heidegger suggests that the subject can be re-born, or experience multiple re-births, as an authentic subject that Arendt perceives as the thinking subject. These conceptions of *natality* link all human beings. This is why Kristeva claims that human life “is either a feminine life or nothing at all” (*Hannah Arendt* 48). Following Derrida’s conception of the feminine, Kristeva suggests that this *feminine life*, paradoxically, is not gender-based. It is the life of maternity, a position of guardian and protector and of revolt. “Any man could assume femininity of that sort, or even experience maternity defined as a tension present in the love between *zoe* and *bios*” (ibid. 48). In this sense, “femininity” is usurpation and resistance; it is unwillingness to act without thinking; it is the courage to embrace the beyond.

Heidegger carves out this realm of the beyond. He presents us with the possibility for an explosive re-imagining of the relationship between the self and the Other. Between the individual and the collective rests an infinite expanse, the terrain of the third,

the terrain of authenticity and potentiality. Arendt employs this third term as natality, as the beginning, as the locus of representation, as the process by which the subject can *appear* as a viable and distinct *who*. For Arendt, the *who* is the authentic “self.” Kristeva applies Heideggerian and Arendtian philosophy to psychodynamics. As Heidegger positions authenticity as that beyond *the they*, Kristeva identifies the authentic as that beyond the Law. Semiotic language rattles the cage of symbolic language; the subject’s father of prehistory threatens to collapse paternal law. Authenticity is the power of revolt. For Irigaray, “the feminine” is the third term. The feminine is an authentic mode of being that has been systematically suppressed by institutionalized androcentric thought. Furthermore, Arendt, Kristeva, and Irigaray, to varying degrees, correlate authenticity with the maternal. Natality is the process of birth. It is the birth of the child; it is the birth of the authentic via action. For Kristeva, the maternal function, by the definitions both Lacan and Freud provide, occupies a space outside the law. To some extent, the maternal function itself is a third term. Kristeva asserts that from this position, the Law can be put “on trial.” It can be validated, condemned, rejected, or embraced. Irigaray calls for an *enveloping of the child by the mother and of the mother by the child*. Instead of rivalries and competitions, instead of rejecting maternal ideology and privileging paternal law, the relationships between women, between children and mothers, must be reconceived. Through this re-conception, “the feminine” can emerge, *be seen*. The maternal shatters the static state of paternal law and exposes the fragility of the law. This exposure is that which renders authenticity possible.

Heidegger’s project exposes the fragility of the Law and a conceptual space beyond the confines of *the they*, or, in a Lacanian context, beyond the enclosure(s) of the

Symbolic order. All subjects can penetrate this space if they are aware of its existence and if they are willing to challenge the primacy of prevailing ideology. Hannah Arendt re-imagines Heideggerian thought as maternal philosophy. Instead of a will to power or a will to self, Arendt proffers a will to love. Kristeva and Irigaray position the maternal function as space apart from paternal law, a space that churns with this power of revolt. If this mother speaks herself, if she identifies and articulates her archaic father, she will put the Law “on trial.” This process, though compromised and complicated by fallenness and entanglement, is her exposure to authenticity. Upon re-entry, it is her ethical obligation to transmit the injustices of the Symbolic-they to her child. When this transmission is successful, the maternal function is a revolutionary mechanism that, by cultivating attunement in her children, can reshape the cultural landscape.

CHAPTER 5

WAKING LIONS: HEIDEGGER, THE MATERNAL, AND REVOLT

IN *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

A Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry's work that debuted at New York's Ethel Barrymore Theatre on March 11, 1959, articulates the social, political, economic, and ideological concerns of "poor" blacks in mid-twentieth-century America. At the center of the play, however, is the relationship between Lena Younger, the matriarch of an African-American family struggling to get by on Chicago's South Side, and her children, Beneatha and Walter Lee, two young adults struggling to cope with the personal powerlessness precipitated by institutionalized racism. As we shall see, throughout the work, Walter Lee is obsessed with what he repeatedly describes as "being a man." The Younger son conflates notions of individuality and freedom with masculinity, a fusion evident in Freudian and Lacanian models of subjectivity. I will argue, however, that as the play develops, it becomes clear that "manhood" is the term Walter Lee (unknowingly) conflates with Heideggerian *authenticity*. What Walter describes as "being a man" is the pursuit for wholeness, a pursuit unhampered by boundaries established by *the they*. Beneatha embarks on this quest as well. Though Walter Lee masculinizes this space, this authentic state is gender-free, neuter. It is the terrain of the deject, of the revolutionary. Lena Younger, in stark opposition to racist policies and unjust cultural practices, provides a model for her children. Devoted to the destruction of social barriers and unafraid to

confront racial oppression, Lena clearly possesses a love-object beyond the mother-child dyad. Justice and racial equality are the bedrock, the Kristevan *third term*, on which Lena's notion of the maternal function is firmly grounded. Lena's ideology underpins her interaction with the world. Unlike Bernarda Alba, who inherits and aggressively transmits cultural norms, or Thelma Cates, who passively capitulates to prevailing ideology without deliberation, Lena Younger, I shall argue, is a revolutionary mother, a woman who communicates to her children unyielding devotion to *her* ideology, *her* values. These values contradict Symbolic Law. Though her worldview is inevitably informed by existing cultural conditions, her outlook is not confined to perpetuating these conditions. On the contrary, for Lena, The Law of the Father, the origin of an intolerant and racist culture, the root of a Symbolic order in which difference is eradicated in favor of the Same, must be put on trial. Furthermore, in a Heideggerian context, Lena's revolutionary dynamism, her rejection of oppressive Law, is the catalyst for her children's transformation from *inauthentic* to *authentic* subjects, from immersion in *the they* to attunement to their potentiality for being. This revolutionary mother, having herself already undergone this experience, transmits the importance of this transformation to her children. This is her gift, her mission, her legacy.

A Raisin in the Sun, a title borrowed from Langston Hughes' poem "A Dream Deferred," chronicles a family's escape from the harsh urban setting of a ghetto in Chicago's Southside. This family of five lives in a two-bedroom apartment. Lena, the widowed matriarch, and her daughter, Beneatha, share a room; Walter and his wife, Ruth, share a room; Walter's son, Travis, sleeps on the couch in the den. The home is not just cramped; it is dilapidated and bleak. Insects have infested the building, and, at ten years

old, Travis is accustomed to playing in a neighborhood with “rat blood all over the street” (59). Ruth describes their apartment as a “trap” (44). Beneatha suggests that the only way to rid the complex of roaches is to “set fire to this building” (55). The extent of their poverty is clearly a corrosive influence on the family. The play begins in medias res; upon the death of the patriarch, “Big Walter,” an event that transpired several weeks before the action of the drama occurs, the Younger family awaits his life insurance policy payout of ten thousand dollars. This sum provides the promise of emancipation from brutal economic circumstances. Since poverty is an underlying obstacle to full racial equality, the family regards the insurance money as more than simply financial gain. Each family member has designs on this settlement. Lena wants to purchase a new home for the family. Beneatha can attend medical school with the money. Walter Lee hopes to invest the resources in a liquor store. The check, however, is payable only to Lena, so precisely where the funds are allocated is her decision alone. In this play, the dream of financial independence has been deferred for each member of the Younger family. When the possible actualization of this dream surfaces, it initially “sags like a heavy load” on the shoulders of the Younger family, and then “explodes” first in racial confrontation at Clybourne Park, the white neighborhood in which Lena purchases a home, then in the subsequent experiences of self-actualization that the Youngers undergo.

A Raisin in the Sun has produced a wide range of critical analysis. In a 1959 *New York Herald Tribune* review of the play, Walter Kerr applauds Hansberry for accurately identifying:

the precise temperature of a race at that time in its history when it cannot retreat and cannot quite find the way to move forward. The mood is forty-

nine parts anger and forty-nine parts control, with a very narrow escape hatch for the steam these abrasive contraries build up. Three generations are poised, and crowded, on a detonating cap. (qtd. in Wilkerson 141)

In “African Playwrights at Mid-Century,” Margaret Wilkerson describes Hansberry as “a master of American realism” who uses “narrative to contrast the materialism of the American dream with its humanistic alternative” (141). Her language here is problematic. By associating non-materialism with *humanistic* values, Wilkerson implicitly suggests a universal human nature, a *humanity* with which all speaking creatures are endowed. In this context, the *humanistic alternative* is a “natural” state, a primordial condition to which the subject should return. By extension, materialism corrupts humanity. Undoubtedly, the play illustrates the problems of a capitalist society. At the same time, however, these problems are ethical problems of representation. Humanism, the notion that all human beings possess core similarities, presents a multiplicity of problems. Humanism obscures, if not altogether eradicating, difference; sexual difference and ethnic difference, for example, disappear into the chasm of “being human” (the Freudian and Lacanian paradigms “legitimate” this disappearance). For the Youngers, the *alternative to the materialism of the American Dream* is to embrace their racial identity, an identity marginalized by prevailing social structures. Their plight, therefore, is ethical. The characters pursue their potentiality; they yearn to signify in a Symbolic in which their “identities” are constructed for them.

The hope for financial stability and upward mobility, therefore, should not be demonized. At the same time, if there exists in a culture a correlation between ethnicity and human “value,” financial status and social status are unrelated. If I am relegated to a

position of Other because I am black, money may change my physical comfort, but it will have no bearing on the psychological trauma caused by my sense of alienation. For this reason, Beneatha and Walter Lee, following the model provided by their mother, seek agency, freedom, and fulfillment outside the confines of assimilation. C.W.E Bigsby compares *A Raisin in the Sun* to Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, but concedes that Hansberry's work has a more optimistic message. Though both plays incorporate an insurance check as a means to an end, "in Miller's play, the policy is a chimera, final evidence of Willy Loman's failure to understand his life; here...it is the catalyst of change" (280). Essentially, Miller's drama is a tragedy. Willy Loman yearns to return to the intricately ordered beauty of 1928, the year in which he was a powerful earner, a year during which his children idolized him, a time before his madness. In this sense, *Death of a Salesman* moves from order (or the nostalgic delusion of order) to the chaos of suicidal despair. *Raisin in the Sun* functions as a comedy. The only past that is idealized is the distant drumbeat of African ancestral heritage. The immediate history the Youngers experience is the injustice of racial oppression. The trajectory of the text, however, moves toward resolution. Despite Willy's theft of the insurance money, despite the overt hostility of the Clybourne Park "welcoming committee," the Youngers escape the horrific conditions of the ghetto (albeit to an uncertain and potentially turbulent future), Beneatha commits fully to her ethnic past, and Walter Lee escapes the delusions in which Willy Loman remains imprisoned.

Paul Carter Harrison has different readings of Hansberry and *A Raisin in the Sun*. He does not find the play "realistic" at all and proposes that any optimism or hope the work conveys is undermined by the drama's naiveté.

It is highly improbable that a woman of her intelligence could have construed the inappropriate happy ending of the play as being meaningful unless it was in response to her deep-seated desire to accomplish what reality could not achieve. Even Hansberry could not have been so naïve as to think that the modality of white oppression could be broken because of a black family's integration into a white neighborhood. (202)

The level of cynicism here is alarming. Obviously, one woman's actions, one family's actions, could not, by themselves, make a visible or lasting impact on a culture in which racism is entrenched and institutionalized. At the same time, however, can one woman, one family, not resist injustice? Furthermore, are we—as subjects—not ethically obligated to enact such resistance?

Other critics level an entirely different indictment against *A Raisin in the Sun*, suggesting that the play perpetuates notions of white superiority. Mance Williams describes *A Raisin in the Sun* as the “quintessential integrationist play” (112). By moving into Clybourne Park, Lena Younger equates “white America” with freedom and opportunity. Martha Gilman Bower also subscribes to this view, arguing that Lena, “instead of buying a house in a middle-class black neighborhood, must live among whites to consider herself a success—even though it means subjecting the family to violent attacks from the neighbors” (91). Attacks on Lena's decision to move into a white neighborhood ignore her justification for doing so. When discussing the purchase of the home with Ruth, Lena explains why she settled on Clybourne Park. “Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could” (93). These brief statements are illuminating. First, the locations

of the black neighborhoods are *way out* of town. Urban development and real estate planning have ensured, by design, racial segregation. Second, economic practices have made upward mobility more difficult for blacks than for whites, considering that middle class housing for blacks is *twice as much* as comparable properties in white areas. Finally, saying *I did the best I could*, Lena implicitly acknowledges that by purchasing a home in a white neighborhood, she may be construed as an assimilationist. Lena does not move into Clybourne Park under the impression that to live among whites is to transcend racial tension. On the contrary, she bravely confronts the potential fall-out of her decision because the material wellbeing of her family outweighs the turbulence that might ensue. For this reason, Lisa M. Anderson describes *A Raisin in the Sun* as “a peak in black feminist playwriting” (*Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama*). Echoing this view, Sheri Parks maintains that Hansberry’s drama articulates “the center of black women’s concerns form the continuity of the culture and survival of self and family” (200). In this light, were Lena to decide *not* to move to Clybourne Park because cultural practices forbid the act, she would have been in collusion with unjust social structures. Was Rosa Parks an assimilationist because she wanted to sit in the “white section” of the bus?

For Leonard Ashley, Hansberry’s realism is problematic. Ashley describes *A Raisin in the Sun* as “safe,” condemning the work as “Arthur Miller in blackface,” a “conventionally naturalistic and well-made drama about people who could be of any racial minority” (151). Clearly, however, this play is not about *any racial minority*; *A Raisin in the Sun* enacts the painful experience of being poor and black in mid-twentieth century America. At the same time, however, critics like Anne Cheney celebrate the

work as a “universal representation of all people’s hopes, fears, and dreams” (55). For Ashley, readings that universalize the play displace the drama’s “blackness.” Any work that can be co-opted by prevailing ideology and absorbed or reconfigured by hegemonic discourse ultimately fails to articulate the voice of the alienated black subject. As Linda Kintz and Jeanie Forte⁹⁴ argue that Marsha Norman’s realism in *’night, Mother* represents the social conditions of a patriarchal order as inevitable, thus undermining the sexual politics at work in the drama and marginalizing the feminine voice, Ashley suggests that Hansberry, by producing the type of work that Brook Atkinson⁹⁵ can describe as a “Negro the Cherry Orchard,” constructs a drama that is “relevant without being radical and sweet without being saccharine, uplifting and not too disturbing” (151). Ashley is unimpressed by what he perceives as Hansberry’s conservative politics.⁹⁶ Though *A Raisin in the Sun* confronts the emotional and spiritual tolls exacted on a disenfranchised people, her play, for Ashley, is not *disturbing* enough perhaps because it lacks the vitriol expressed in works by Hughes, Baldwin, Baraka, and Wright.

Political and artistic representation of the disenfranchised subject, the ethnic Other or the colonized “native,” has historically been either altogether stifled or its articulations have been filtered by or understood through prevailing ideological discourse and dominant linguistic practices. As Irigaray asserts that “woman” is rendered mute in a patriarchal Symbolic order, Gayatri Spivak maintains that the *subaltern*, a subject in opposition to the hegemonic socio-political-ideological matrix to which it is subordinated, is unable to express its identity on *its own* terms. In asymmetrical power relations, dominant discourse marginalizes groups and sub-groups, resulting in the “obliteration of the trace of that Other” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 2197). Subjectivity

and representation are distilled to and contextualized by a common denominator: prevailing ideology. Leonard Ashley's critique of *A Raisin in the Sun* is grounded in his notion that Hansberry is complicit in this marginalization; by mimicking Chekhov and Miller, the black playwright expresses the black experience by employing the signifying practices of an oppressive system. For Spivak, mimicry is the inevitable fall-out of an oppressive Symbolic order. If signifying practices privilege specific modes of representation, any modes that deviate from "normalized" representation are marginalized or rendered unintelligible. For Spivak, therefore, the *subaltern* cannot speak without employing the "language" of dominant ideological structures. A subject is always already embedded within Symbolic, within social and cultural structures. A subject can only signify insofar as it can produce and reproduce the signifying practices within that system.

Spivak proposes, however, that representation of the alienated subject is possible. Although Spivak acknowledges that *essentialism*, the concept that a group possesses some innate or "natural" characteristics, is problematic and can be the mechanism for oppression, she suggests that the voice of the *subaltern* can be heard if it is associated with a group. She calls this association *strategic essentialism*, "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" ("Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" 214). In short, if disenfranchised subjects unite under the banner of their disenfranchisement, their opposition to oppressive practices can be more effective. This notion of strategic essentialism can be understood as paralleling Heideggerian notions of authentic relations. When subjects "devote themselves to the same thing in common, their doing so is determined by their Da-sein, what has been

stirred. This *authentic* alliance first makes possible the proper kind of objectivity which frees the other for himself in his freedom” (*Being and Time* 115) [122]. At the same time, however, the emergence of the strategically essentialized group is only possible by drawing attention to generalizations and stereotypes. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, these stereotypes are presented clearly. George Murchison is a hackneyed, stereotypical figure. He is an educated black man who integrates seamlessly into, therefore signaling his collusion with, a patriarchal, Anglo-Euro-centric order. When describing his ancestral heritage, George calls Africa “nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts;” he articulates the worldview of “the Uncle Tom” (81). On the other end of the spectrum is a character like Mrs. Johnson. She implies that education is synonymous with arrogance. “You know how some of our young people gets when they get a little education” (102). She adopts an antagonistic view of educated blacks. She also describes the Youngers as “one proud-acting bunch of colored folks” (103). Mrs. Johnson is a woman at home in her subjugated status. She denigrates learning and frowns upon pride. Both characters are examples of how prevailing ideology silences that which has been designated Other. George perceives his ethnic origin as inferior; Mrs. Johnson tacitly embraces her status as second-class citizen and chastises those who do not with passive aggression.

Beneatha Younger, on the other hand, enacts a return to her ethnic roots. For her, this is the form that her striving for “authenticity” will take. Furthermore, pursuing a revival of African culture as an expression of black pride is an example of Spivak’s *strategic essentialism*. Though Beneatha is not African, though she has never set foot on African soil, she aligns herself with an identifiable group in order to accomplish a

political end. By celebrating her ethnicity, by drawing attention to the very characteristics a Symbolic order has deemed Other, she overtly rejects prevailing notions of race. Philip Uko Effiong claims that Hansberry “calls on Africans and diasporic Blacks to develop a sense of belonging to a cohesive family” (35). The Youngers rescue themselves from immanent destructive forces—oppressive racism, economic hardship, divisive familial tension—by maintaining racial identity and personal integrity. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory echoes this sentiment by arguing that the play draws on “African ancestral spirits to serve as a dim light of hope and strength to help the black family survive in America” (143). The return to a viable past establishes an emotional reprieve from the injustices of the American caste system. Furthermore, as black people were clearly *strategically essentialized* by the white community, the African pride movement celebrates the position of Other, celebrates the difference that the Symbolic order denigrates and attempts to erase.

Homi K. Bhabha expands on Spivak’s argument. For Bhabha, the *subaltern* can be mobilized and operate as an effective political agent. Even if a subject must incorporate prevailing signifying practices, the subject is not condemned, as Spivak suggests, to silence or essentialism. Any marginalized figure, any subject rendered Other by dominant modes of discourse, can retain ethnic identity *and* signify within the confines of an alienating Symbolic order. This process is not one of mimicry; it is one of transformation.

The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a

space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics. (2385)

The *hybrid* is a political and ideological position. Its emergence signifies the *decolonized space* Spivak considers essential. Once Asagai learns the “master’s tongue” and becomes versed in Western literature, philosophy, history, and culture, he personifies the hybrid. He can combat colonialism and wield the “master’s tongue” against the master, an act he accomplishes in his “conversion” of Beneatha. Furthermore, one can assume that Beneatha, transformed into her hybrid persona, “Alaiyo,” will voice her ideological concerns and generate in others the conversion she herself experienced. Moreover, as the product of two cultures, the composite of two unique traditions, the *African American* is itself a hybrid. “Black families brought their traditions, affiliations, mutual support, and extendedness with them to the New World. Their ability to see the ultimate interdependence of all humanity flows from the African philosophical influence on the black worldview, and it has been manifest in Black culture in Africa, in slavery, and in *freedom*” (Engram 37). The hybrid subject occupies, by definition, the space beyond. It is both/and; it is neither/nor. Though this position often serves to relegate the subject as Other, as history in this country indicates, it pulses with the power to reform culture. Merely occupying this position, however, does not accomplish political or cultural reform. Like the mother, the hybrid must take *action*. As we saw in the previous chapter, Arendt elucidates how the subject must think beyond the parameters of the world as it is presented by Symbolic structures. The subject must tell its story, live its narrative,

and engage the Other. Once engaged in this ontological biography, the subject, being toward its potentiality-for-being, is the *authentic* subject; in contrast, that which fuses with the thronging mass is a being of everydayness, a being of the public, a *they-self*. “If Da-sein is familiar with itself as the they-self, this also means that the they prescribes the nearest interpretation of the world and of being-in-the-world” (*Being and Time* 121) [129]. To adhere unconditionally to the ways of *the they*, to endorse, perpetuate, and guarantee the Law *because it is the Law* is to surrender agency and to risk oblivion.

Although she obviously would not view her situation in Heideggerian terms, Lena Younger is unwilling to take this risk. *The they* with whom the black subject is confronted in mid-twentieth century America is the face of a hostile Symbolic. Though she has “adjusted to many things in life,” she has “overcome many more” (39). Out of necessity, she has accustomed herself to the material reality of poverty, but has never compromised her integrity and refuses to adopt any attitude or tolerate any behavior that impinges on her principles. In a Kristevan context, Lena’s third term is justice and ethical responsibility. Her religious faith, her commitment to civil rights, and her devotion to the family unit all inform the way she raises her children. When her own ideology deviates from societal norms, she is unwilling to concede her principles. When racial tension in the American South manifests in unchecked violence, Lena migrates to Chicago. When her family’s living conditions are cramped and substandard, she purchases a nicer home in Clybourne Park. In short, Lena Younger has experienced exposure to authenticity; consequently, she recognizes the arbitrary nature of the Law. As a revolutionary, Lena enacts the maternal function to its full potential. This revolutionary mother is a catalyst for transformative psychical growth in both of her

children. Beneatha's celebration of African heritage and Walter Lee's emancipation from *the they* are the direct result of Lena Younger's commitment to her third term. She *labors* to produce a world in which her children can *work* and *act*.⁹⁷

In the home, Lena's unwavering resolve is evident when Beneatha declares her atheism. The confrontation between mother and daughter culminates in violence.

Beneatha: Mama, you don't understand. It's all a matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I don't accept. It's not important. I am not going out and be immoral or commit crimes because I don't believe in God. I don't even think about it. It's just that I get tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no blasted God—there is only man and it is *he* who makes miracles!

Mama: Now—you say after me, in my mother's house there is still God.⁹⁸ (51)

This conflict between Lena and her daughter is indicative of generational difference and their educational gap. At the same time, however, the similarities of these two women are evident. God is a concept that Beneatha is unwilling to endorse. Despite the extent to which Judeo-Christian theology is embedded in American and African-American culture, Beneatha is a materialist. Furthermore, as she justifies her philosophy, she describes the arbitrariness of the Law. The Symbolic is a tenuous construct made possible by shared intelligibility. The foundation of a culture's practices is nothing other than ideology. *It's all a matter of ideas*. Beneatha is unwilling to adopt prevailing notions. She is unwilling to succumb to the pressures of *the they*.

Although Lena Younger does not share her daughter's atheism, the matriarch does not actively force her daughter to subscribe to a Christian worldview. Instead of trying to convert Beneatha, Lena requires Beneatha to acknowledge and respect the fact that Lena, herself, does believe in God. Beneatha's attack on religion is an assault on Lena's third term. Lena, therefore, defends theology with the same vigor Beneatha displays when rejecting it. Lena forces her daughter to repeat: *In my mother's house there is still God.* This statement is indicative of Lena's attitude. The matriarch does not declare authoritatively that God exists. On the one hand, it is likely that, for a woman like Lena, non-belief in God is inconceivable. Thus, confiding in Ruth moments after the heated confrontation, Lena states that, in regard to her relationship with her children, "something come down me and them that don't let us understand each other" (52). There is a theological gulf here between mother and daughter; as the play progresses, the ideological schism between Lena and Walter becomes apparent. On the other hand, she states that in the Younger home, in Lena's conceptual and physical space, there is a God. Lena does not negate the reality of worldviews that oppose her own; she does, however, vehemently defend the ideas to which she subscribes.

Ironically, it is through this altercation that the similarities between mother and daughter are evident. Just as Beneatha resists pressures to conform to a Christian worldview, Lena Younger denounces racial injustices perpetrated in an oppressive Symbolic order. One of these injustices is a socio-economic system that stifles the African-American subject.⁹⁹ Lena condemns social practices that relegate the black worker to a subordinate role. "My husband always said being any kind of a servant wasn't a fit thing for a man to have to be. He always said a man's hands was made to

make things, or to turn the earth with—not to drive nobody’s car for em—or—carry they slop jars” (103). The prevailing ideology of a segregated culture perpetuates a racial caste system, and in such a political climate, social mobility for blacks is economically, culturally, and institutionally deterred. Lena Younger, however, despite her subjection and exposure to an Anglo-Euro-centric Symbolic, opposes the legitimacy of oppressive policy. The role of the African-American subject is not to serve the dominant class. Widespread adherence to an ideological concept is not synonymous with the concept’s validity. On the contrary, it is often the ubiquity of a belief system that enables a population to deem a concept credible. Lena Younger rejects the second-class status of the African American in the face of a culture that has essentialized the ethical inferiority of the black subject, positioned it as the Ethnic other.¹⁰⁰ Lena’s rejection of prevailing ideology is precisely that which enables Beneatha’s rejection of Christianity. Though the characters manifest revolt differently, both women, steadfast to personal philosophy, reject hegemonic Law.

Critic Keith Clark, however, suggests that Lena Younger’s ideology is not her own. Clark perceives Lena Younger as a woman devoid of any philosophy at all. He argues that the matriarch is more akin to Bernarda Alba than to a woman possessing revolutionary potential.

The Younger family represents an erstwhile version of the black American family, one ruled by the philosophy of the “old days,” where the father maintained inalienable sovereignty over the home in spite of his devalued economic status. Lena is the purveyor of this configuration of the black family, as she frequently calls upon the ghost of “Big Walter. (99)

Clark's charge against Lena Younger echoes the indictment Irigaray levels at Lacanian psychoanalysis. As Irigaray concludes that a phallogocentric conception of subject formation results in limiting "woman" to that which perpetuates male subjectivity, Clark determines that Lena's opposition to racial injustice is the outgrowth of her late husband's worldview. In other words, Lena's repudiation of cultural practices is regurgitation.

This interpretation is troubling. Not only does Carter's reading profoundly disempower Lena Younger, his reading undermines the revolutionary potential of the revolutionary mother. To be sure, Lena Younger does, in fact, make references to her former husband. She critiques a racist "system," a culture Big Walter, as a black, institutionally subordinated subject, would never have endorsed. When Lena repeats her husband's ideology, she "legitimizes" it. She recognizes his beliefs; she shares them. In the Kristevan schema, Lena loves Big Walter as a figure beyond, outside, the mother-child dyad. In this sense, Big Walter is the father of her children, but his views coincide with Lena's worldview, with her Father of Individual Pre-history. Under these circumstances, shared ideology is the bedrock of the relationship. Is it not possible, therefore, that their union was the result of these values, values that Lena possessed prior to her marriage to Big Walter? Could Lena's defiance against injustice be *the reason why* she married a man who rejected racial inequity instead of *the result of* his influence? To suggest that such a scenario is impossible is to render any married woman mute. To agree is not to yield. The text does not provide the "answer" here. What is clear, however, is that Lena respects her husband's philosophy. The "root" of Lena's respect is speculative. In short, an audience member/reader can deduce that Lena passively defers

to the phallogocentric authority of Big Walter or can determine that Lena repeats her husband's aphorisms because they reflect her own philosophy. Any notion that *both* are not equally plausible is indicative of a larger problem...the very problem against which the revolutionary mother struggles.

Lena Younger wants her children to have opportunities for success that she, herself, never had available. At the same time, however, the racist system in which this family is immersed poses the same obstacles that Lena and her husband experienced throughout their lives. Though these obstacles vary in degree, they do not vary in kind. The matriarch, however, has not grown embittered or hostile as the result of living in an oppressively unjust culture. Hansberry's stage directions describe Lena as having "a face full of strength" and possessing "the noble bearing of the women of the Hereros of Southwest Africa" (39).¹⁰¹ Despite the family's social status, Lena Younger is a proud woman. In an environment in which blackness is regarded as a handicap, the matriarch clearly values her ethnic identity. The playwright's description of Lena both foreshadows and positions Beneatha's attraction to Joseph Asagai's political agenda. By likening Lena Younger to an African queen, Beneatha's return to her ancestral heritage is contextualized.

Beneatha obviously takes cues from her mother. First and foremost, it is apparent throughout the play that Lena Younger deeply loved and respected her husband. Her commitment to social justice, her conceptual third term and her Father of Individual Pre-history, is supplemented by her devotion to a material body, the father of her children. Lena describes Walter as a fallible but honorable man who shared her dedication to family.

Crazy ‘bout his children! God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger—hard-headed, mean, kind of wild with women—plenty wrong with him. But he sure loved his children. Always wanted them to have something—be something...Big Walter used to say, he’d get right wet in the eyes sometimes, lean his head way back with the water standing in his eyes and say, “Seem like God didn’t see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams—but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile. (46)

Lena, as was Walter, is dedicated to bettering the material conditions of her family. In an existence plagued by monetary and socio-political Lack, the black subject stagnates in a world of deprivation. The dreams to which Walter refers are his Desire for the racial equality and opportunity he has been denied. If his children, however, can overcome the barriers erected by an ethnocentric order, his dreams may be deferred but will not be destroyed. Keith Clark issues a cynical analysis of “Big Walter,” claiming the patriarch “‘loves’ his children only because they represent possibilities for attaining the ‘American’ pie which was denied him. In and of themselves, they could be as valueless as the women with whom he is ‘wild’” (100). First, the extent of Walter’s *wildness* is never made apparent. More importantly, however, to suggest that the father objectifies his children in an effort to achieve vicarious success is a harsh appraisal of the parental function. At the risk of generalizing, do all parents not wish for their children a life better than their own? Further, to associate Walter’s dreams with the *American pie* is to reduce his Desire to the mere hope for financial gain. Though economic practices further

alienate the black subject, neither Lena's memories of "Big Walter," nor Lena's own ideology, suggests that monetary success is synonymous with social justice.

Beneatha's own attitude indicates that financial gain is not the endgame. George Murchison, an educated and wealthy young black man who would easily be her ticket out of the ghetto, aggressively courts the young woman, but she rejects his advances. She labels him an assimilationist, "someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case *oppressive* culture" (81). George, though financially secure, is a servant to prevailing ideology. When Beneatha celebrates her ancestral heritage, George denigrates their ethnic origins.

Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our great West African heritage! In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilizations; and the great sculpture of Benin—and then some poetry in the Bantu—and the whole monologue will end with the word *heritage*! Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts! (81)

For Beneatha, the advancement of her people is not wholly contingent on economic mobility. Marrying George would ensure monetary freedom. Financial privilege, however, is a far cry from racial justice. As Lena states that the black subject should never be reduced to toting the white man's slop jar, Beneatha perceives George as subscribing to prevailing ideology, lugging around notions of the African American that an oppressive Symbolic order has been feeding its subjects. The cost of marrying George, therefore, would be collusion.

As for George. Well. George looks good—he’s got a beautiful car and he takes me to nice places and, as my sister-in-law says, he is probably the richest boy I will ever get to know and I even like him sometimes—but if the Youngers are sitting around waiting to see if their little Bennie is going to tie up the family with the Murchisons, they are wasting their time. (49)

A merger between the two families would be a horrible compromise. Remaining steadfast to her principles, the integrity she has gleaned from her mother’s example is more precious to Beneatha than is material wealth.

Beneatha, therefore, is far more attracted to the political mindset of Joseph Asagai than she is to the assimilationism of George Murchison. Asagai is a Nigerian native who has left Africa to pursue education in Canada and the United States. While in the West as a student, Asagai also assumes the role of teacher. He has a profound influence on Beneatha. Noting that “assimilationism is so popular” in African American culture, Asagai points out that Beneatha, though clearly outspoken in her rejection of dominant ideology, has “mutilated her hair” (61-2). Though Beneatha’s hair, in its natural state, is “crinkly,” she elects to manipulate it in accordance with prevailing standards for fashionable appearance. For Asagai, this “fashion” is an extension of white influence on black culture. What Heidegger refers to as *being with*, “fitting in” to the cultural demands of *the they*, has permeated the black community to such an extent that the black subject, as Ethnic other, is willing to alter physical appearance in order to appear less other. Asagai, however, recognizes that Beneatha’s hairstyle is an example not of assimilation, but is instead symptomatic of how deeply ingrained conformity to *the they* is in any cultural construct. Heidegger describes this conformity as *fallenness*.

The other is initially “there” in terms of what they have heard about him, what they say and know about him. Idle talk initially intrudes itself into the midst of primordial being-with-one-another. Everyone keeps track of the other, initially and first of all, watching how he will behave, what he will say to something. Being-with-one-another in the they is not at all a self-contained, indifferent side-by-sideness, but a tense, ambiguous keeping track of each other, a secretive, reciprocal listening-in. Under the mask of the for-one-another, the against-one-another is at play. (*Being and Time* 163) [174-75]

Every subject is always already *thrown* into the public world, hurled into cultural conditions in which “appropriate” behavior is clearly delineated. Subjects that deviate from prescribed conduct are policed and judged by the population at large. Avoiding judgment often informs how one interacts with the world. The extent to which the subject’s behavior is shaped by its desire to fit in is the extent to which the subject is willing to *fall prey* to the pressures of *the they*. When the subject *falls prey* to the demands of the Symbolic, the subject succumbs to the pressures of everydayness and is *entangled* in prevailing signifying practices. In so doing, Da-sein falls “away from itself” and becomes “lost in the publicness of the they” (*Being and Time* 164) [175]. To be sure, however, the subject does not “‘fall’ from a purer and higher ‘primordial condition’”(ibid. 164) [176]. To become *entangled* is not to corrupt the soul or stray from essential being. In short, *fallenness* illustrates how a subject becomes absorbed in prevailing ideology. Though the extent to which an individual yields to the pull of *the they* is variable, the individual, to some degree, always falls. Beneath pursues the

authentic mode of Being, but in moments of fallenness, she *turns away* from this pursuit and becomes mired in dominant cultural practices. For example, she strives to celebrate her blackness and reject unjust cultural practices. Despite her desire to do so, she allows herself to be *entangled* in the desire to fit prescribed parameters for physical appearance.

Ironically, however, during this conversation with Beneatha, Joseph reveals his own ensnarement in prevailing ideology. As Beneatha has fallen prey to the demands of *the they*, Joseph has allowed himself to be indoctrinated by a patriarchal worldview. Asagai tells Beneatha, “between a man and a woman there need only be one kind of feeling,” and “for a woman it should be enough” (63). As Heidegger recognizes that even subjects that pursue their potentiality are always already predisposed to fall and fall again into conformity to societal pressures, Hannah Arendt understands that we are all born into (*thrown*) “the frailty of human affairs” (*The Life of the Mind* 217). Human freedom is always limited by this frailty. In this light, as Beneatha’s fallenness does not undermine her commitment to social reform, Joseph’s androcentric outlook, though problematic in its own right, does not undermine his credibility. Asagai, as are we all, is entangled in the ideological structures in which he is immersed. Though he longs to emancipate himself from the shackles of racism, he struggles to jettison phallogocentric assumptions.

As Joseph holds Beneatha accountable for her fallenness, Beneatha, to a limited extent, responds in kind. She attributes Joseph’s misogyny to “all the novels that men write” and claims that she’s “not interested in being someone’s little episode in America” (64). Beneatha’s modest reprisal and her subsequent romantic involvement with Asagai that is implicit in the text lead Keith Clark to conclude that *A Raisin in the Sun* recycles

“tenets about male self-definition and patriarchy” (100). Beneatha, however, *does* undermine the patriarchal assumptions of a phallogocentric economy. Her antagonistic stance toward a racist Symbolic, however, is her focus. Though *A Raisin in the Sun* does not articulate Hansberry’s attention to a feminist polemic, her (unfinished) essay on Simone de Beauvoir does:

Today in the United States our national attitude toward women and their place, or finding it, is one of frantic confusion. Women themselves are among the foremost promoters of this confusion. They have been born into a cultural heritage which has instructed them of a role to play without question and in the main they are willing to do so. And yet, therein hangs the problem: housework, “homemaking,” are drudgery; it is inescapable, women flee it in one form or another. They do not always understand their own rebellion, or why they want to rebel or why *they* deprecate, more than anyone else really, what the rest of the nation will always insist, so long as it does not have to do it, is the “cornerstone” of our culture, the “key” to our civilization, and the “bedrock foundation” of our way of life. (“Simone DE Beauvoir and *The Second Sex: An American Commentary*”

137)

In her *frantic confusion*, Beneatha rejects the *drudgery* of *homemaking* and pursues an education in hopes of becoming a physician. Moreover, Hansberry here suggests that the feminine compulsion to revolt stems from her relegation to the domestic sphere. For the African-American woman, this is a double-bind. She is the victim of racial *and* gender discrimination. As a result, her desire to reshape the Symbolic is more urgent. Though

unstated in *A Raisin in the Sun*, this notion is present in the text. It is Lena and Beneatha who, from the onset of the play, exhibit attitudes radically different from those of their male counter-parts. “Big Walter,” though devoted to his family and to the advancement of his children, would come home “night after night” and “look at the rug,” frustrated and overwhelmed by the injustices of American social structure. It is Lena who takes action. Similarly, as Walter Lee struggles to generate revenue and assimilate into the capitalist consumer economy, Beneatha strives to practice medicine and engages revolutionary political ideology with Asagai.

Identifying Beneatha’s resolve, Asagai gives her his sister’s African clothing and also gives her a Yoruban name: Alaiyo, meaning “One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough” (65). Obviously, one needs food to survive. Beneatha, however, is not satisfied by mere survival. She wants to thrive. She wants equality. Like her mother, she wants justice. On a personal level, if food can be associated with the domestic sphere, she is unwilling to relegate herself to a domestic role. She is in medical school because she wants to engage the world, participate. She tells Asagai she wants to “sew up the problems” and “fix up the sick” in an effort to “make them whole again” (133).

Committed to social reform, she wants to heal an ailing culture. Furthermore, though Asagai translates bread specifically as food, “bread” can be read in a monetary context. Beneatha’s disdain for George Murchison makes it readily apparent that financial gain *Is Not Enough*. In an Arendtian context, Beneatha’s desire to engage the world is a desire to take *action*. Becoming a physician is her direct attempt to better the world. As a doctor, Beneatha devotes herself to “the human condition of labor,” which is “life itself” (*The Human Condition* 7). Devoting herself to medicine is devoting herself to ensuring

the survival of the species. As a doctor, her “work provides an ‘artificial’ world of things,” in this case, a world in which medical care can extend human life beyond its “natural” span (ibid. 7). Through *work*, the speaking being produces a “man-made world of things, the human artifice erected by *homo faber*” which “becomes a home for mortal men, whose stability will endure and outlast the ever-changing movement of their lives and actions, only inasmuch as it transcends both the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use” (ibid. 173). Culture itself is the product of this work; social structure is the epicenter of the *man-made world of things*. This world is sustained only insofar as it is useful, only insofar as it functions to build a comfortable *home* for human beings. Arendt, however, maintains that the *work-world* “must be a place fit for action and speech” (ibid. 173). In short, human endeavors should strive beyond mere survival. Though *work* and *labor* are integrally enmeshed, signification, that is to say, ontological freedom, is guaranteed by something altogether different; it is possible only through personal *action*.

Partly, *action* consists of communication, of telling one’s personal narrative. Asagai tells his “story” to Beneatha, and their dialogue initiates Beneatha’s *active* decision to go to Africa with him. Prior to that radical decision, however, Beneatha *acts* insofar as she commits herself to the medical profession. In so doing, she applies herself to preserving human survival and reshaping cultural parameters. This decision, one far beyond laboring through the world *as it is*, conforms to Arendt’s definition of the heroic.

The connotation of courage, which we now feel to be an indispensable quality of the hero, is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one’s self into the world and begin a story of one’s

own. And this courage is not necessarily or even primarily related to a willingness to suffer the consequences, courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one's self. The extent of this original courage, within which action and speech, and therefore ... freedom, would not be possible at all, is not less great and may be greater if the "hero" happens to be a coward. (*The Human Condition* 186-87)

Heroism consists of engagement, in the *willingness to act and speak*. In her celebration of heritage, in her rejection of George Murchison despite his economic status, in her atheism, Beneatha speaks herself. In so doing, she leaves the *private hiding place* of anonymity and discloses her ideology, reveals her "self." To be sure, however, she exceeds verbal engagement. By attending medical school, she *inserts herself into the world and begins a story of her own*.

Prior to her exposure to Joseph Asagai, Beneatha grapples with her "identity," with her conception of her "self" as positioned within an oppressive Symbolic. Her attempts at self-expression—the "guitar lessons," "that little play-acting group," or her membership in "the horseback riding club"—manifest her quest for fullness (47). As a black woman in the 1950s, Beneatha Younger must confront constant obstacles to her agency and power. Sexism and racism both hamper her ability to pursue her desires. She yearns, therefore, to possess the power of representation in a culture designed to disenfranchise the black subject. In her pursuit of the Freudian Thing, or the Lacanian *objet a*, Beneatha engages in what Heidegger calls "our search for totality" and endeavors to find "the structural whole that we are seeking" (*Being and Time* 178) [191].¹⁰² This

pursuit assumes higher stakes for the Ethnic other, the subject possessing psychological Lack compounded by socio-economic alienation. Lena, however, when she “wonders why [Beneatha] has to flit from one thing to another all the time,” recognizes that her daughter’s hunt for ontological satisfaction is consistently stifled by only brief, non-committal experimentation with these activities (47). Beneatha, enraged by her mother’s critique, exclaims, “I don’t expect you to understand” (47). Perhaps, however, it is Beneatha who does not understand why she has been plagued by an inability to commit. As Kristeva describes the emergence of the idealized other in a subject’s involvement with a romantic partner, Heidegger describes the tension resulting from a subject’s idealization of its self. “Da-sein has always already compared itself, in its being, with a possibility of itself” (*Being and Time* 179) [191]. Beneatha searches for authenticity; she seeks disentanglement and, by engaging in activities she hopes will make her whole, she projects herself toward her potentiality-for-being. At the same time, however, the avenues she has pursued for ontological relief have been superficial distractions. It is only when she embarks on an ancestral return, an ideological journey prompted by her relationship with Asagai, that she begins to experience a sense of the wholeness that she desires.

Beneatha wants to separate herself from the ghetto as badly as she wants to identify and explore her potentiality-for-being. Prior to her relationship with Asagai, she tries to jettison herself from poverty and oppression by acquiring an education. When she chastises Ruth for marrying Walter Lee, Beneatha describes her brother as “an elaborate neurotic” (49). This reference to Freudian psychodynamics intellectually distances her from an impoverished community with which she wants no part. At the

same time, however, articulating these theories in this context is potentially pointless.

Not only does her family not understand her terms, she is mimicking the discourse of the intelligentsia, parroting the lexicon of the academic elite. This is not to suggest that Beneatha does not or cannot possess the knowledge of the dominant class, but the manner in which she employs these terms is contrived. She injects the terminology when conversing with uneducated people who speak in a black vernacular. This scene clearly establishes, however, that, through specific modes of discourse, Beneatha attempts to assert herself.

This self-assertion, however, is far more effective when she embraces the tribal dialect of the Yoruban people. After receiving the Nigerian clothing from Asagai, Beneatha changes her physical appearance, but she also adopts a new way of speaking. “OCOMOGOSIAY,” she exclaims when putting Nigerian music on the record player (76). “Enraptured” by the music, she goes “back to the past” (76-7). She sings and dances to the music and displays her racial pride in “an arrogant flourish” (76). At this point in the drama, Beneatha’s new speech coincides with her new vision of herself and of the world around her.

In the Lacanian paradigm, the acquisition of language enables subject formation. Learning to speak signals the final act of matricide; upon the ability to articulate intelligible sounds, the child severs the psychical umbilical chord and conceptualizes itself as an independent entity, a form separate and distinct from the mother and from all things. Language, therefore, constructs the subject. For Lacan, “language imposes being upon us” (*Seminar XX* 44). To be sure, in the Lacanian schema, the Phallus, as Master signifier, designates that which can and cannot be signified. That which exists beyond or

outside the parameters of prevailing phallogentric ideology is reduced to the amorphous, the unintelligible. Lacanian conceptual rhetoric, therefore, is grounded in exclusion. “A woman can but be excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words” (ibid. 73). For Lacan, the subject learns to speak not itself, but the linguistic and philosophical lexicon into which it is born. In this interpretation of subject formation, woman is not whole. Similarly, the Otherness of the Ethnic other is the product of hegemonic discourse. The dynamics that position woman, devoid of a penis and an abomination of normalized male subjectivity, as Other are the same as those which produce racial stratification. That which is non-white, non-European, is Other. Though Lacan does not broach this subject, he does articulate a notion of “the norm.” Though one cannot conflate the Ethnic other with woman, logic that excludes feminine essence is the same logic that devalues difference in general, logic that has historically justified the silencing of minority subjects.

For Heidegger, however, language is not confined to prevailing ideology. Thus the subject is not confined to assimilation into prevailing ideology. For Heidegger, “the essence of man consists in language” (“The Way to Language” 398). Though language *can* be appropriated by the they, language is not an inherent expression of the Symbolic. Through speech, “speakers have their presencing” (ibid. 406). Language enables the subject to signify more than a system of signs, more than the pre-existing terms of a philosophical field. To speak is to show, and this showing “lets what is coming into presence shine forth” (ibid. 413). Language allows the subject to come into the presence of being. For Lacan, the subject speaks the language of the Symbolic; for Heidegger, embedded within language is the power for the subject to speak itself.

When Beneatha chants Yoruban speech, she articulates her racial pride. She begins the process of disentanglement and confronts her potentiality-for-being. Undeniably, her return to her African roots is a *performance*. She does not know Yoruban; she is spatially and culturally disconnected from this heritage. When she initially dons the ceremonial garb, she moves her body “in front of the mirror as she thinks a Nigerian woman might” (66). When she makes her grand entry “thoroughly robed” in Yoruban garments, “she is coquettishly fanning herself with an ornate oriental fan, mistakenly more like Butterfly than any Nigerian that ever was” (76). When speaking Yoruban, she is singing words she does not understand and when she dances, she moves her body as she imagines the Nigerian women would. Her performance of Nigerian tribal custom, however, though an imitation in its own right, is different from mimicry of prevailing ideology.

Beneatha’s conceptual return to her ethnic origins signifies, in Bhabha’s theoretical terms, her *hybridity*. Though the young woman has little immediate knowledge of her African roots, she is drawn to her heritage because her ethnic past provides the potential for representation. Internalizing Asagai’s political message, Beneatha *becomes* Alaiyo; she integrates the identity of an African past into her experience as an African American subject. African American theorist Henry Louis Gates, Jr., asserts that “the terms of our own self-representation have been provided by the master;” therefore, the main objective of the African American subject “must be to address the black political signified, that is, the cultural vision and the critical language” (2431). If language speaks the human experience, as Heidegger suggests, engaging in the hegemonic discourse of an oppressive Symbolic order is to forego the linguistic power

for self-representation. Gates insists that the black subject must “escape” this “mockingbird relation” (2429). To mimic prevailing ideology is to assume the linguistic and philosophical features of the Symbolic. Though Lacan suggests that this adaptation is inevitable, Heidegger’s notions of language and authenticity provide the means for a subject’s emancipation from the confines of Symbolic Law. For Gates, “black tradition exists only insofar as” black subjects “enact it” because “race is a text” to be interpreted and “not an essence” to be labeled or understood as a static state (2429). In “The Negro Writer and His Roots: Toward a New Romanticism,” Hansberry articulates the importance of maintaining historically black linguistic practices:

The speech of our people has been the victim of hostile ears and commentary. That there are tones and moods of language that the African tongue prefers, escapes attention, when that attention would demand admiration of beauty and color rather than mere amusement or derision. The educated are expected to apologize for slurrings that haunt our speech; the mark of ascendancy is the absence of recognizable Negro idiom or inflection. It is an attitude that suggests we should most admire the peacock when he has lost his colors. (7-8).

The Lacanian paradigm, essentially and inevitably androcentric by design, renders that which deviates from normalized subjectivity—that which is non-male, that which is non-Anglo-European—as Other. In this context, to be black is to possess an *essential* otherness. Even when relegated to Other, blackness is appropriated by dominant discourse when spoken for, when denied a language of its own. When Beneatha shouts “*Alundi, alundi*,” she is articulating an ethnic identity that has been suppressed by

hegemonic cultural practices. Moreover, by speaking Yoruban, she is *unapologetically* expressing a linguistic history that *haunts the Negro idiom*. Ironically, by speaking the language of another culture, she *speaks herself*; she speaks her narrative of authentic communication.

Though Lena Younger does not understand the manifestations of her daughter's plight, she does appreciate the importance of the process. Lena does not have any idea why she should "know anything about Africa," yet she mimics Beneatha's opposition to colonial oppression. She regurgitates bits and pieces of the concepts she has heard her daughter articulate in an effort to connect with both Joseph and with her daughter. "I think it's so sad the way our American Negroes don't know anything about Africa 'cept Tarzan and all that. And all that money they pour into these churches when they ought to be helping you people over there drive out them French and Englishmen done taken away your land" (64). Lena's condemnation of imperialistic dynamics is both comic and touching. On one level, this is simply a scene in which a mother is trying to help her daughter cultivate a possible romantic interest. On another, however, this scene illustrates Lena Younger's devotion to her daughter. Even though Lena does not understand her daughter's ideology, she respects Beneatha's beliefs. In short, Lena Younger does not reject that which is different. She does not recoil from her daughter's fascination with an African past, a fascination Lena "can't seem to understand in no form or fashion" (52). Lena's support for her daughter is a constant. The matriarch has supported Beneatha's academic pursuits; Lena intends to set aside a portion of the insurance money to pay for Beneatha's medical school. On a more superficial level, she has clearly emotionally and, more likely than not, financially¹⁰³ enabled the guitar lessons

and other activities that Beneatha has pursued. Lena's support of her daughter extends far beyond indulging what she perceives as Beneatha's whims. When Beneatha informs her family that George Murchison is not a viable prospect for marriage, Lena stands behind her daughter's decision. Despite the fact that marital union with the Murchisons would alleviate some financial strain on the Youngers, when Beneatha calls George a fool, Lena validates her daughter's judgment, saying, "I guess you better not waste your time with no fools" (98). In addition, Lena supports her daughter's relationship with Joseph Asagai. Lena is a Christian; her daughter is an atheist. Lena focuses on her family and on the immediate need to better the material conditions of the African American subject; Beneatha is radicalized and inspired by the oppression of subjects nearly six thousand miles away.

Lena Younger, however, does not support her children's interests unconditionally. As evident in Lena's conflict with Beneatha over atheism, the matriarch is willing to support her children only insofar as her children's decisions do not impinge on her third term. That is to say, Lena Younger's notions of justice and ethical obligation are of primary importance.

For Walter Lee, economic hardship has a particularly profound impact on psychic life. In a patriarchal order in which *the-man-of-the-house* provides financial security and authority, Walter Lee perceives himself as a dismal failure. Since he associates masculinity with agency and power—an association in accordance with prevailing ideology and Lacanian psychodynamics—and since he conflates financial success and individual worth, Walter Lee has fully internalized an inherited system of capitalistic values. At the same time, however, the worldview to which he subscribes is the product

of a Symbolic order that has relegated him to the status of ethnic Other, an Other that is inferior, subordinate, and therefore institutionally alienated. “Walter Lee swallows whole not merely the dogma of the American dream—rooted in materialism, rugged individualism, and isolation—but he accordingly accepts its underlying configuration of masculinity: man as ‘breadwinner,’ man as ‘strong’ and ‘silent’” (Clark 90). Like Miller’s Willy Loman, Walter Lee Younger’s sense of self-worth is contingent on external factors. Walter Lee is a young man entangled in the signifying practices that dominate a capitalist society. As a result, he tells his son, Travis, that a monetary “transaction” can “change our lives” (108). To Walter Lee, financial achievement is the endgame. As his sister yearns to practice medicine and heal the sick, Walter Lee idealizes an existence in which he would have “conferences and secretaries;” after long days at an office in which he holds a position of authority, he would return home in “a plain black Chrysler” and park next to Ruth’s “Cadillac convertible” (108-9). Describing this scenario to his son, Walter Lee is empowered by the fantasy. The material reality of the present is dismal; Ruth tells Travis that the family does not have the fifty cents he needs for school one morning. Consequently, Travis begs his parents for permission to “go carry groceries” for money after school (30). Walter Lee cannot abide the effects that economic hardship has on his son. Undermining his wife’s authority, father gives son two quarters and then says, “In fact, here’s another fifty cents...Buy yourself some fruit today—or take a taxicab to school or something!” (31). Walter Lee seeks to empower Travis by providing him with money. Empowering the son, however, empowers the father. Walter Lee savors any moment during which he can provide. At the same time, in his fantasy, he says Travis would be able to “just tell me where you

want to go to school and you'll go" (109). This is one of the complex and tragic elements of the drama. Though racial factors may well determine where Travis could attend college, monetary resources would definitely dictate the process. Even if the Youngers were white, the extent of Travis' education would be contingent on their financial situation. In this sense, Walter Lee's notion that money, in a capitalist society, enables agency is not easy to dismiss altogether. In the drama, however, the issues with which the characters struggle are not exclusively financial in nature. As blacks, the Youngers do not have equal access to the means by which they can earn money. Life, therefore, is not "about" money as much as it is "about" freedom. Only when race does not determine opportunity can money really emancipate a subject from poverty.

Walter Lee's opportunities to provide are few and far between. As chauffeur to a wealthy white family, Walter Lee is a poorly paid servant to the dominant class. Not only is his apartment a dilapidated hovel, he lives amid racially motivated violence. Reading the paper, Walter Lee notes, "Set off another bomb today" (26). *They* is the understood subject of his statement. *They are the white people. They are the shapers of culture, of order, of the Law. They are the Symbolic order.* Furthermore, as the detonation of a bomb indicates, deviation from the Law can result in destruction and turmoil. Walter Lee feels victimized in and by this system. As a black subject, an Ethnic other, Walter Lee is institutionally and economically denied the agency to improve his material conditions. Moreover, Walter Lee feels powerless within his own home. When trying to discuss with his wife his plans to start a business that might free the family from the ghetto, Ruth describes his business partner, Willy Harris, as "a good-for-nothing loudmouth" (32). Enraged that his wife is so unsupportive, he reminds her, "Charlie

Atkins was just a ‘good-for-nothing loudmouth’ too, wasn’t he! When he wanted me to go in the dry-cleaning business with him. And now—he’s grossing a hundred thousand dollars a year” (32). Desperate to generate income and leave the harsh urban environment he and his family occupy, Walter Lee is embittered by the apparent complacency that surrounds him.

For Martha Brown-Guillory, Walter Lee’s anger is a cultural phenomenon. She asserts that the socio-political and economic conditions imposed on the African American and the limited resources available to the black subject to change these conditions produce a unique tension in the black experience.

The black man in search of manhood wants desperately to be recognized as a courageous and determined adult. He vacillates between integration and separatism. He has yet to establish a philosophy about how to succeed or to cope in American society. As he strives to overcome personal problems and to achieve responsible maturity, the searching black male may castigate blacks and opt to align himself with whites whom he feels will validate his manhood. The black male reaches maturity and moves in the direction of manhood when he realizes that his manhood does not hinge upon his acceptance by whites, but upon himself. (110)

Walter Lee follows this trajectory. Though he does little to *align himself with whites*, his castigation of the black community is vehement and frequent. He refers to his heritage as “the world’s most backward race of people” because, in his eyes, black women are part of the problem. “A man needs a woman to back him up,” but Ruth is dismissive of his commercial schemes (32). As victim of oppressive cultural practices, Walter Lee claims

that unsympathetic wives and mothers make his alienation and marginalization even more tenuous. “We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds” (35). Caught between his dream for financial success and the reality of his poverty, he transforms racial inequality into gender conflict.

Upon the arrival of a ten thousand dollar insurance settlement, this conflict explodes. Walter Lee is intent on opening up a liquor store, but must have his mother’s consent to do so. For Lena Younger, however, selling alcohol is an unethical trade that would only prey on the community. Although Ruth, Walter Lee’s wife, speculates, “people going to always be drinking themselves some liquor,” Lena responds, “whether they drinks it or not ain’t none of my business. But whether I go into business selling to ‘em *is*, and I don’t want that on my ledger this late in life” (42). The matriarch, implying a religiously motivated decision here, places moral integrity over material success. For the matriarch, liquor is a corrosive influence on an already disenfranchised people. For Walter Lee, the store is the opportunity to leave the ghetto—any goods or services he would provide are immaterial in achieving this end.

Lena’s resistance to the business venture devastates Walter Lee. In a heated exchange between mother and son, the fundamental difference in their ideologies becomes apparent. When Lena asks, “how come you talk so much ‘bout money,” Walter Lee divulges the extent to which he has interpellated into a capitalist society. “Because it is life, Mama!” (74). For Walter Lee, financial freedom and socio-political freedom are indistinguishable. For Lena, freedom is something else entirely:

In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity

too...Now here come you and Beneatha—talking ‘bout things we ain’t never thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain’t satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; that we kept you out of trouble till you was grown; that you don’t have to ride to work on the back of nobody’s streetcar—You my children—but how different we done become. (74)

Generational differences here are evident. Lena comes of age in the American South at a time during which violent acts of racism were unpunished and often actively permitted by representatives of law enforcement.¹⁰⁴ As a young woman, Lena moves north in an attempt to escape the atrocities of the sanctioned white supremacy in the South. In this passage, the matriarch asserts her own sense of “identity.” As a result, we can return again to Keith Clark’s notion that Lena Younger merely parrots her husband’s patriarchal authority. By focusing on Lena’s use of pronouns, Lena’s concept of “self” comes to bear. *In MY time We was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North.* In this statement, Lena positions herself within an African-American culture, a culture sharing a traumatic, historical experience. In the same breath, Lena tells her son that *ME and your daddy...WE kept you out of trouble* and also that *you MY children*. The “we” here shifts to a different grouping. In the first person possessive, Lena asserts herself as an individual. At the same time, however, the nominative first person plural situates her first within a larger ethnic group and second within the parental unit. When she invokes Big Walter, therefore, she does so to cite an extension of herself. In other words, Lena identifies her “self” as a part of something. The first “we” denotes shared history; the second indicates shared ideology. In both cases, Lena can buttress her experience and

authority by associating herself with something “larger” than herself. Big Walter, of course, is a part of the ethnic “we” to whom she refers. When she recalls the words of her husband, she invokes parental (not patriarchal) authority. In this context, repeating Big Walter’s ideology reflects continuity, not passivity.

Walter Lee, however, at the beginning of the drama, reflects discontinuity and is incapable of distinguishing between his personal desires and the family’s best interests. On the one hand, Walter Lee is profoundly alienated and powerless simply by being an African American subject in an order designed and maintained by white interests. On the other hand, Walter Lee’s vision of social justice is informed by some of the same flawed assumptions that shape the oppressive culture he rejects. Though he loathes the racist social structures that limit his agency, he embraces the phallogocentric codes upon which the Symbolic is built. He resents Beneatha for being in medical school; not only is she draining the family of desperately needed funds while also not generating income or financially contributing to the family, she is pursuing a career that Walter Lee implicitly thinks is reserved for men. “Who the hell told you to be a doctor? If you so crazy ‘bout messing ‘round with sick people—then go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet” (38). Though racial discrimination is unbearable, Walter Lee is clearly unready to grant women the fundamental rights he so desperately craves. Beneatha’s brother is not the only character who exhibits this misogynistic attitude. In this sense, Walter Lee’s attitude towards women is akin to that of George Murchison, who, while courting Beneatha, attempts to mold her into something that fits his desire. “Drop the Garbo routine. It doesn’t go with you. As for myself, I want a nice—simple—sophisticated girl” (96). These characters occupy a world saturated by notions of male

dominance. Entrenched in this way of thinking, Walter Lee struggles with his mother's unyielding authority and feels victimized by conditions beyond his control. "Nobody in this house is ever going to understand me" (38). Walter Lee, subjected to omnipresent white authority, considers himself as economically, psychologically, and politically powerless as his ten-year-old son. The only two men in the house are subordinate to female control. The anger and resentment resulting from this subordinate position are only justifiable in a patriarchal context, a context in which Walter Lee, as a man, feels entitled to domestic power and authority over family.

As Walter Lee subscribes to phallogentric aspects of representation, he legitimates the financial practices of American culture. He perceives the American Dream of upward mobility as possible only through handshake deals and bribery. To succeed in an unjust world, one must employ unethical tactics. "Don't *nothing* happen for you in this world 'less you pay *somebody* off" (33). Walter Lee, though a casualty of a racist culture, does not exhibit the desire, as do his mother and sister, to reshape the ideological terrain; his primary objective is to get ahead by seemingly any means necessary. It is this attitude that alienates him from his family.

In Heideggerian terms, Walter Lee, "lost in the they," is paralyzed by his compulsion to "linger in the tranquillized familiarity" of everydayness (*Being and Time* 177) [189]. Everydayness, for Heidegger, is the web of existing cultural practices into which the subject is thrown upon birth. To be sure, however, the *tranquility* of the *familiar*, the relative ease of conforming to the parameters of the Symbolic, is neither peaceful nor calming for Walter Lee. That which is familiar, that which has been deemed status quo in American culture, is steeped in material gain and discrimination. It is *the*

they that constructs the American Dream. It is *the they* that determines the Ethnic other. If the subject conforms unquestioningly to the authority of this conventional wisdom, its trajectory

has always already been decided upon—tasks, rules, standards, the urgency and scope of being-in-the-world, concerned and taking care of things. The *they* has always already taken the apprehension of these possibilities away from Da-sein. The *they* even conceals the way it has silently disburdened Da-sein of the explicit *choice* of these possibilities. It remains indefinite who is “really” choosing. So Da-sein is taken along by the no one, without choice, and thus gets caught up in inauthenticity.

(*Being and Time* 248) [268]

Walter Lee’s definition of success is not his own; from a consumer culture, he has inherited the notion that material worth and human worth are synonymous. Walter Lee is ravenous for power, and the material conditions of his life, in his eyes and according to his own formula, prevent the success he craves. “I’m thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room—and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live” (34). Walter Lee’s worldview is self-defeating, yet he clings to it desperately. According to the culture into which he’s been thrown, according to the ideology of *rich white people*, Walter Lee, unless his circumstances change, can only transmit to his son a sense of inferiority. In context with Arendt’s assertions, Walter Lee conflates his “worth” and his *utility*. He yearns to be *of use* in the economic system that drives American culture. This conflation is encouraged by prevailing ideological structures. Arendt warns that such an understanding of the world

results in a “society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse” (*The Human Condition* 5). In Arendt’s terminology, therefore, tenacious devotion to a capitalist system threatens to yield a lifeless labor-force. Walter Lee teeters on the brink of this lifelessness and flails in ontological despair as a result. He possesses the human impulse for representation and agency, but the very worldview to which he clings, the dominant mode of thinking ubiquitously broadcast and silently normalized by *the they*, is a mechanism for his own oppression. This paradox tortures Walter Lee. Only by becoming aware of this ideological conflict will he be capable of the agency for which he longs.

To be sure, however, Walter Lee does undergo change. Moreover, the character’s transformation begins in the midst of Beneatha’s celebration of Nigerian music and culture. Returning home after a night out drinking at a bar, Walter Lee stumbles into his sister’s enactment of African folklore. He watches her performance “at first with distaste,” but his demeanor suddenly shifts as if he can see “back to the past,” and “he lifts both of his fists to the roof, screaming” (77). This abrupt change in posture and demeanor signals the onset of a psychological shift. Walter Lee, instead of ridiculing his sister’s clumsy exhibition as we might expect, engages and participates in the improvisational ethnic drama unfolding in the den of the Younger home. At first, Walter Lee has a physical response to the music. His body moves to its rhythms as he is “digging them drums” (78). This visceral, bodily reaction quickly takes ideological form as Walter Lee passionately assumes the identity of a Nigerian warrior. He tears at his clothing, jumps onto the table, and makes violent stabs with his imaginary spear. In Walter Lee’s explosive moment, he is radicalized. Furthermore, his transition occurs

within a Kristevan linguistic context. His bodily response to the music is *semiotic*, an aspect of language Kristeva associates with gestures, body language, and intonation. The semiotic is fluid expression; its ability to impart meaning is outside and beyond the grammar, lexicon, or formal linguistic structure of symbolic language. As such, the semiotic “does not respect borders, positions, rules” because it is “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (“Approaching Abjection” 232). Kristeva asserts, however, that signifiers can signify, language can possess any intelligible meaning at all, because of the tenuous interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic, utterly unrestricted, seethes beneath the surface of symbolic language and threatens to destroy it.

For Walter Lee, his semiotic expressions result in revolutionary speech, articulations that threaten to disassemble the hegemonic power of the Symbolic order. “DO YOU HEAR ME, MY BLACK BROTHERS,” he screams, pulsing with ancestral energy that urges him “to prepare for the GREATNESS OF THE TIME!” (79). In his trance, Walter Lee is an *African* American, a subject imbued by terms that exist outside prevailing ideology; he occupies the space of *hybrid* subject that is *the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite*. As a Nigerian warrior, Walter Lee is not an Ethnic other; he is part of a rich tradition and in opposition to *the they*...“THE LION IS WAKING” (78).

This moment simultaneously produces a sibling bond and creates a connection between siblings to their African past. It is as brief as it is powerful and is interrupted by the arrival of George Murchison. The powerful expressions of racial pride are aborted by the appearance of the figure that consistently rejects his ethnic heritage. Exhilarated by the “FLAMING SPEAR,” Walter Lee is inspired to engage George in meaningful

conversation. Initially, Walter Lee relapses into financial discourse in his attempts to connect with the visitor.

Your old man is all right, man. I mean he knows how to operate. I mean he thinks *big*, you know what I mean, I mean for a *home*, you know? But I think he's kind of running out of ideas now. I'd like to talk to him. Listen, man, I got some plans that could turn this city upside down. I mean I think like he does. *Big*. Invest big, gamble big, hell, lose *big* if you have to, you know what I mean. It's hard to find a man on this whole Southside who understands my kind of thinking—you dig? (84)

To a degree, this exchange is Walter's transparent effort to align himself with a wealthy investor for his liquor store. At the same time, however, Walter Lee earnestly feels misunderstood and alienated. He genuinely feels that if he can just get the chance, his ideas can be lucrative.

George, as did both Ruth and Lena Younger, dismisses Walter Lee's designs for financial freedom. With bored indifference, George responds, "Yeah—sometimes we'll have to do that, Walter" (84). This rejection is deeply painful for Walter Lee. George has been born into opportunity; he has financial resources and could be a valuable ally in Walter's attempt to escape the ghetto. George, however, expresses no kinship; he exhibits no interest in assisting a fellow black man to actualize his dream. Walter Lee can rationalize his wife and mother's disinterest; as women, they are shallow and possess "small minds," obstacles to the progress of the black man (34). George, however, is a *man*, yet he is still unsupportive of Walter Lee's business proposal. In short, Walter Lee takes George's rejection as an affront to his character. He feels like he is not being taken

seriously—and he is right. Incensed, Walter Lee re-assumes the posture of the Nigerian warrior and attacks George’s masculinity.

I see you all all the time—with books tucked under your arms—going to your “clahsses.” And for what! What the hell you learning over there? Filling up your heads—with the sociology and the psychology—but they teaching you how to be a man? How to take over and run the world? They teaching you how to run a rubber plantation or a steel mill? Naw—just to talk proper and read books and wear them faggoty-looking white shoes. (85)

Walter Lee directly challenges George Murchison and all that George represents. Walter clearly associates George’s education with assimilation into a network of white convention and decorum.

For Walter Lee, abstract concepts of social development or psychic formation are completely irrelevant if they do not help the individual achieve power. To be sure, however, Walter Lee fuses power and maleness. His conflation of these concepts is induced by a patriarchal social structure, and, as a result, he confuses his desire *to be a man* with his desire for agency. Clearly, Walter Lee does not want to *take over the world*, but he does want to be the master of his own world. He wants to *run a rubber plantation or a steel mill*; he does not want to be condemned to the anonymity of a factory worker. He wants authority and freedom. He yearns for the ontological privilege of *authenticity*. Still, however, he equates monetary gain with emancipation from the status of Ethnic other.

This correlation is beginning to unravel. When Walter Lee suggests that all George has learned in school is how to *talk proper*, he accuses George of abandoning African identity and adopting the signifying practices of an oppressive culture. For Walter Lee, George is surrendering power and enslaving himself to the societal injustices Walter Lee wants to escape. George, therefore, is *worse off* than Walter Lee; George has access to power and agency and squanders the opportunity. Walter Lee, feeling emasculated by socio-economic factors, questions George's masculinity. By describing George's shoes as *faggoty*, Walter Lee questions George's power. Moreover, these shoes are white. George has been talking the talk of assimilationism; now he is walking the walk.

Walter Lee cannot stomach this conversation. When George again dismisses him as "all whacked up with bitterness," Walter Lee erupts with cathartic *self speak*:

And you—ain't you bitter, man? Ain't you just about had it yet? Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? You happy?—You contented son-of-a-bitch—you happy? You got it made? Bitter? Man, I'm a volcano. Bitter? Here I am a giant—surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what it is the giant is talking about.

(85)

In this powerful moment of psychological awareness, Walter Lee confronts the trauma he experiences as a marginalized subject. This explosive outburst reveals the character's potential for a dramatic shift in perspective. Not only does Walter Lee identify his anger, he situates his rage in a cultural context. Up to this point, Walter Lee has associated economic freedom with ontological freedom. At this moment, however, he questions

George's fulfillment. Even though the Murchisons are wealthy and plugged in to the financial community, Walter Lee suggests that money simply is not enough when he asks whether or not George has *had it yet?* He wonders if George has had enough of being the Ethnic other. Even though George has material wealth and education, Walter Lee realizes that there are still opportunities that even George *can't reach out and grab*. No amount of money in the world will make George or Walter Lee white. Acquisition of funds, therefore, will never resolve the core problems these subjects experience. This realization makes Walter Lee a fountain of rage. His anger is compounded by the absence of anger he sees in his ethnic peers. Walter Lee is beginning to realize that he does not simply want financial resources. He wants the freedom that he has always thought this money represents. This freedom is the freedom to make choices, to limit the constraints imposed by an order he has had no part in designing.

The freedom Walter Lee desires is freedom from *the they*. In Heideggerian terms, Walter Lee yearns to break from *Mitda-sein*, the mode of being in which the subject's notion of the "self" is indistinguishable from societal expectations for behavior. *Mitda-sein* is associated with the everyday, the routine dealings of engaging the world on the world's terms. This mode of being "makes visible what we might call the 'subject' of everydayness, the they" (*Being and Time* 107) [114]. Furthermore, "the self of everyday Da-sein is the they-self which we distinguish from the *authentic self*, the self which has explicitly grasped itself. As the they-self, Da-sein is *dispersed* in the they and must first find itself" (ibid. 121) [129]. Walter Lee's *dispersal* is apparent in his obsession with the promise of an asymmetrical capitalist system. As long as Walter Lee is consumed by desires grounded in socio-economic demands of an anglo-centric, patriarchal, capitalist

culture, he is entangled in the world and cannot experience the ontological fulfillment of *authentic being*. Heidegger proposes that when a subject is “tranquillized and ‘understanding’ everything, thus compar[ing] itself with everything, it drifts toward an alienation in which its ownmost potentiality for being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquillizing, it is at the same time *alienating*” (ibid. 166) [178]. This *understanding* of the world is paradoxical. To be well versed in the signifying practices of the Symbolic, to integrate seamlessly into the world of *the they*, Da-sein deludes itself into thinking that self-actualization is congruent with effective social navigation. In a Symbolic order in which the subject—a figure like Walter Lee—is marginalized, *authenticity*, the *sense* of wholeness, is possible only outside the mainstays of dominant culture. As Žižek explains, “the process of interpellation-subjectivation is precisely an attempt to elude, to avoid [the] traumatic kernel through identification: in assuming a symbolic mandate, in recognizing himself in the interpellation, the subject evades the dimension of the Thing” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 181). Assimilating into social structure and embracing its ideological maxims offer a consoling promise: integration into the Symbolic prevents the subject from experiencing the horror, *the traumatic kernel*, of ontological aloneness. Interpellation enables the fullness that the subject desires; interpellation allows the subject to *evade* the impenetrable Otherness of the Thing. Its capacity for this *evasion* is *the sublime object of ideology*. There is, however, an inevitable caveat. If the Symbolic order itself renders a subject Other, the other-ized subject cannot experience the sublimation guaranteed by the contract. Under these conditions, the subject must *somehow* operate outside the Law.

When Walter Lee goes on his drives, when he listens to the saxophone at the Green Hat, he experiences a *sense* of fullness and ontological satisfaction that the hail of interpellation cannot provide. The conceptual process of ontological separation is actualized through physical movement. Through sheer force of will, he jettisons himself beyond the boundaries of the ghetto.

Well—Wednesday I borrowed Willy Harris' car and I went for a drive...just me and myself and I drove and drove...Way out...way past South Chicago, and I parked the car and I sat and looked at the steel mills all day long. I just sat in the car and looked at them big black chimneys for hours. Then I drove back and I went to the Green Hat. And Thursday—Thursday I borrowed the car again and I got in it and I pointed it the other way and I drove the other way—for hours—way, way up to Wisconsin, and I looked at the farms. I just drove and looked at the farms. Then I drove back and I went to the Green Hat. And today—today I didn't get the car. Today I just walked. All over the Southside. And I looked at all the Negroes and they looked at me and finally I just sat down on the curb at Thirty-ninth and South Parkway and I just sat there and watched all the Negroes go by. And then I went to the Green Hat. (105)

Walter Lee Younger has clearly articulated his sense of powerlessness and entrapment. Unrestricted spatial movement is compensation for his economic stagnation. The ghetto is a material representation of a flawed Symbolic contract. To interpellate is to function effectively within an urban prison. In this context, Walter Lee's meanderings are an *inauthentic* revolt. With a sense of "self" informed entirely by the practices of a racist

society, his capacity to revolt, in this case, remains enclosed within the parameters *the they*. He rejects his obligation to his *white* employer; he rejects his place in a *white* socio-economic system. The culture from which he recoils provides the terms by which he can revolt. Evidencing the extent of his powerlessness, he has to borrow a car to reject his immobility. The fruit of this event, however, is *exposure*. He sees the industrial setting beyond the Southside; he sees the pastoral environment in rural Wisconsin; he sees a world outside the spiritual and economic deprivation of the inner city. After two days of wandering, he internalizes the experience and no longer needs to escape familiarity to transcend the everyday.

During this three-day psychological event, the Green Hat is his anchor. Though the bar offers the intoxicating effects of alcohol, Walter Lee finds more lasting refuge in the music there. Transfixed by “this little cat they got there who blows a sax,” Walter Lee “can just sit there and drink and listen to them three men play” and “realize that nothing don’t matter worth a damn, but just being there” (106). The inventive sounds of jazz dissolve, if only briefly, the injustices and prejudice of an oppressive Symbolic order. Only through rhythms and tones can Walter Lee hear the ethnic voice that impoverishment and racism seek to crush.¹⁰⁵ Paul Carter Harrison claims that “black music articulates the cross-fertilization of African sensibility and the American experience: Irrespective of the form in which black music may be expressed, the African roots have survived the death-grip of Western acculturation” (56-7). For Walter Lee, jazz, as a uniquely black cultural expression, fills the gaps between thought and expression. As animated Nigerian warrior, he goes back to a Yoruban past, and though

Beneatha's ancestral return to African roots provides Walter Lee with an initial taste of ethnic identity, the music at the Green Hat more fully promotes his racial pride.

This ethnic pride, this sense of self apart from prevailing ideology, is a move toward his *authentic* mode of being. The authentic subject engages in "the search for totality," endeavors to become "the structural whole that we are seeking" (*Being and Time* 178). In short, the quest for authenticity is the quest for the sublime, for *imeros enargeia*, for a moment during which Desire is made manifest and the horrors of Lack are temporarily abated. It is a moment during which the Thing (*das Ding*) is made visible, an occurrence during which Lack briefly dissipates, but the subject is not destroyed by the process. The sublime is "the violent illumination, the glow of beauty" that "coincides with the moment of transgression or of realization" (*Seminar VII* 327). The sublime is exposure to the violent trauma of the Real. During sublimation, *meaning* is impossible; rather, the meaninglessness of the Law is laid bare. In this sense, the sublime is both horrifying and beautiful.

Walter Lee's three-day revolt provides him with glimpses into the sublime. Through jazz, through travel, he becomes acquainted with the wholeness and freedom for which he has yearned. Importantly, a psychological transition produces this suspended state; financial gain, the ever-present target of Walter Lee's desires, does not. Even after his exposure to the sublime, however, Walter Lee flounders. To leave the Green Hat is to re-enter the material world in which he is alienated. In the bar, *nothing don't matter worth a damn*; in the streets and alleys of the Southside, his sense of entrapment is overwhelming.

When Lena Younger hears her son describe his experience at the Green Hat, she recognizes that Walter Lee is dangerously close to surrender. His consistent failings have nearly broken him. Unable to convince those around him that his plans are worth pursuing, Walter Lee approaches the abyss. When he calmly proclaims, “you ain’t never been wrong about nothing, Mama,” Walter Lee is prepared to resign himself to accepting the harsh realities of ghetto life (106). At this point, the character is willing to sublimate his volcanic rage by potentially disappearing night after night into the Green Hat. Even if the experience at the Green Hat is his exposure to the sublime, exposure to authentic being, Lena recognizes that *re-entry* is imperative. Lena intercedes. “What you ain’t never understood is that I ain’t got nothing, don’t own nothing, ain’t really wanted nothing that wasn’t for you. There ain’t nothing as precious to me... There ain’t nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, nothing else—if it means—if it means it’s going to destroy my boy” (106). This passage is ambiguous. At this moment, Lena Younger is potentially undermining her philosophical principles. By claiming that there is *nothing worth holding on to if it means it’s going to destroy my boy*, Lena appears to be willing to sacrifice her third term, betray her ideological core, in order to prevent her son’s decline into surrender and passivity. This is complicated further by her solution. Having put thirty-five hundred dollars down on the house at Clybourne Park, Lena gives Walter Lee the remainder of the insurance settlement. “I want you to take this money and take three thousand dollars and put it in a savings account for Beneatha’s medical schooling. The rest you put in a checking account—with your name on it” (107). Clearly, Lena realizes the strong possibility that Walter Lee will pursue the liquor store venture with Bobo and Willy Harris. She is knowingly, therefore, colluding with a practice to which she is

morally opposed. There are, however, larger issues at play here. Lena Younger adheres to her ethical principles—privileges racial equality, self-respect, ethnic pride—because these beliefs endow her with a sense of power and purpose in a culture that has historically sought to pacify, marginalize, and contain the African-American people. When Lena determines that an inflexible, dogmatic allegiance to her ideology *possibly* impinges on her son's ability to develop *his own* notions of power and purpose, she provides her son with something he has never had before: a *choice*.

Several critics, however, conclude that Lena Younger has a negative impact on her son. Martha Gilman Bower asserts that Lena Younger is an obstacle to Walter Lee's agency and power because the matriarch, as the head of the household, "takes on the male role which further renders Walter less than a man—impotent" (93). Bower holds Lena accountable for contributing to the emotional and ontological decline of Walter Lee by not surrendering domestic power to the oldest son upon the death of the father. For Bower, Lena's unwillingness to relinquish her position of authority, when operating alongside white patriarchal power structures already suppressing the agency of the black subject, serves to corrode Walter Lee's fragile sense of masculinity. Bower positions Lena Younger, therefore, as a "Mammy," a hackneyed caricature of the black female. The Mammy is "the domineering woman who tries to control the lives of those around her" (Anderson 9). Historically, "the mammy was disdained in the middle-class black community. She was viewed not only as a negative stereotype, but also as harmful to the efforts of black women to their communities and in the society as a whole. This maternal figure was associated with the repression of the black man" (ibid. 22).¹⁰⁶ The mammy's role in the *repression of the black man* is amplified by her assimilation into white culture.

The mammy is stereotypically a domestic in a white family and “is the caretaker of the whites’ homes and children first, and her own second” (ibid. 10). Lena Younger is a far cry from this demonized notion of the black matriarch. Unlike the mammy, Lena “is neither a conservative nor a supporter of the racist system and its law. It is she who filled her children with pride in the race” (Carter 52). When the tolls of poverty and oppressive ghetto life begin to destroy the family, Lena Younger takes decisive action. When Walter Lee starts to crumple beneath the weight of his bitterness, when Ruth concludes that her unplanned pregnancy must be terminated to preserve the family’s resources, the matriarch fully understands the gravity of the situation.

I—I just seen my family falling apart today...just falling to pieces in front of my eyes... We couldn’t go on like we was today. We was going backwards ‘stead of forwards—talking ‘bout killing babies and wishing each other was dead... When it gets like that in life—you just got to do something different, push on out and do something bigger. (94)

Racial pride and family unity are paramount to Lena Younger. Though she does deny Walter Lee the opportunity to ascend to the role of Younger patriarch, her decision to do so does not result from an impulse to control and dominate the lives of others in an effort to perpetuate her own power. On the contrary, as the play’s conclusion illustrates, she is willing to empower her son with the “traditional” position of male authority, but she is willing to do so only when he is capable of steering the family in a direction that is compatible with her notions of justice and ethical responsibility. Her notions of justice and responsibility, to be sure, are inseparable from racial pride and family unity.

Predictably, Willy Harris runs off with the investment money. Less predictably, Walter Lee never goes to the bank. Instead, he pours all of the money, Beneatha's medical school funds included, into the liquor store. Walter Lee fails miserably; when given monetary power by his mother, he reverts to his delusion that financial gain will solve ontological problems. Furthermore, Walter Lee discovers that he has been duped shortly after Mr. Lindner, speaking on behalf of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, visits the Youngers as they are moving into the suburb.¹⁰⁷ Claiming that the residents of Clybourne Park have a "dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in," and how a homeowner here "has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way," Lindner states that "for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their *own* communities" (117-18). As a result, the community, "through a collective effort," is willing to buy the house from the Youngers for a higher sum than the family paid to own it (118). It is at this point that the nebulous forces of racism, heretofore swirling abstractly through Lena's memories of a savage South, Beneatha's political theories, Walter Lee's angst, and the material hardship of the ghetto, manifest in the tangible form of a bribe.

Walter Lee has lost the family fortune and is immediately confronted with the means by which this tragedy can be alleviated. Lindner's offer can make the Youngers' financial problems disappear. Walter Lee's knee-jerk response is to take the money. After Lindner leaves, Walter Lee calls him and accepts the offer. His association between financial freedom and the freedom to signify is so profoundly ingrained that he appears, despite Willy's betrayal, despite George Murchison's integration into the white

community, incapable of distinguishing between financial security and existential satisfaction. “There ain’t no causes—there ain’t nothing but taking in this world, and he who takes the most is smartest—and it don’t make a damn bit of difference *how*” (143). Seeking power, Walter Lee essentially argues that the ends justify the means. For a person to whom money and freedom are indistinguishable, Willy and George have seized power with Machiavellian precision. Still rationalizing his decision to his mother and sister, Walter Lee resolutely claims, “I didn’t make this world! It was given to me this way!” (143). Although Walter Lee Younger is right in his insistence that he did not *make the world* into which he has been thrown, unlike Lena and Beneatha, Walter Lee still resists the possibility of *re-making* it.

Once again, Walter Lee utilizes specific language to convey interiority. As Nigerian warrior, he deploys ethnic confidence through tribal dialect. Now, on the verge of accepting Lindner’s deal, Walter Lee, acknowledging the implications of his decision, rehearses before Beneatha and Lena the “shucks and jive” he plans to perform for Lindner. “Captain, Mistuh, Bossman—A-hee-hee-hee! Oh, yassuh boss! Yassssuh! Great white—Father, just gi’ ussen de money, fo’ God’s sake, and we’s—we’s ain’t gwine come out deh and dirty up yo’ white folks neighborhood” (144). The white man, as prescribed by a racist Symbolic, is *boss*; the authority of paternal law is apparent when Walter Lee refers to the master as *Father*. The notion of the black as Other of the Same is apparent here. As Irigaray proposes that woman is the unnamable Other, subjected to the male gaze and objectified by the masquerade, the African American experiences a similar dynamic. By employing the submissive speech of the stereotypical “faithful slave,” Walter Lee enacts the masquerade; he positions himself as the object of white

desire: as a black man who “knows his place” and respects the boundaries of appropriate societal conduct.

When Lindner arrives at the home with the contract, the entire Younger family is assembled. Since the house is in Lena’s name, she is the only person who can legally confirm or reject the deal. At this pivotal moment, however, she defers to Walter Lee. Despite his failing when responsible for the family fortune, Lena empowers her son to make a choice that will profoundly impact the family’s future. Ruth instructs Travis to go downstairs during this business transaction, but Lena insists, “No. Travis, you stay right here. And you make him understand what you are doing, Walter Lee. You teach him good. Like Willy Harris taught you. You show him where our five generations done come to” (147). The mother reminds the son of the family’s history and urges him to keep faith with a proud ethnic past. Moreover, she provides him with the opportunity, if only briefly, to reshape the Symbolic landscape. Walter Lee has grappled with a sense of powerlessness and victimization throughout his adult life. In dealing with Lindner, he possesses the agency to endorse cultural practices or reject them. Under these circumstances, Walter Lee realizes that his obsession with financial gain has compromised his integrity. Furthermore, he understands that if he continues to confine his pursuit for freedom within an oppressive system, he will never achieve the sense of self-worth and pride he desires. It is here that Walter Lee Younger is confronted with Heideggerian choice.

Da-sein explicitly brings itself back to itself from its lostness in the they. But this bringing back must have *the* kind of being *by the neglect of which* *Da-sein* has lost itself in inauthenticity. When Da-sein thus brings itself

back from the they, the they-self is modified in an existentiell manner so that it becomes *authentic* being-one's self. This must be accomplished by *making up for not choosing*. But making up for not choosing signifies *choosing to make this choice*—deciding for a potentiality-of-being, and making this decision from one's own self. In choosing to make this choice, Da-sein *makes possible*, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality-of-being. (*Being and Time* 248) [268]

This Heideggerian *self* is not an essential immutable core. In short, the self is the locus of Desire. As *existentiell*, Da-sein possesses the capacity for self-interpretation, for auto-disclosure. For the Heideggerian subject, Desire indicates angst; Desire is the unsettledness of inauthentic or undifferentiated Being. Though Da-sein possesses no essence, the capacities for self-interpretation and disclosedness of Being comprise preontological knowledge, the kernel of authenticity, the nexus of human Being. The Lacanian subject, on the other hand, is at its center a void. Within the speaking being is the horrific emptiness of Lack. The self is fueled by the desire to fill the gaping hole. The hail of interpellation-subjection operates to make the emptiness bearable. This indicates a key difference between the Lacanian and Heideggerian subject. For Lacan, there is no possibility for authenticity; assimilation is the *forced choice*. For Heidegger, however, *the they* sings the song of the call. As Heidegger's ontological project indicates, however, the subject is always in danger of answering the call out of *obligation* to cultural practice. Obligation denotes inauthentic being. *If I conform to the pressures of the they, if I answer the call even though Symbolic law perpetuates my Lack instead of alleviating it, I am betraying my Desire and am condemned to an angst-ridden existence.*

Walter Lee can no longer perpetrate this betrayal. It becomes clear to him that he comes “from people who had a lot of pride,” so he tells Lindner that “we have decided to move into our house” (148). In so doing, he acknowledges his obligation to historical legacy, but he also rescues himself from existential destruction. Importantly, his mother enables this transformation. Lena *forces* the *choice*. Not only does Lena urge her son to recognize how far he has strayed from his ethnic origins, she bestows upon him the position in which he can *come to* this realization instead of having morality *thrust upon* him. Moreover, Lena Younger provides to her children an example of ethnic pride in the face of a racist culture.

Lena Younger, despite her ignorance of African culture, is conceptually akin to Joseph Asagai. Asagai is committed to empowering his village and helping his community emancipate itself from the clutches of imperial rule. What is most important to him is independence, but he concedes that his vision of freedom may become archaic or irrelevant over time.

Perhaps the things I believe now for my country will be wrong and outmoded, and I will not understand and do terrible things to have things my way or merely to keep my power. Don't you see that there will be young men and women—not British soldiers then, but my own black countrymen—to step out of the shadows and some evening and slit my useless throat? Don't you see they have always been there...that they always will be. And that such a thing as my own death will be an advance? They who might kill me even...actually replenish all that I was.
(136)

What Asagai describes here is the inevitability of progress. As long as the community is committed to liberation, the method by which liberation is accomplished is immaterial. His description of revolt is violent and bloody, but he understands that the advancement of the people is more important than one person's concept of that advancement. Like Asagai, Lena Younger plants the seed of revolt in her children. As she nurses the dying plant in the ghetto apartment, she nourishes her children with her racial pride. Unlike Asagai, Lena does not risk being murdered by a rising faction, but she does witness her notions of freedom and ethical responsibility replaced by new versions of those concepts. By the end of the play, Beneatha's compulsion to heal the sick will lead her to Africa to help Asagai revolutionize Nigeria. Walter Lee finally honors himself, his family, and his heritage, but will possibly carry his newfound pride into economic development in the community. Though Lena Younger cannot relate to either of these reactions, her example has enabled her children's decisions and the mother does nothing to dissuade her children from pursuing these interests. Beneatha and Walter Lee, though focused on different aspects of revolt, *replenish* all that their mother has believed.

The future of the Younger family is uncertain. Though they have moved out of the ghetto, they have lost their small fortune and, as a result, have increased their financial obligations without increasing their income. Furthermore, the possibilities for violence or harassment loom on the horizon. The resolution presented at the close of the text is clouded by this ambiguous future. Clearly, however, Lena Younger both instigated and enabled great change in her children. Providing a model of pride, resolve, and self-respect upon which Beneatha and Walter Lee can each fashion their own sense of identity, the matriarch devotes her life to labor and action in order to produce a better

work-world. Hansberry, in her “Address to the American Academy of Psycho-Therapists” on October 5, 1963, a speech that signifies her awareness of and interaction with psychoanalytic theory, provides a cogent account of the revolutionary mother, describing Lena Younger as:

the Black matriarch incarnate: The bulwark of the Negro family since slavery; the embodiment of the Negro will to transcendence. It is she who, in the mind of the Black poet, scrubs the floors of a nation in order to create Black diplomats and university professors. It is she who, while seeming to cling to traditional restraints, drives the young on into the fire hoses and one day simply refuses to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery. (qtd. in Carter 52-3)

Throughout the play, Lena tells her story; she articulates her narrative so that her children can learn from her biography. Furthermore, she respects the differences that her children possess. She recognizes that they are Other than herself and that, as such, they possess the power to produce a “new society.” Clearly, the actions of one woman cannot and will not restructure the Symbolic world, but Hansberry, by relaying this narrative to the audience/reader/Other, conveys the power of the revolutionary mother. The maternal function can, one mother at a time, defy, deconstruct, and then reassemble the ideological world in the interest of social justice.

CHAPTER 6

COME FLY WITH ME: KUSHNER'S INVITATION TO THE VOYAGE IN *HOMEBOODY/KABUL*

In *Homebody/Kabul*, Tony Kushner embarks on a radical investigation of human interaction. The work first articulates the psychological impacts of industrialization, technological progress, and economic globalization on the individual. The woman called Homebody is profoundly dissatisfied with the trajectory of western culture and consequently alienated from the world and its occupants. The first act of the play is her manifesto in which she outlines the problems of a socio-economic system, then conveys how these cultural conditions affect her. After the first scene, however, Homebody disappears never to return again. The remainder of the play explores collisions of culture, representations of the Other, ethical responsibility, and the extent to which languages both enable and prevent human connection. Though Homebody is only present for 21 of 140 pages (a mere 15% of the text), she determines the trajectory of the action in the drama. Her flight from London brings her husband, Milton, and her daughter, Priscilla, to Afghanistan. More importantly, however, Homebody's disappearance is a watershed event. First, Homebody's departure is a rejection of Symbolic structures. As such, her exodus is revolt, and this revolt is expressed through deliberate action. As a direct result of Homebody's drastic choice, Milton and Priscilla undergo radical shifts in perspective.

Over 3500 miles from home, worlds away from the familiarity of routine, Milton and Priscilla are irreversibly altered. Upon spatially separating themselves from their native culture, Milton and Priscilla are able to distance themselves from its signifying practices and a “they” that privileges consumerism, greed, and ethnocentrism. Furthermore, this ontological separation enables father and daughter to connect with one another in ways previously impossible and connect to other human beings on levels previously unimaginable. Further still, unbeknownst to Milton and Priscilla, when they pursue the Homebody, they pursue authenticity. The transformations of Milton and Priscilla, however, are enabled by a disturbing paradox. Only by abandoning her husband and daughter can Homebody save them. Her radical break from the familiar is what enables her husband and child to be jettisoned from prevailing ideology. This revolutionary mother, in stark opposition to traditional notions of the maternal role, rescues her child and husband from oblivion by forsaking them.

Homebody/Kabul premiered in July 1999 at the Chelsea Theatre in London.¹⁰⁸ In this original version, Homebody’s monologue, Act One, Scene 1 of the revised version, is the entire drama. Sheridan Morley describes the play as “a memoir, a travelogue, a poem, the history of a nation wrecked by tourism and capitalism and internecine strife and tribal loyalty. It’s also a lament for one woman’s inability to connect” (qtd. in Fisher 188). Dissatisfied with her life and estranged from those around her, the Homebody takes refuge in an outdated guidebook to Afghanistan. The thirty-three year old publication she scours, however, contains more geo-political history than does its contemporary *Let’s Go* counterpart. Though Afghanistan may initially appear a randomly selected locale, appealing only insofar as it differs from the myriad “refinements” of a “civilized” British

culture she has come to loathe, her meticulous research of Afghanistan reveals centuries of conquest, upheaval, and transformation.

James Fisher concludes that Homebody's fascination with Afghanistan is emblematic of the psychological fissure that plagues her. "This country, and the city of Kabul in particular, are used by Kushner to reflect the woman's mental state as it is, a place that is both wondrously exotic and profoundly unsettled" (189). Her cryptic articulations mirror an unstable sense of self. As Afghanistan has been carved and re-carved by outside influences, and consequently denied the continuity necessary for "identity," the Homebody has been shaped and re-shaped by the pressures of a culture she considers alien. Susannah Clapp writes that the one-act play contains "purposefully elusive monologue" that possesses "unsatisfactory as well as intriguing aspects" (qtd. in Fisher 193). The inaccessible speech in the Homebody's monologue is alienating. There are moments during which the character is hardly plausible. At the same time, however, her weirdness is intriguing; she is like a grotesque car crash from which the horrified observer cannot avert his gaze. This deliberately abstract monologue is what Morley terms a "potent verbal avalanche" stemming from a "lyrical, butterfly mind" (qtd. in Fisher 193). Pedantic speech and erudite meditation such are at the core of the Homebody's interaction with the audience.

Though a monologue, the Homebody *directly engages* the spectators. Addressing the audience repeatedly, Act I, Scene 1 veers far a-field from the modality of realist drama. Unlike Lorca's attempt at photographic representation, Kushner utilizes Brechtian metatheatricality. Homebody first deploys opaque language that muddies the "fantasy" of seamless plot and continuity, and then, by talking to the assembly of

viewers, she further disturbs the observers by acknowledging the their presence. As a result, the onlookers no longer experience a *detached* position from which they can peer into a character's world and "listen-in" on what goes on there. This produces a paradox: though *included* in the drama, the spectators are *alienated* from its fictionality. The alienation shatters the "fourth wall" between audience-performer and intrudes upon the onlooker's anonymity. In a play like *Homebody/Kabul* that beckons individuals to *own up* to their ethical responsibilities to the Other, this alienation effect (Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*) renders the audience self-aware. Once attuned to the fact that they are watching a play and that the play articulates a specific message, audience members become more accountable to the ethical concerns addressed in the drama. The viewers are no longer passive bodies observing "the dream" of fictional expression; they are the targets of a (socio-ethico-political) message.

In December 2001, a revised version of *Homebody/Kabul* premiered at the New York Theatre Workshop. Beginning with the original, though slightly edited, monologue, the new text extends beyond Homebody's imaginative and neurotic meditations in her London home. In the extended version, the modality shifts dramatically after the first scene. The play appears to settle into the clarity of realism and an identifiable "story" takes shape. Acts 2 and 3 occur in Kabul, Afghanistan, where Milton and Priscilla navigate the Taliban-controlled city in search for answers in regards to Homebody's mysterious fate. The revised edition concludes with a Periplum in which Mahala, a young Afghan woman whom Priscilla and Milton essentially smuggle out of the country, "replaces" the Homebody. At the same time, however, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Kushner provides a "hyper-realism" that further alienates the

observer. Characters speak in un-translated Pashtun and Esperanto, so audience members, like Milton and Priscilla, cannot understand the dialogue.¹⁰⁹

It is this revised production of the play that has generated the bulk of critical attention. Three months after the destruction of the Twin Towers, Tony Kushner presents a play about white westerners interacting with a fundamentalist theocratic regime. At the same time, however, the work does not thematize the Kabuli people in a reductive fashion. Though there are rigid Taliban border guards and the violent Munkrat, the arbitrator of Muslim Law who threatens to beat Priscilla for walking the streets without a male chaperone and for not wearing a burqua, there is also Khwaja, the socialist activist, and Mahala, the young woman who yearns to escape the oppression of Islamic fundamentalism by fleeing to the western world.

In short, the Afghan, the Arab, the Muslim, the “Other,” is not presented as a menacing threat to American security. It is for this reason that Marc Peyser, in his *Newsweek* article “Tales From Behind Enemy Lines,” writes, “Surely, Kushner wouldn’t dare go ahead with *Homebody/Kabul*, a play set in Afghanistan that features a Taliban mullah, women in burquas and at least one reference to Osama Bin Laden. Or would he?” (68). Peyser’s question suggests that the drama is an audacious, insensitive, and potentially unpatriotic literary work. One cannot forget, however, the frenzied nationalism in the United States following the events of 9/11. Jacob Juntunen reports that “in mid-September, when George W. Bush literally used ‘dead or alive’ rhetoric in his ‘crusade’ against Osama Bin Laden, 4,000 Afghans fled into Pakistan each day,” presumably in fear for their lives (174). In this reactionary political climate, “the National Endowment for the Arts delayed a \$60,000 grant for a production of

Homebody/Kabul scheduled to take place later that season at Berkeley Repertory Theatre” (ibid. 176). Ironically, a play that investigates the individual’s ethical responsibility to other human beings, an unconditional responsibility divorced from any expectation of reciprocity, a responsibility to and for the Other despite any ideological or ontological difference, is perceived, by some, as inappropriate or threatening literary expression.

This irony is not lost on the playwright. In a September 22, 2001 *L.A. Times* interview with Michael Phillips, Kushner recounts his experience in Ireland when he learned about the New York City attacks. “It was also full of a kind of European horror at the American cowboy mentality so stunningly embodied by our president. It created an impression that frightened me—the impression that America could only respond to this by talking like this was the shootout at OK Corral” (Phillips). There was a terrorist assault on American soil, and, as millions of faces, transfixed by images of mangled concrete, of human bodies plummeting toward ash-blanketed pavement, and of gruesomely immense architectural collapse, were glued to 24-hour news networks, the materiality of existence, the indifference of the Real, and the temporal finitude of the human experience emerged with nightmarish clarity. On the morning of September 11, 2001, satellite feeds and real-time coverage prompted and enabled a massive population to experience, in dazed unison, their being-unto-death. The response, whether geo-political or personal, to this phantasmic scene is of profound importance.

There are two fundamental reactions to this atrocity. One can be consumed by fear of the Other. This ensuing terror renders all Arabs as terrorists, “camel-jockeys,” and savages. This thematization enables mass retribution and vengeance in which there

are no non-combatants. An alternate stance is one in which prevailing ideology is questioned, one in which western culpability is examined. As James Reston, Jr. states, “we see no American flags fluttering on this stage, hear no macho one-liners from a Wild West American president,” and concludes that *Homebody/Kabul* “is a play for those who are interested in the root causes that proceeded Sept. 11, for those who can see through the fog of patriotism to the finer distinctions, who are finally ready to ask how on earth do we get out of this godforsaken place, who can bear to contemplate the thought that we have participated to some extent in our own tragedy” (53). Our *participation*, through ignorance of, collusion with, indifference to, or active involvement in hegemonic discourse that seeks to consume difference by projecting a particular political, economic, theological, or cultural practice as that which is universally Right, cannot be ignored. In *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life*, Marvin Carlson asserts that “both theatre organizations and [the] public have come to accept reviewers as ‘official’ readers of productions, giving to their reactions a particular authority” (23). If these *official* interpretations are dictated exclusively by the winds of prevailing ideology, the message of a work, no matter how vital or relevant, can be trampled beneath the feet of the thronging mass. In Kushner’s own words, “the play is simply an attempt to think about the history of Afghanistan, in a very complicated way. It’s also about mourning and grieving and loss. And I don’t think silence is what we want to ask of artists at a terrible time.”¹¹⁰ To muffle the voice of dissent is to totalize experience.

As the “meanings” of artistic works are frozen by *official interpretations*, the Freudian-Lacanian paradigms function to freeze subjectivity. In their “correctives” to these theories that elevate the masculine subject to the position of normalized

subjectivity, Kristeva and Irigaray reject and resist patriarchal totalization. Kristeva and Irigaray counter the fixed and static aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis with nebulous and fluid concepts that keep the certainties of Lacanian theory in check. Kristeva's *semiotic* dimension of language, for example, though grounded in the material body, evades definition. As the flip-side of symbolic language, the semiotic is impregnated by the unintelligible and harbors the power to expose and destroy the fragility of all meaning. Similarly, the *Archaic Father*, a mother's love object beyond the mother-child dyad, enables a child to internalize concepts like love, justice, freedom, and responsibility and, therefore, successfully integrate into a society that the mother has validated, but this *Father of Individual Prehistory* is also a destroyer of worlds. The mechanism that certifies cultural practices functions simultaneously as that which can level and reform the Symbolic order. Along the same lines, Irigaray re-imagines the conception of Otherness; woman is not the Other of the Same, not the binary antithesis of masculinity, but instead the Other of the Other, that which is altogether *different*, in character and content, from the masculine subject that has ascended to primacy and has been historically legitimated as the universal subject. Irigaray does not identify the essence of woman; she does not explain precisely how the feminine embodies Otherness of Otherness. She positions woman outside the Freudian-Lacanian framework that renders the feminine as masculine distortion. With deliberate ambiguity, Irigaray emancipates "woman" from an androcentric continuum. As will be later discussed in detail, the Homebody gravitates toward the mysterious. She longs for what she describes as the "magic" that exists beyond the categorized and the intelligible. Revolting against cultural machinery that silences and discounts the feminine-maternal, machinery that destroys the

magic of alterity, Kristeva and Irigaray situate the maternal function as the locus of revolution. Existing beyond the Law, the mother ratifies or rejects cultural practices. Beyond the Law are Otherness, Heideggerian authenticity, and one's potentiality-for-being. For the Homebody, beyond the Law is Afghanistan.

The first scene of the play takes place in the kitchen of a London home. The woman who addresses the audience is unnamed, unknown. She is "the Homebody." This moniker situates her directly in the domestic sphere and also suggests a mild agoraphobia. The home, as defined by the *OED*, is "the place of one's dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally and properly attach to it, and are associated with it." In this sense, one's residence is associated *metaphorically* with security, predictability, order. The home is a refuge from the chaos of the outside world; in her monologue, the Homebody clearly perceives the outside world as chaotic:

Such is the expansive nature of these times that every animate and inanimate thing, corporeal or incorporeal, actual or ideational, real or imagined, every, every discrete unit of...of *being*: if a thing can be said to *be*, to *exist*, then such is the nature of these expansive times that this thing which is must suffer to be *touched*. Ours is a time of connection; the private, and we must accept this, and it's a hard thing to accept, the private is *gone*. All must be touched. All touch corrupts. All must be corrupted.

(11)

Considering the Hegelian or Marxist notion of history as a constant force surging towards resolution, the *expansive nature* of the contemporary world, as imagined here, is

inevitable and even necessary. In this teleological conception, the past culminates in a specific, resolving event. For Hegel, the idea incarnates. For Marx, workers revolt. For the Christian, Christ returns. All beings are *touched* by, that is to say, affected by and subjected to, the unfolding of the great narrative. Such a conception, however, hinges on the belief of a central core, a center from which all originates and toward which all progresses. Everything, everyone, has its place. Furthermore, in a world of CNN, of cell-phones, of the worldwide web, instant communication produces *a time of connection*. Subjects are plugged into a network of discovery and understanding. For the Homebody, however, this connection is not the spiritual event of ethical human interaction. On the contrary, this “connection” is a violent leveling; the tentacles of the Same expand and engulf the Other, destroying its radical Otherness and reducing it to the Same.

Ironically, however, the Homebody spouts her cryptic rant while “safe in her kitchen,” nestled in the warmth of familiarity (28). For Freud, the speaking being is drawn toward the familiar in an effort to avoid the horrors of difference, the horrors of the unintelligible. In his 1927 essay “The ‘Uncanny,’” Freud unpacks the psychological components of that to which we are accustomed.¹¹¹ “The German word ‘*unheimlich*’ is obviously the opposite of ‘*heimlich*’ [homely], ‘*heimisch*’ [‘native’]—the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar. Naturally not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation is not capable of inversion” (931). After etymological investigation, Freud brings to the fore that the term also signifies that which is “concealed, kept from sight,” and that capable of “arousing gruesome fear” (933). The word, therefore, is a paradox. It’s “meaning” floats between two poles. Freud concludes

that “uncanniness” is “something familiar that has been repressed” (949). According to Freud, therefore, Otherness is something to which human beings are organically opposed. It is not surprising then that this father of psychoanalysis constructs an entire paradigm in which woman, a being he describes as “veiled in an impenetrable obscurity,” possessing a “conventional secretiveness and insincerity,” is an *aberration* (“The Sexual Aberrations” 17). Woman is anatomically different; she possesses a void, a gaping wound, a reminder of the castration that awaits any man unwilling to embrace the Law.

Lacan clearly agrees. Woman, without a penis and therefore unable to experience castration anxiety, cannot fully integrate into the Symbolic. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan situates woman as unintelligible. Since “The Other...is that to which woman is fundamentally related,” Lacan argues that “there is no Other of the Other” and, therefore, “~~Woman~~ cannot be said” (81).¹¹² What is at stake here extends beyond sexual politics. The pitfalls of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis expose a deeply unsettling ethical dilemma—the rejection of the Other. Woman is the embodiment of the uncanny. Since she walks the earth, since she lives, breathes, and ensures the survival of the species, she cannot be ignored. Instead, she must become Other, *something familiar that must be repressed*.¹¹³

The Other must be familiarized, contained, its threat neutralized. This process, to return to the Homebody’s monologue, is “the touch which does not understand that which it touches;” it is “the touch that corrupts that which it touches, and which corrupts itself” (28). The Homebody retreats from cultural forces that seek consolidation and commoditization; she retreats from that which seeks to familiarize. Clearly, the Symbolic structures from which she flees are surely *familiar*, for she has been reared within their

network. At the same time, however, she perceives the monolith as alien, foreign, something of which she is not a part. Her only refuge is her home, but she is not *at home* even there. As Martha Lavey asserts, the Homebody struggles to “give voice to her inner self in her native tongue,” but throughout the drama, “no one is ‘at home’ in the play. There exists a terrible longing to be understood, to touch the authentic” (xi). The *authentic* is veiled and just out of reach when it is parceled out by *the they*. Prevailing ideology, appropriate behavior, economic conditions alienate subjects from themselves and from one another. In a Heideggerian context, the Homebody’s cultural alienation is *angst*, a sensation that precedes and is essential for the emergence of authenticity. *Being-with* other human beings, enclosed with them within the matrix of cultural practices, is always already informed by the abstract contours of an amorphous they. To function according only to prevailing ideology is to become ensnared, entangled.

This characteristic of being-with [is] more concretely visible through the everyday publicness of the they which brings tranquillized self-assurance, “being-at-home” with all its obviousness, into the average everydayness of Da-sein. *Angst*, on the other hand, fetches Da-sein back out of its entangled absorption in the “world.” Everyday familiarity collapses. Da-sein is individuated, but *as* being-in-the-world. Being-in enters the existential “mode” of *not-being-at-home*. (*Being and Time* 176) [188-9]

The *Home-body*, immersed in a *familiar* setting, sequestered in the safe *familiarity* of her residence, is haunted by the terror of that which quakes behind the veneer of the known world. She is becoming attuned to the fact that the world around her is fueled by a fear of

the Other. Under these circumstances, her *everyday familiarity collapses*. She is jettisoned from *the they* and adrift in an ontological void.

Ironically, however, the Homebody's revelation occurs in a world in which *the private is gone*. The private is the un-concealed. As science and technology decode the mysteries of the universe, the secrets of existence, what the Homebody refers to as "magic," diminish. Kristeva asserts that "evil begins by abolishing the ancient Greek boundary [*horoi*] between the 'private' or 'one's own' [*idion*], which is centered on the household [*oikia*], and the 'public' or 'common' [*koinon*] space of the agora" because the decomposition of this boundary "puts various sorts of freedom in jeopardy" (*Hannah Arendt* 159). The *decomposition of this boundary* is the *corruption of the touch*. The corruption from which Homebody recoils is the illusion of knowledge, the mirage of mastery. The more that is "known" the less freedom one has to wonder. Though Kristeva situates this erosion of boundaries as spatial decomposition, as the encroachment of the public into the private/domestic, the Homebody perceives this intrusion as the invasion of "knowledge" into the world of the "mysterious." As she later suggests, the Homebody also associates imperialism with violation of the "mysterious." The mystery of the Other disappears into a teaming mass of Sameness; the line between the "I" and "*the they*" is blurred. The totality is born. The Homebody is horrified by this conflation.

In the *age of expansion*, mystery becomes demystified, dislodged and replaced by labels and categories. For Heidegger, this *corruption* is the conflation of the phenomenological with the noumenal in the process of scientific "discovery." Positivism consolidates, but does not reveal. The endeavor to understand marks a human impulse, but when this endeavor is undertaken without ontic-ontological context, a context ignored

by scientific method in an attempt to accomplish “objectivity,” mysteries are not explained as much as they are realigned and comfortably partitioned. This Heideggerian notion emerges in the text when the Homebody discusses the laws of the universe.

In that galaxy there so far away, that cloud there so hot and blistered by clustering stars, exhaling protean scads of infinitely irreducible fiery data in the form of energy pulses and streams of slicing, shearing, unseeable light—does that nebula know it nebulates? Most likely not...It knows nothing, its *nature* is to stellate and constellate and nebulate and add its heft and vortices and frequencies to the Universal Drift, un-self-consciously effusing, effusing, gaseously effusing. (14)

Quite simply, the Homebody *describes* the production of celestial bodies. In an opaque, galactic womb, white hot gas and dust fuse into stellar matter. The nebula, however, does not know it *nebulates*. The human observer is that which categorizes, identifies, labels steps, and constructs the terminology of the process. The *why* is decidedly unaddressed. The mysteries of *Universal Drift*, though pulsing at the center, are obscured by the illusion of understanding.

The Homebody occupies a world in which the expansion of culture, the expansion of “knowledge,” accomplishes *nothing*. The more space “filled” by ideas, explanations and *Truth*, the more unbearable the absence of mystery becomes. It is into this emptiness that the Homebody recedes. To be sure, however, she qualifies her notion of recession. She refers to alienation and not to “two consecutive quarters of negative growth in gross domestic product” (11). This qualification signals the capitalistic foundations of western

culture as well as the fluidity of language. *Let me clarify. Let me say what I mean. The words betray me.*

In the *age of expansion*, the age of Sameness and consolidation, in the age of advancement and exponential growth, the fissure between the known and the unknown is sutured by technical breakthroughs, and the magic of Being is displaced by the necromancy of scientific Truth. For Žižek, “Truth” is an inconceivable kernel always already infinitely beyond human grasp.

Everything is not just the interplay of appearances, there is a Real—this Real, however, is not the accessible Thing, but the *gap* which prevents our access to it, the “rock” of the antagonism which distorts our view of the perceived object through a partial perspective. And, again, the “truth” is not the “real” state of things, that is, the “direct” view of the object without perspectival distortion, but the very Real of the antagonism which causes perspectival distortion. The site of truth is not the way “things really are in themselves, beyond their perspectival distortions, but the very gap, passage, which separates one perspective from another, the gap...which makes the two perspectives radically *incommensurable*. The “Real as impossible” is the cause of the impossibility of ever attaining the “neutral” non-perspectival view of the object. There *is* a truth, everything is not relative—but this truth is the truth of the perspectival distortion *as such*, not the truth distorted by the partial view from a one-sided perspective. (*The Parallax View* 281)

“Reality” is the mirage of *perspectival distortion*. From the vista of egoism, the speaking being engages the world via thought. The gulf, however, between world-around and the world-within is not traversable. The human being is mired by the irreversible condition of *parallax view*: “the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight;” as a result, what “I see is never ‘whole’—not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it” (ibid. 17). This *blind spot*, however, is unacknowledged. Like the uncanny, it must be repressed; only through its repression is knowledge possible at all. Only by constructing a sense of intelligible, immutable “reality,” a stable and knowable thingness of things is the Žižek an *gap* between “appearance” and “reality” seemingly traversable. As knowledge accumulates, the gulf appears to narrow. For the Homebody, to understand is to foster delusion.

We shudder to recall the times through which we have lived, the Recent Past, about which no one wants to think; and then, have you noticed? Even the most notorious decade three or four decades later is illuminated from within. Some light inside is switched on. The scenery becomes translucent, beautifully lit; features of the landscape glow; the shadows are full of agreeable color. Cynics will attribute this transformation to senescence and nostalgia; I who am optimistic, have you noticed? attribute this inner illumination to understanding. Ah, now I see what that was all about. Ah, now I see why we suffered so back then, now I see what we went through. I understand. (11-12)

In this passage, Homebody equates understanding to naivety. By studying history, one can peer into the past and uncover the mystery of an epoch. The speaking being is seduced by the glow of understanding. At the same time, the present is a casualty. In the scenario the Homebody describes, the was, the has been, is privileged over that which is. *My perspective always already informs my notions of the world, of justice, of order, of right and wrong. At the same time, however, I am conditioned, interpellated, overlook this distortion and conflate perspective with the Truth.*

To be sure, to accumulate understanding of the world, to “know,” is not villainy. The Homebody, however, suggests that there is that which is beyond understanding, that which can be experienced but never understood. In short, “hard” science and the technical revolution, the exponential progress of (post)modernity, is impregnated with a ghastly potential. Heidegger proposes that science is devoid of *thinking*. Though any scientist would clearly dismiss such a claim, Heidegger’s conception of thought must be examined to qualify this statement. Science investigates, experiments, and discovers, but “science does not think” (“What Calls for Thinking” 373). In all of its investigations, scientific method overlooks the primary inquiry: ““What is it that calls on us to think? What makes a call upon us that we should think and, by thinking, be who we are?” (ibid. 390). *Why the need*, the essential ontological compulsion, to discover? As Heidegger asserts that the Greeks investigate Being (Existence) as a phenomenon apart from being (existing), he proposes that scientific method deliberates without thinking. There is much at stake in the quandary: “The approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced *as the only way* of thinking” (*Discourse on*

Thinking 56). This *calculative thinking* is grounded in the logical, the pragmatic; this thinking aims to understand, but cannot explain. What Heidegger calls “the atomic age” is a time during which the human animal teeters on the brink of *acting without thinking*. Technology, though not inherently evil, can perpetuate this thoughtlessness.

Hourly and daily [we] are chained to radio and television...All that with which modern techniques of communication stimulate, assail, and drive man—all that is already much closer to man today than his fields around his farmstead, closer than the sky over the earth, closer than the change from night to day, closer than the conventions and customs of his village, than the tradition of his native world. (*Discourse on Thinking* 50)

The Homebody flounders in this alienation. Surrounded by a synthetic world, Baudrillard’s simulacra, she is detached from *being in the world*. She exclaims, “the Present is *always* an awful place to be. And it remains awful to us, the scene of our crime, the place of our shame” (11). Paradoxically, her reaction is to withdraw. Instead of crawling into the celluloid refuge of plasma television or chat room cyberspace, she retreats into the obscurity and abstractness of her psyche. She ruminates; she examines; she dissects; she scrutinizes—but her analysis is paralysis. Her reaction to the dilemma is to think without acting.

For Arendt, it is thought without action that typifies the (post)modern condition. Her notion of thinking is similar to the Heideggerian “definition” of thought. Arendt identifies cognition as a primordial return. “The experience of the activity of thought is probably the aboriginal source of our notion of spirituality in itself, regardless of the forms it has assumed” (*Life of the Mind* 44). To think is to commune with the essence of

existence; in thought, one registers the existence of existence, the Being of Being. This is why Julia Kristeva describes Arendt's conception of thinking as access to the sublime and

A unitary characteristic that marks the emergence of meaning outside the world: thinking becomes a glorious scar of the original split that constitutes speaking and thinking beings. In sum, thinking in such a way is a poetic activity in the sense that it is articulated like a work of poetry that seeks not to produce an object of beauty but to endlessly reveal dehiscent truths about the experience that takes place in the condensation that makes each word flourish and the thinker proceeds to divide and expose. (*Hannah Arendt* 195)

As Heidegger calls for a new method of articulation, poetic expression that can “*bring language to language as language*,” Kristeva's description of Arendtian thinking *brings thinking to thinking as thinking* (“The Way to Language” 398). Thinking, however, is not a project in and of itself. Thinking for its own sake accomplishes nothing—thinking, like faith, is dead without action. Arendt claims that “the most momentous of the spiritual consequences of the modern age” is “the reversal of the hierarchal order between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*” (*The Human Condition* 289). Since the Enlightenment, the life of the mind has taken on a life of its own. Arendt proceeds to give an illuminating example of this reversal.

It is a matter of historical record that modern technology has its origins not in the evolution of those tools man had always devised for the twofold purpose of easing his labors and erecting human artifice, but exclusively in

an altogether non-practical search for useless knowledge. Thus, the watch, one of the first modern instruments, was not invented for purposes of practical life, but exclusively for the highly “theoretical” purpose of conducting certain experiments with nature. (ibid. 289)

The undeniably practical application of the watch is an incidental byproduct of the quest for *non-practical* and *useless knowledge*. This example illustrates how a life of action has become subordinate to a life of thought, a reversal Arendt describes as a *momentous spiritual consequence*. Ideally, thought is the precursor to action; thought informs action. “It is important not to limit thinking to its solitude but to guide it toward the goal of developing into judgment. In the political space of appearances and of sharing with other people, to think about the good is not to do good;” thinking should be “used as a means for distinguishing between good and evil” (*Hannah Arendt* 153-4). Such discernment, however, is not a theoretical act. The differentiation is only relevant when culminating in *action*.

In an Arendtian sense, the Homebody, in her monologue, *does* absolutely nothing. Though her mind is her sanctuary from an invasive, ever-expanding public sphere, her mind isolates her from the rest of the world. She divulges, “my husband cannot bear my...the sound of me,” and explains that the gulf between them stems from the fact that she has “read too many books” and speaks “elliptically” and “discursively” (12-13). She states, “my parents don’t speak like this; no one I know does; no one does. It’s an *alien influence*, and my borders have only ever been breached by books. Sad to say” (13). What Arendt describes as the *spiritual consequences* of the *hierarchical reversal* of acting and thinking comes to bear here. Strangely, the Homebody arrives at this

agoraphobic, immobile inactivity as the result of her Heideggerian notions that the present world acts without thinking. She teeters on the brink of oblivion and subsequently consumes “powerful anti-depressants” (13). Despite her sequestered and insulated state, despite the language she employs, the linguistic Gordian knots she weaves, she yearns for connection with other human beings.

Her solution is to throw a party, to host a gathering during which “something catalytic” would occur, “each element triggering transformation in all the other elements till all elements, which is to say, *guests*, are...*surprising* to themselves and return home feeling less, less certain of, of those *certainties* which...*Because* of which, for example, powerful antidepressants are consumed” (15). These *certainties* are the harbinger of death; they destroy mystery, obliterate the spiritual dimension of human existence. Predictability can have a narcotic effect on the human heart; our secret pleasures in the mysterious evaporate. In *Angels in America*, Kushner’s imagines heaven as a place “in which everything is known. To the Great Questions are lying about here like yesterday’s newspapers all the answers. So from what comes the pleasures of Paradise? *Indeterminacy!*” (*Perestroika* 137). Since empirical knowledge cannot fill holes of existential loneliness, and human reason cannot explain the irrational conditions of human existence, the speculative and poetic dance that is ontological investigation perhaps points to the solace we crave. At the same time, Heidegger declares, “the role which philosophy has played up to now has been taken over by the sciences” (*Der Spiegel* Interview, September 1966 108). Hard data and factual evidence, however, do not satisfy the Homebody’s desire for human contact. The party she visualizes is not just

an assembly of bodies; it is the convergence of minds, a transformative event during which authentic connections are forged and alienation alleviated.

The character sits atop a rift; she recoils from an age of expansion and longs to experience the warmth of interaction. At the same time, her Prufrockian self-absorption and cryptic language, as her defenses against the encroachment of “the world’s utter indifference,” only serve to distance her from other human beings (12). She does, however, yearn for the personal encounter. For example, the character consumes the psychotropic medication prescribed to her husband. Homebody tells us, “I frequently take his pills instead of mine so I can know what he’s feeling” (13). As comically bizarre as this statement is, her capsule swap is a positive step, a proactive moment of creative engagement. Although remaining in her comfort zone of a pharmaceutically altered “reality,” she is stepping outside of herself in an effort to connect, in an effort to see the world the way he does. This is not an attempt to change him; she wants to experience him. She “find[s] his refusal to sample dull” because the refusal is a negation of, a disinterest in, the Other.

Milton’s unwillingness to experiment is evidence of a world in which the Other is replaced by an array of objects. Not only is the Other objectified in pill form, the Other is reduced to a commodity that can be purchased. When Homebody makes preparations for the idealized party, she determines that the festivities would not be complete without hats. For Homebody, simple party hats will not do; she must gather exotic headwear from Afghanistan. To secure her items, she must leave the familiarity of her home and wander into the frenzy of the marketplace.

There are shops full of merchandise from exotic locales, wonderful things made by people who believe, as I do not, as *we* do not, in magic; or who used to believe in magic, and not so long ago, whose grandparents believed in magic, believed that some combination of piety, joy, ecstasy, industry, brought to bear on the proper raw materials, wood for instance known to be the favorite nesting place of a certain animus or anima possessed of powers released, enlisted in beneficent ways towards beneficent ends when carved, adorned, adored, just so...before colonization and the savage stripping away of such beliefs. (10)

Once again, the Homebody is confronted by the vapidness of her culture. She privileges these wonderful objects that originate in a world beyond her own, a world that still contains vestiges of the uncorrupted. In her description, however, as she outlines the stark contrasts between Western consumerism and Asian-Middle-Eastern spirituality, she consolidates the Other into the totality of the *exotic locale*, as if all Non-Western culture is united in its Non-Westerness and in its belief in “magic.” Said’s *Orientalism* comes to mind here. As Irigaray asserts that woman is a non-entity, intelligible only in context with masculine subjectivity, Said discusses how the West perceives the East in binary terms. The Eastern Other is intelligible only as an antithetical representation of the Occident. If we can attribute her misstep to a moment of Heideggerian fallenness, we can proceed in unpacking this passage. Essentially, Homebody’s conception of the *exotic locale* is interfused with her notion of the Other. In this binary context, the Other, quite simply, is that which is non-Same. Accordingly, her idealization of this foreign land with alien customs is more of a condemnation of her own culture as a culture that has replaced

mystery with knowledge and has systematically destroyed the magical. This destruction is accomplished, in the age of expansion, by nothing other than *colonization* and imperial domination.

In a post-World-War-II epoch, territorial invasion is no longer the method by which one culture eradicates, or attempts to eradicate, the practices of another. These means are now accomplished economically and/or ideologically. Homebody has access to the goods and services of an entire planet by venturing into the local “Ethnic” market, where she can purchase “Doodahs of a culture once aswarm with spirit matter, radiant with potent magic, the disenchanting dull detritus of which has washed upon our culpable shores, its magic now shriveled into the safe container of *aesthetic*, which is to say, *consumer appeal*” (17). As easily as one can swing into a roadside Stuckey’s and pick up a commemorative Elvis shot-glass, one can buy “authentic” Indian incense. Whether the item is a “genuine” rug or hat, “that which was once Afghan, which we, having waved our credit cards in its general direction, have made into junk” (17). The magic, that is to say, the mystery, of Otherness is obliterated by economic exchange. Furthermore, the transaction is even more insidious insofar as the obliteration is cloaked in the garb of exposure to a foreign land. Far from exposure, however, the objectification of the mystery is domination.

The hat, the rug, the arbitrary *doodah*, has a history, a trajectory, is infinitely stuffed with an entire universe of ontological matter. In a Heideggerian sense, hats and rugs are equipment for living. Each acquires *handiness* (*Zuhandenheit*) when it becomes a *useful thing* (*Zeug*). As something that accomplishes an objective (like keeping a head warm or decorating a floor), the hat or the rug is *ready at hand*. Once, however, one

views an object as merely an object, as an *arbitrary doodah*, for instance, the thing is no longer useful; it is just a thing, something merely present at hand. The equipmental relation explodes in fiery supernova when an item is picked-up-while-running-errands or ordered-off-Ebay. The thingness of the thing vaporizes into anonymity when it becomes just an object which is indifferently and immediately accessible.

A many-cameled caravan, having roamed across the entire postcolonial not-yet-developed world, crossing the borders of the rainforested kingdoms of Kwashiorkor and Rickets and Untreated Gum Disease and High Infant Mortality Rates, gathering with desperate indiscriminateness...on the mudpitted unpaved trade route its bits and boodle, had finally beached its great heavy no longer portable self in a narrow coal-scuttle of a shop on _____, *here*, here, caravanseraied here, in the developed and overdeveloped and over-overdeveloped paved wasted now delinquent post-First World postmodern city of London; all the camels having flopped and toppled and fallen here and died of exhaustion, of shock, of the heartache of refugees, the goods simply piled high upon their dromedary bones, just where they came to rest. (20)

Homebody notwithstanding, the inauthentic subject (or the narcissistic consumer) is oblivious to the haunted past of the object and indifferent to how the “things” we use are our tools in the task of living. Lives, craftsmanship, pain, trauma: all are condensed into the finitude of an item for sale. Oblivion to all that *flops and topples*, convenient denial

of or apathetic disinterest in the Other, focus only on the utility of the object, destroys the divine magic of the Other, the magic of the thing, and the magic of potentiality.

For Homebody, action without thought, thought without action, globalization, industrialization, automation, and the end of “magic” signal an apocalyptic event. The end of “magic” marks the erasure of Otherness. As “magic” ends, so does the mystical, the spiritual, the mysterious. The myths in which human beings live are the theological, scientific, historical, and cultural narratives that cohere as the subject’s sense of “self.” The “magic” of a rain-dance, sacrificial ritual, or the transubstantiation of communion are human attempts to tap into the mystery of that which is unknowable. Freud argues that the accumulation of knowledge and technical discovery has tempered the human reliance on the mystical. As for the magical, he asserts,

We—or our primitive fathers—once believed that these possibilities were realities, and were convinced that they actually happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have *surmounted* these modes of thought; but we do not quite feel sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny. (“The ‘Uncanny’” 949)

For the Homebody, what *actually happens* is that she discovers that the dismissal of *old, discarded beliefs* in mystery and the unknowable is problematic. Uncannily, the vestiges of radical Otherness emerge within her psyche and she is haunted by their absence in the world around her. Consequently, she is no longer able to suppress her desire for the mystical.

When analyzing the Homebody's dilemma, it is helpful to compare her to another figure from the Kushner canon. In *Angels in America*, Harper, the pill-popping, quasi-prophetic housewife groping through a world she does not understand, pierces the gilded veneer of the Symbolic and discovers the terrifying conditions of Real human existence, saying, "when we think we've escaped the unbearable ordinariness and, well, untruthfulness of our lives, it's really only the same ordinariness and falseness rearranged into the appearance of novelty and truth. Nothing unknown is knowable" (*Millennium Approaches* 32). Like Homebody, Harper pursues the mystery *as mystery*. She is far more "at home" in her world of fantasy than she is in her Manhattan apartment. Harper, as do Žižek, Arendt, and Heidegger, suggests that the search for the Truth, like the alchemist's quest for gold, is an exercise in self-deception. On the one hand, this discovery is liberating. On the other, she experiences a terrifying sense of disillusionment. The human experience is rooted in the Symbolic; it is rooted in stability. In this sense, it is rooted in the illusion of order. When this illusion is exposed as illusory, one teeters on the brink of madness. Ironically, however, in this "madness," she comes in contact with the Real. Harper relates these notions through an atmospheric metaphor.

Thirty miles above our heads, a thin layer of three-atom oxygen molecules, product of photosynthesis, which explains the fussy vegetable preference for visible light, its rejection of darker rays and emanations. Danger from without. It's a kind of gift, from God, the crowning touch to the creation of the world: guardian angels, hands linked, make a spherical net, a blue-green nesting orb, a shell of safety for life itself. But

everywhere, things are collapsing, lies surfacing, systems of defense giving way. (ibid. 16-17)

The ozone layer functions as does the Symbolic order. Life is protected from lethal radiation by *a thin layer of molecules* much like the abysmal chaos of material reality is concealed by Symbolic structures. What happens, however, when these structures give way? As Žižek explains, ideology only functions when it provides the illusion of wholeness and, in so doing, nestles the human psyche in the warm fantasy of order. Clearly, for Harper and Homebody, the fantasy has exploded.

For the Homebody, the horrors of postmodern life are oceanic. She describes herself as

safe in her kitchen, on her culpable shore, suffering uselessly watching others perish in the sea, wringing her plump little maternal hands, oh, oh. Never *joining* the drowning. Her feet, neither rooted nor moving. The ocean is deep and cold and erasing. But how dreadful, really unpardonable, to remain dry. Look at her, look at her, she is so unforgivably dry. Neither here nor there. She does not drown, she...succumbs. To Luxury. (28)

Afloat on the velvet sea of familiarity, the Homebody does not participate in life; she does not engage a Symbolic which she has, with *plump maternal hands*, aided in conceiving. Describing “our individual degrees of culpability,” the Homebody declares that we are “bound up in our correspondent degrees of action, malevolent or not, or in our correspondent degrees of inertia, which can be taken as a form of malevolent action if you’ve a mind to see it that way” (24). She acknowledges her responsibility; she

acknowledges *our* responsibility to preserve alterity. All around her, she sees individuals like her, people who have spent their lives clinging to familiarity. She does not want her child to repeat this mistake. “I so wanted her to be out in the world, my daughter. Of use” (28). Homebody speaks in past tense here, as if she has given up on her daughter’s possibilities and on her own possibilities as a mother. Clearly, however, Homebody has not lost hope. Though London may not provide the ideological terrain that can transform the Homebody and her daughter, Afghanistan does provide this regenerative realm.

The Middle East is far from the homogenized western world, far removed from a world in which mystery is eradicated by a monolithic public sphere. “When we *choose* to interpret our being in the public way—living in the world of the one (*das Man*), doing ‘what one does’ because it is either ‘right’ or the comfortable thing to do—we ‘fall’ into the inauthentic way of being” (Hall 137). As the authenticity of the commodity at the ethnic market is lost in its immediate availability, the authenticity of the individual is consumed by a socio-economic-political worldview in which everything must be known, understood, touched.

In a letter to Karl Lowith, Heidegger articulates a sense of revolt akin to the Homebody’s urge to leave London. “For years, a saying of van Gogh’s has obsessed me: ‘I feel with all my power that the history of man is like that of wheat: if one is not planted in the earth to flourish, come what may, one will be ground up for bread.’ Woe to him who is not pulverized” (qtd in Lowith 170). Lowith interprets Heidegger’s musings as the philosopher’s philosophy of philosophy. “Instead of devoting oneself to the general need for cultivation, as one would upon receiving the command to ‘save culture,’ one must—in a [time of] radical disintegration and regression, a *Destruction*—convince

oneself firmly of ‘the one thing that matters’ without bothering with the chatter and bustle of clever and enterprising men” (ibid. 170). For Homebody, the *one thing that matters* is the mystery of Otherness, the preservation of alterity. The *chatter and bustle* of *the they* convey inherited standards for conduct and transmit roles and responsibilities. On a basic level, a parent is responsible for the wellbeing of her/his child, but how this well-being takes shape is variable. As will be discussed later, the Homebody does not leave London to serve exclusively her best interests; she embarks on a quest for mystery in order to redeem herself and save her child. As the reason for Priscilla’s trek to Afghanistan, Homebody gets her daughter out in the world. Furthermore, as Žižek argues, “the will to revolutionary change emerges as an urge, as an “I cannot do otherwise,” or it is worthless...an authentic revolution is by definition performed as a Must—it is not something we “ought to do,” as an ideal for which we are striving, but something we cannot but do, since we cannot do otherwise” (*The Parallax View* 334). In this context, the Homebody simply cannot bear the pressures of an inauthentic world. She cannot abide the destruction of mystery and the ascension of empirical knowledge. Unwilling to endure the emptiness and alienation of the postmodern world, she is compelled to make a radical choice. Her decision to go to Afghanistan, as an expression of revolt, is not something that she considers to be the-right-thing-to-do or a-good-idea. On the contrary, her decision to flee London is not a decision at all; it is an obligation. Homebody *must* take action.

In a Heideggerian context, Homebody undertakes her *revolutionary change* as an “essentially futural being...that is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factual ‘there’ by shattering itself against death...can, by handing down to itself the

possibility it has inherited, take over its thrownness and be in the *moment of vision* for ‘its time’” (qtd in Lowith 170). Clearly, the Homebody experiences a *moment of vision*. In the original edition of the play, the character merely undergoes a moment of clarity; in the revised edition, however, this moment is followed by resolute action. *Thrown into* millennial London, *hurled into* a capitalist culture, she *takes over* her *factual there* and flees to Afghanistan. Furthermore, by simulating and choreographing her demise, she *shatters her* they-self *against death*. Her ontological transformation is solidified upon this symbolic obliteration. To live in *the they* is to evade choice and compliantly follow the trajectory they outline.

Ironically, the Homebody seeks shelter in the dogmatic doctrine of Islam. She flees a culture in which the world is organized and rationally understood for a society in which theology is cogently “understood” and revealed through divine law. Destabilized and disoriented, she seeks refuge in a transhistoric God (at least according to the message to Priss from Homebody via Zai Garshi). At the same time, however, it is the mysterious power of God, not the secular or rational, that informs cultural practices. Furthermore, the burqa provides literal anonymity. By immersing herself in a Muslim nation, the Homebody not only *experiences* Otherness (instead of reading about it in an outdated guidebook), she can do so in a world in which *the private* is very much alive. With face covered, she is hidden, mysterious, unconcealed, unavailable.

In the twilight of his life, Heidegger describes an ethereal onto-theology when he claims, “philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all merely human thought and endeavor. Only a god can save us” (*Der Spiegel* Interview, September 1966

107). Heidegger continues to describe “god” as a term interfused “with the word Being,” a signifier that is a “traditional, multifaceted, and worn out” concept that “needs man for its revelation,” and he concludes that since “we can not think him into being; we can at most awaken the readiness of expectation” (ibid. 107). In a time during which “philosophy is at an end,” replaced by technology, science, logic, and economic-political theory, one attunes oneself to the *readiness of expectation* by what Heidegger calls “other thinking,” a way of thought in which “silence is required to preserve thinking from being all jammed up” (ibid. 107-8). The Homebody exhibits this Heideggerian impulse. Not only does she pursue a Muslim God to rescue her from the pitfalls of western philosophy, her thinking is *preserved* in silence; her ideas are not *jammed up* by speech. After scene one, we never hear from Homebody again. Instead, we are left to sift through the consequences of her *actions*.

In the original version of the play, the Homebody, as a person, is a profound failure. Though in her monologue she may illuminate her failings, and, in so doing, present to an audience/reader her destructive mode of being, thus providing a model for how *not* to live life, as an individual, she is a profoundly flawed human being. She is self-obsessed, recondite, and almost completely unintelligible. Those attributes, however, do not comprise her failings. She is a failure *because she is irrelevant*; she does not act. She remains safely nestled in her imagination, quarantined from the horrors of the world.

It is only in her imagination that she engages the Afghan shopkeeper. In a moment of economic exchange, she purchases her party hats from a disfigured ethnic stranger. “As I hand the card to him I see that three fingers on his right hand have been hacked off, following the clean line of a perfect clean diagonal from middle, to ring to

little finger, which, the last of the three fingers in the diagonal cut's descent, by um, hatchet blade? was hewn off almost completely" (21). During this transaction, credit card consumerism collides with an Afghan hand that has been mangled by the ravages of turbulent, violent history. The information in the guidebook and the visceral world of experience merge in this moment of exposure to the Other. Though Homebody admits, "I know nothing of this hand, its history, of course, nothing," through fantasy, she engages this stranger (21). In this sense, her interaction with the shopkeeper is not dictated by "knowledge;" it is informed by the magic and mystery of creative engagement. "While I am signing the credit card receipt I realize all of a sudden that I am able to speak perfect Pushtu" (23). In stark contrast to later acts when Pashtun and Dari are spoken and *not* translated, this world of imagination is without language barriers. Proximity transcends the linguistic gulf. At this moment, the Homebody, at least in her imaginative world, is *being-with*; she is communing with the mystery of Otherness. In this communion, she produces the shopkeeper's history; she writes his narrative.

The streets are as bare as the mountains now, the buildings are as ragged as mountains and as bare and empty of life, there is no life here only fear, we do not live in the buildings now, we live in terror in the cellars in the caves in the mountains, only God can save us now, only order can save us now, only God's Law harsh and strictly administered can save us now...save us from terror and neverending war, save my wife they are stoning my wife, they are chasing her with sticks, save my wife save my daughter from punishment by God, from war, from exile, from oil exploration, from no oil exploration, from the West, from the children with

rifles, carrying stones, only children with rifles, carrying stones can save us now. (24)

In the hat merchant's "story," the chaos, conflict, and contradictions of Kabul come to bear. Moreover, the Homebody's forthcoming conversion to Islam is foreshadowed. God, the immanent, transcendent, trans-historic, is the ultimate mystery and refuge from the "knowing" mind that corrupts the human world. In this moment, however, the Homebody, through imagination and creativity, appropriates the Other. As Beneatha in *Raisin in the Sun* imagines a Yoruban tribal dance and then projects that image as rhythmic body movements that are, for her, "Yoruban tribal dance," the Homebody never communicates with the shopkeeper. All interaction is fantasy. The story of him that she tells is complete fabrication. At the same time, her narrative preserves alterity; she maintains a sense of difference, of a life to which she cannot relate. Finally, her fantasy culminates in a moment of physical intimacy during which the two "make love beneath a chinar tree," and when the man "places his hand inside" her, it is a "whole hand" (26). Although the Homebody exhibits an interest in the Other, a willingness and compulsion to interact with another human being, she objectifies the Other through sexualization and narrative. In sum, her fantasy, as fantasy, transpires as monologue.

In this fantasy, though there is no action, there is exposure. Mere exposure, however, is insufficient. Action is paramount. In the monologue, therefore, in this original version of the play, the Homebody *fails*. Though one might speculate that her-heart-is-in-the-right-place, it is only when intention and action merge that anything can actually *happen*. In the original version of the play, the Homebody only articulates dissatisfaction. In the revised edition, however, her experience with/of the Afghan

shopkeeper clearly becomes the catalyst for her radical action. It is only with this stranger that the Homebody expresses a sense of connection. Ironically enough, there is no literal connection. As a result, the Homebody takes flight to Afghanistan. She seeks to materialize the fantasy...or so we are led to believe.

In the revised version of the play, therefore, the character assumes a profoundly different shape. Instead of merely hemorrhaging self-indulgent, intellectually masturbatory contemplation, the Homebody's passive, narcissistic malaise boils over, and she engages the world around her. Instead of remaining suspended in the Western tree of knowledge, withering on its vines, she cuts herself loose, denounces an entire socio-political-economic-ethico paradigm, and journeys into the heart of mystery. Though we can only speculate how effective this drastic move is for Homebody, the impact her decision makes on Milton and Priscilla becomes clear.

It is in Kabul where Homebody makes an impact on her family. Ironically, it is in absence that she affects her daughter and husband so drastically. On the most basic level, Priscilla and Milton are extracted from familiarity; they leave London for Afghanistan so they can discover what has happened to the Homebody. The strange circumstances of her murder are made stranger by the fact that the body has been lost. But, once again, we only have scattered testimonies, delivered in broken English, to substantiate the tale. As the story goes, the Homebody was attacked, dismembered, and murdered for disrespecting the fundamentalist cultural practices instituted and enforced by the Taliban. She was not covered by a burqua and was listening to music through headphones.

Interestingly, the shift from scene one to scene two, the shift from the Homebody's monologue in London to a hotel room in Kabul, is a change in both setting

and diction. The reader/audience is freed from the Homebody's quixotic banter, but her esoteric patois is replaced immediately by the ambiguous terminology of Doctor Qari Shah, a Kabuli physician trained in Scotland, who speaks in English to the Ceilings about the Homebody's disappearance. As the Homebody speaks the specialized language of a pedantic educated elite, a language deliberately obtuse and therefore alienating, the doctor communicates in his own specialized lexicon. He speaks *medicine*.

After dislocation of the humerus from the glenohumeral joint, there was separation and consequent calamitous exsanguination from the humeral stump...The axillary fascia of the right, ah, hemispherical eminence, um, mamma, um *breast*, torn off either by force of a blow or as the corpus is dragged. Her left eye being enucleated, and from dull force the occiput sheared cleanly off. And consequently to which, spillage of, ah, contents.
(32).

According to the physician, Homebody's arm and breast were torn off, her eyeball ripped from its socket, and her skull opened enough for portions of her brain to have spilled out of her head. The dark comedy of this moment is made possible only through the language that Kushner employs here. The technical language produces a distance from the material reality, the gravity, of the situation. Though a linguistic system is that which enables individuals to communicate with one another, the Homebody and this doctor deploy language that is radically alienating...alienating to the point of humorous detachment from the world(s) they describe. Adding to the humor, the doctor assures Milton and Priscilla that "there seems to have been no forcible invasions of the introitus;" since the Homebody was not raped, "she was not dishonored," as if being beaten to death

by rusty iron bars is incidental (32). Furthermore, the Homebody's body has been lost; there is, therefore, no body to claim; there is simply a graphic narrative.

The blackness of the humor also registers exposure to the uncanny. Mortality is clearly *something familiar that must be repressed*. At the same time, however, Heidegger argues that exposure to the materiality of existence forces the speaking being to "reckon with time" (*Being and Time* 217) [235]. Only through this reckoning, this attunement to finitude and temporality, can a subject be characterized as authentic, as "being-toward-death as a being *toward a possibility*" (ibid. 241) [261]. Becoming aware of one's inevitable demise, awareness prompted by exposure to death, can jettison Da-sein from the clutches of *the they* and propel it to embrace resoluteness and conviction. Kristeva describes this moment as exposure to the abject. "The abject is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments" ("Approaching Abjection" 241). For Priscilla and Milton, there are no mangled remains; there is nothing visible. In death, the Homebody is as lost as she was in life. They mourn for a lifeless body, and this corpse is literally a *lost object*. Priscilla yearns for the object. "If they ripped her open at least I'll finally get to see her fucking secrets" (42). Hoping that the physical body will reveal ontological secrets, Priscilla conflates the object with the abject. It is not simply a cadaver that is lost. For Homebody, what is lost is mystery; for Priscilla and Milton, a family member is lost. Ontologically, however, for all three characters, authentic being has been lost in Symbolic Law and *the they*. In Afghanistan, the characters are *approaching abjection*; as the play develops, they each *shatter the wall of repression*.

Milton's verbal response to his wife's murder illustrates his repressive barrier. Though he cries in front of his daughter for the first time in their lives, further evidence of the disconnection between family members to which the Homebody alludes in her monologue, he quickly discards his emotion for a *rational* outlook. When Milton, a man whose job "has something to do with the routing of multiple expressive electronic tone signals at extraordinary speeds across millions upon millions of kilometers of wire and cable and fiber and space," discusses with his daughter the horrors Homebody must have endured when assaulted, he situates the graphic murder of his wife in the context of cognitive science (14). "They say in some circumstances the screams simply come out of you and you don't know immediately who it is doing the screaming, you have not made the decision to scream and yet screams are issuing forth. Which is probably a good thing, because it implies that within you there is a person more competent than yourself at assessing and responding to danger" (38-9). Milton focuses on objects; he represses the ontological gravity of trauma and death. Priscilla, skeptical of her mother's disappearance, wonders why the discman was not damaged in the assault, Milton explains that "Japanese plastics" are "durable stuff," a toughness that can be "ultimately explained by high-impact polystyrenes" (38). Upon the discovery of his wife's brutal murder, Milton speaks *science*. In this sense, *science does not think*. Milton understands chemical compounds and synthetic materials, but does not *understand* that *calculative thinking* does not address the fact that Priscilla's questions are existential.

Priscilla, frustrated that the body is lost and suspicious at the very possibility that the body *could* be lost, questions the actuality of the murder. "Maybe she's hiding. From us" (40). Priscilla senses the truth of her mother's disappearance; she intuitively that the

Homebody has “finally...acted” (65). A woman who always “demanded interpretation” and was so “unyieldingly secretive” has engaged the world through active participation (65). If she is alive, her disappearance perhaps “wasn’t ever a rejection, just an invitation to understand” (65). Priscilla, therefore, embarks on a quest to solve the mystery.

On the streets of Kabul, Priscilla enacts a surreal repetition. With face uncovered and headphones on, she sits and smokes a cigarette without a male chaperone. Behaving with this disregard for local custom is what precipitated her mother’s alleged murder. Immediately, the Munkrat, an enforcer of Muslim religious law, appears to punish her misconduct. He first condemns Priscilla for her actions, but he naturally speaks his native tongue. This is the first moment in the play during which a character speaks untranslated Pashtun. Priscilla and the audience, alike, are totally disoriented by the experience until a Kabuli native, Khwaja, intervenes. “Please forgive this Western lady. She is my responsibility, I am her mahram, she is my niece” (45). When the Munkrat prepares to beat Priscilla with a rubber hose, Khwaja swipes it from his hand to prevent the assault. As a result, Khwaja is kicked and battered. In a profoundly ethical moment, this stranger takes the beating *for* Priscilla. Oddly, however, her response to this event is indifferent. *She does not thank him. She does not even acknowledge his sacrifice.* Instead, she fears him. “Are you Taliban,” she asks, as if the Afghan Other is indistinguishable from religious extremism (48). After convincing her that he is not a threat, a relationship is forged; Khwaja will be Priscilla’s guide and chaperone for ten pounds a day.

As Khwaja guides Priscilla through the cramped and dusty Kabuli streets, Quango, an Englishman who has lived in the area for years functioning as an “unofficial” British diplomat and relief worker, educates Milton from a different perspective.

One of six newborn babies die here. One in every six. About half of the remaining Afghan children die before they reach the age of five. And thirty-five percent of those hardy survivors are drastically malnourished, I mean little pot-bellied skeletons, starving slowly to death. On the Human Index Rank this place is 169th of 174 countries, it’s not really a state at all, it’s a populated disaster. The only reason it’s not considered *the* worst for women is because the Afghans don’t do genital mutilation. Most of the arable land is land-mined. (51)

Quango describes the gritty reality of life in Kabul. In so doing, he references *the Human Index Rank*, a system by which a country’s quality of life can be measured. According to a nation’s available medicine, economy, standards for education, and an array of other factors, its “worth” is calculated. In a Heideggerian context, this sort of organization and pattern recognition is problematic.

Fundamentally, this plethora of information seduces us into failing to see the real problem. The syncretistic comparison and classification of everything does not itself give us genuine essential knowledge. Subjecting the manifold to tabulation does not guarantee a real understanding of what has been ordered. The genuine principle of order has its own content which is never found by ordering, but is rather already presupposed in ordering. Thus the explicit idea of world as such is a

prerequisite for the order of world images. And if “world” itself is constitutive of Da-sein, the conceptual development of the phenomenon of world requires an insight into the fundamental structures of Da-sein.

(Being and Time 48) [52]

Afghanistan is a *place*, a *people*, complete with a history, a tradition, a culture.

Undeniably, the material conditions of the region make life difficult. At the same time, as Heidegger asserts above, *the conceptual development of the phenomenon of world requires an insight into the fundamental structures of Da-sein*. Without respect for and focus on the human dimension of a country, a region is “understood” according to demographic formulas and statistical data. The information gleaned from such practice *does not guarantee a real understanding of what has been ordered*. Without proximity, without an experience of life in Afghanistan, an experience of the Kabuli people and their ontological world, these numbers are worthless. As an “index,” the “rank” of Afghanistan is intelligible and possible only in context with other countries. Under such conditions, a baseline exists, a standard for living, against which all countries are measured.

Quango explains the implicit structure of this baseline. He tells Milton that Afghanistan “used to be a fully functioning country,” a society replete with “secretaries in modern dresses” and “lady ticket-takers at the cinema” (51). In short, the nation was colonized. Western influence, however, has dissolved and the tidy veneer imposed by Anglo-American “order” has been removed. In warring efforts to fill the power vacuum, roads and buildings have been destroyed, chaos has emerged, and the Real material and ontological conditions of human existence pulse in clear view. The madness of human

existence—disorder, disorganization, unpredictability—is exposed. Interestingly, though Quango describes the country as “a disease,” he tells Milton, “I love this place” (54, 51). What Quango loves *is* the madness. He calls the Afghanis “the bravest people on earth” because they endure such hardship on a regular basis (101). He admires their courage, but he in no way attempts to emulate it.

Much like Homebody, he has fled England to disappear in the strangeness of this foreign culture. Unlike the Homebody, however, Quango is a nihilist. His nihilism, however, is pathological self-absorption. For Heidegger, nihilism is a positive condition of human life. Our “existence, stripped of all security and standing in relation to nothing other than itself, constitutes the essence of Da-sein in Heideggerian philosophy; and Da-sein itself is the foundation of all awareness of Being. Pure Da-sein, the fundamental thesis of existential philosophy, presupposes that all traditional truths and contents of life have lost their substance” (Lowith 174). Under these conditions, the speaking being has choices. Once liberated from the shackles of prevailing ideology, from the chains of convention and tradition, the subject can pursue meaning and strive for its potentiality, and in so doing, uncover its “purpose,” extract meaning that is concealed in the narcotic haze of everydayness, or the subject can spiral into amorality, self-gratification, and revel in the pathological freedom of meaninglessness. Quango clearly opts for the latter. Though he admires the courage of the Afghan people *because* they, as a culture being-unto-death and exposed daily to the materiality of existence, struggle onward, he is drawn to Kabul because the city is devoid of the rigidly outlined, organized, and fastidiously maintained “order” of the “civilized” world. In *Homebody/Kabul*, Afghanistan is a rogue state, a culture in transition and ill defined. Quango loves the chaos. In this world

outside the law, he can sleep soundly in the warm cradle of heroin addiction with impunity; he can indulge egoistic desires.

Khwaja, on the other hand, guides Priscilla through an entirely different world. With him, she engages native culture. She experiences the city, its customs and history. When she speaks to Khwaja, she speaks the tongue of solipsism. “I’ve never seen anything so...I’ve never traveled. Not anywhere. We went to Paris once, but I didn’t look” (56). As her guide points historical markers, pillars that mark the battle-sites of Kabul’s tumultuous past, Priscilla articulates her cultural narcissism. *I’ve never seen anything so...hideous? Terrifying? Beautiful? Unlike London?* She does not say. She does, however, explain that engaging the Other, even the Western, Parisian Other, is of little importance to her. She is interested in the familiar.

Khwaja, however, is profoundly interested in the *un*familiar. He rejects aspects of his native customs. As a socialist, he fought for reform. He engaged in “women literacy campaigns” and sought “the elimination of the veil” (57). Khwaja’s efforts to level-the-playing-field resulted in his incarceration. During his six years behind bars, he had a cellmate who spoke many languages.

I asked him, please, to teach me English. He refused; he would teach me something much better: an international language, spoken in every nation on earth. I had never heard of such a marvel! Esperanto. It was created by a Polish Jew, Zamenhof, who believed that until we could speak to one another in a mother tongue which draws from us our common humanity, peace will never be attained. Who doesn’t want peace? Who would not want to be able to speak the world’s language? (58)

As Khwaja enthusiastically tells his tale of connection and even speaks to Priscilla in this universal language, Priscilla conveys her deeply rooted cynicism. “But it hasn’t worked, that idea. Common humanity. It’s crap, really” (59). For Priscilla, the possibility for human connection is a myth. Why should she think otherwise? Raised by an unreachable, unknowable mother and a pragmatic father who is more adept at working with machines than with humans, Priscilla has experienced alienation for most of her life.

The extent of this alienation is painfully clear when Priscilla and Milton discuss her ordeal at a mental institution. What Milton evasively describes as “a past record of mental affliction,” Priscilla directly calls “attempted suicide” (62). Clearly, however, the episode is something that the family has suppressed entirely, partitioned off to the realm of taboo, unspeakable. Priscilla informs her father, “when I took those sleeping pills I was pregnant,” and she continues that the Homebody was aware of the pregnancy. “I told her and told her. She just...couldn’t talk about it. All those words, but not a one for me” (95). *All those words* were ramparts: the more abstruse her vocabulary, the more effective the barricade. Far from Esperanto, Homebody’s cabalistic communication was deliberately non-communicative. As a result, Priscilla explains, “I needed... a place with close solid walls and an utter absence of the two of you. And *you* certainly stayed away. The electroshock was just dramatic effect, I agreed to it to punish you two” (64). Again, a repetition is evident here. In London, the Homebody withdraws into psychological isolation, exhibiting linguistic separation from her family and from culture; in Afghanistan, she seeks physical escape. Priss, in suicide, sought absolute separation and in confinement to a psychiatric facility, sought physical escape. Mother and daughter, alike, however, endure the same paradox: in self-imposed isolation, each seeks

connection. Priscilla reveals this contradiction. Though she yearned to free herself from her parents, she harbors resentment that they did not reach out to her. “I was in there for months. You never visited once” (64). Priscilla was reared in an environment of self-absorption. Her parents are profoundly self-involved and, as *Homebody* illustrates throughout her monologue, this self-involvement is indoctrinated by a culture of consumerism, expansion, and acquisition. Moreover, this cultural narcissism is validated and subsequently perpetuated by its scientific prowess...its ability to discover, achieve, and demystify.

It is no surprise, then, that only thousands of miles away from the “civilized” world can this conversation take place. In a random hotel room in the middle of Kabul, Afghanistan, father and daughter confront an event they have avoided ever since it happened. The physical space is away from the order of carefully arranged and organized social structure, terrain that is therefore conceptually and physically outside identifiable and stable Law. In *Homebody/Kabul*, Afghanistan does possess its own set of cultural practices; its infrastructure and ideology are patchwork, a montage.

With different “guides,” Milton and Priscilla have profoundly different outlooks on Afghanistan and its people. Priscilla moves beyond the familiar. Like her mother, she integrates into local culture and customs. Milton, on the other hand, remains in the confines of the hotel room. He does not venture out into the land. The mystery, the weirdness of the circumstances, is more than he can bear. Without concrete knowledge of the situation, without an intellectual command, a knowing grasp, he unravels. He consumes alcohol to excess; he smokes opium.

Though Priscilla begins her journey in Kabul as a self-obsessed cynic, she transforms. Walking around Kabul with Khwaja prompts in her a major psychological change. “I can’t believe this day. It’s as if there’s more room suddenly, and air to breathe. Something snapped, or sprung loose. I can’t tell you how uncharacteristic this is. Me, trudging about. She really would be surprised” (60). In an epiphanic moment, Priscilla connects deeply with her absent mother. Priscilla muses over the possibility that Homebody’s disappearance was “an invitation to understand” (65). Priscilla begins to understand that the Homebody, in characteristically cryptic fashion, has vanished to the ends of the earth in an effort to jettison her daughter from the plague of everydayness, from the blight of ethnocentricity, from the gilded cage of familiarity. In Baudelaire’s poem “Invitation to the Voyage,” a brother attempts to lure his sister away from the harshness of being and into the superior world of the imagination, a place in which “there is nothing else but grace and measure,/Richness, quietness, and pleasure.” *Come Fly With Me*, the Frank Sinatra album Homebody leaves in her discman, functions in a similar capacity. Sinatra invites the listener to “glide, starry eyed” in a “perfect” world (“Come Fly with Me”). Homebody conveys a similar message: *step outside of yourself; experience the magic of otherness; engage the fullness of humanity*. Unlike Baudelaire and Sinatra, however, the Homebody urges her daughter to go beyond the imaginary and step into actual engagement with other human beings. It is in interaction that a superior world can be experienced. Priscilla takes the bait. Catherine Stevenson argues that the Homebody “perform[s] actions that disrupt the status quo and the fixity of identity,” serving to “shift location” and “stir up change” (759). Through monumental revolt, Homebody thrusts her daughter into personal and ethical responsibility. As a result,

Priscilla experiences a sense of joy in the fundamentally ethical act of engagement. Her time in Afghanistan is a far cry from the narrow-minded blindness to Otherness she experienced in Paris. She shares her newfound excitement with her father. “I marveled at myself. Ooh, Priscilla! Priscilla Ceiling in Kabul! Embarrassing. Never really done that before. Marveled. All day, I’ve felt like laughing” (65). Priscilla is amazed at her ability to surprise herself, to open up to the Other. This event is *embarrassing* in so far as it is ironic; across an ocean and within a foreign culture, Priscilla is more capable of connecting to other human beings, her father included, than she ever was within her native environment.

Upon learning that her mother is not dead, that she has actually faked her death in an effort to liberate herself from her past, Priscilla’s attitude understandably shifts dramatically. When told by a Kabuli messenger, Zai Garshi, that “your mother, she wish you to know, she is not dead,” that she “have spoken the kaleema” and converted to Islam, that she wants to “marry to a pious Muslim man,” and that “she wish to remain in Kabul, not to see you nor the father of you” ever again, Priscilla becomes enraged and *falls prey* to thematizing the Afghan people: “This is...this is nonsense. I’m not fucking stupid, you know, I’m SORRY we treated you so wickedly back in, when was it, 1879, but I’m not fucking AMERICAN, *we* didn’t fire missiles at wherever it was, YOU NASTY FUCKING PIG, WHERE IS MY MOTHER WHERE IS SHE?” (77). In total shock, Priscilla directs her anger at the messenger. “My mother would never, never...do any of this, anything like this, this man is lying” (77). Moreover, her anger possesses a cultural dimension. The conversation transcends the present and delves into historic antagonism between the East and the West. The “progress” she has made evaporates

when she assumes the combative stance of “we” and “you,” of *us and them*, of Other and Same. Priscilla repudiates and fears the other; she presumes that her mother has been abducted for ransom or actually murdered, after all. The young woman cannot conceive that her mother would make such a radical choice.

As the drama unfolds, however, precisely what it is that Homebody has fled comes into sharper focus. Priscilla returns to her hotel room to find that her father has “been smoking opium with Quango” (92). Ironically, though Milton would not ingest his wife’s medication and experience her chemical reality, he does consume heroin, partly because he “had to stop taking...antidepressants because they interact poorly with the nivaquine,” and partly because the events in Afghanistan are so overwhelming (74). Under the influence of opiates, Milton articulates the corrosive elements of his Western, capitalistic, ethnocentric culture. First, he describes a narcotic vision: “I dreamt of an iron-banded oaken chest full of gold and I fucked it” (92). In this fantasy, he sexualizes his hunger for material wealth. This is a clear illustration of Marxian commodity fetishism. As Žižek explains:

Money is in reality just an embodiment, a condensation, a materialization of a network of social relations—the fact that it functions as a universal equivalent of all commodities is conditioned by its position in the texture of social relations. But to the individuals themselves, this function of money—to be the embodiment of wealth—appears as an immediate, natural property of a thing called ‘money’, as if money is already in itself, in its immediate reality, the embodiment of wealth. (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 31).

In this fetishistic illusion, the diamond, the ruby, the gold, the currency, possesses innate value. This, of course, is not the case; an object's "worth" is entirely imposed by a cultural or socio-economic system. For Milton, however, money, in this case gold as *the embodiment of wealth*, is sexualized. It becomes the ultimate object of his desire. In Lacanian terms, objet *a*, the locus of Milton's desires, that which he perceives will make him "whole," is money, the kernel of a capitalist society. For Žižek, the dream is *the reality*. In the dream-state, the dreamer taps into fantasy, desire unregulated by "appropriate" standards for behavior inculcated in the subject through the process of socialization.

First, he constructs a dream, a story which enables him to prolong his sleep, to avoid awakening into a reality. But the thing that he encounters in the dream, the reality of his desire, the Lacanian Real...is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself, and that is why he awakens: to escape the Real of his desire, which announces itself in the terrifying dream. He escapes into so-called reality to be able to continue to sleep, to maintain his blindness, to elude awakening into the real of his desire. (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 45)

Commodity fetishism, privileging the thing, the object, over *the network of social relations*, is the beating heart of Milton's desire. Exposure to this "reality" produces what Milton calls, "an orgasm deep inside my head" (92). Milton's dream is intensified by the fact that it is drug-induced. When Milton awakens to *so-called reality*, therefore, there is no refuge from the Real he encountered in the dream...he awakens to the haze of a narcotic fog.

He awakens to the “quiet and calm” of his self-imposed isolation (92). He returns to (compromised) coherence away from the madness of Kabul; he emerges from his slumber sequestered in an environment insulated from the Other, an insulation that is his umbilicus to the familiar. High on opium, he is still tethered to the dreamland. As he speaks his *truth* of his oak-chest fantasy, he speaks his *true* conceptions of Afghanistan as an inferior world. “These people who are the ruthless creatures of a culture, if I may call it that, a culture of betrayal and brutality and dissembling,” who speak a language “composed entirely of gutturals and sounds like a toilet backing up” (93). *These people* are profoundly different. They do not privilege money; they do not privilege the object. They worship a god Milton does not understand in a manner Milton considers savage. He is stunned that his wife left him and married one of these *creatures* and states, “Which, allow me to point out, she might just as easily have done in London, and a nice Western sort of Muslim, too, not one of these...barbarians” (93). This attitude is that from which the Homebody is in flight. The Other, the Muslim or the Arab, is respectable only insofar as it is intelligible. It is only *human*, that is to say, not a *creature*, insofar as it is the Same. In this sense, assimilation is the death of alterity. As woman is understood only in terms of male subjectivity, as George Murchison mimics prevailing ideology at the expense of his own heritage, Milton voices the *expectation* that the Muslim adopt *Western*, that is to say non-*barbaric*, practices. As Freud, in his theories of the uncanny, asserts that the human being is psychologically programmed to resist the unfamiliar, Lacan posits, “what we want to know is the status of the Other’s knowledge” (*Seminar XX* 87). In other words, *we want to, we need to, understand the Other*. This is

a violent paradox, for to comprehend the Other is to demystify Otherness, reducing it to elements of the Same and therefore robbing it of its difference.

The Homebody's *invitation to understand* is a beckoning to understand that there are components of Being that cannot be understood. They are Other. Her disappearance to Kabul is an attempt to immerse herself in Otherness...to immerse herself in the magic that the Western world, through science, through reason, through its fidelity to the illusion that all can be consolidated, classified, and comprehended, has systematically destroyed. On the one hand, the Homebody is running from Western domination; on the other, she is running towards the mystery of Otherness that she, in her own fantasies, associates with Afghanistan. In Kabul, a chaotic region of the world in which competing factions jockey for the power to rule the tattered land, the Taliban emerges with the promise of restoring order to "a ship foundering" (97). As Hitler, under the banner of returning honor to a struggling Germany, rose to power in an economically depressed and war-torn culture, the Taliban promise religious order. Moreover, the Taliban celebrates ethnic identity and regional history. What Milton considers to be religious fundamentalism is their absolute rejection of the Western world. The rigidly dogmatic codes of the Taliban's authoritative interpretations of Islamic doctrine, the strict behavioral standards they impose and enforce—no music, no dancing, no acting, limited exposure to secular materials—are a reflection of Allah's will. When Homebody immerses herself in this strict culture, she does so because the subsequent "order" is guaranteed, not by reason, logic, technology, supply, demand, or political theory, but by the unknowable, infinitely unintelligible *magic* of Allah—of God. Instead of *succumbing to luxury*, she yields to mystery.

At the same time, however, there is an undeniable paradox at work here. Though Homebody gravitates toward the magic of the Other as experienced in Muslim traditions, the religious practices employed by the Taliban exhibit a different strand of oppression and violence. To escape the alienating consequences of inhabiting consumer culture, she extracts herself from it and disappears behind the veil. One cannot ignore that the culture to which the Homebody flees is a culture of violence, a world in which “every other man...is missing pieces,” dismembered from a landmine or attacked by Taliban death squads (101). It is a world of religious intolerance, an environment in which dissenters, like Khwaja, are jailed or “bake[d] to death [and] lock[ed] in metal trucks in the desert” (84). Kabul is a place in which “thirty thousand widows live...with three hundred thousand children to feed,” yet women, according to religious law as understood by Taliban extremists, are “not allowed jobs” (86). There is an obvious tension between these poles. For M. Scott Phillips, *Homebody/Kabul* straddles the fault-line between “consumer-driven western imperialism and a misogynistic, anti-western theocracy” (1). Each outlook is equally destructive. Consequently, for Phillips, there is no hope in this drama. “Kushner’s works suggests that we truly are at the ‘end of history,’ facing a spiritual, moral, and ethical crisis for which there may be no solution, no ‘next step.’ His sense of crisis derives from an apocalyptic context in which moral, social, political, and economic structures have been leveled, leaving nothing to replace them” (2). Homebody critiques western ideology and then takes *action*. Her “solution” is to reject the narcissism of her culture and embrace difference. Whether or not the Homebody interacts with Taliban fundamentalists or practices their version of Islam is unclear. What is abundantly clear, however, is that sects in Afghanistan, the country Homebody

regards as the epicenter of magic and mystery, seek to eradicate secular Otherness in favor of the theological Same. In short, the dynamic of erasure is as alive in Kabul as it is London; it simply manifests itself differently.

Phillips, however, appropriately situating the Homebody at ground zero of the millennium's ontological crisis, sees no hope in her, a pessimism akin to Baudrillard's summation of the human condition in "The Anorexic Ruins." Baudrillard describes the anxiety of postmodernity as the end of days. While Yeats hopes desperately that "surely, the second coming is at hand," and an increasingly destabilized world will be reconciled, Baudrillard proposes that such an event has come and gone.

The pole of reckoning, denouement, and apocalypse (in the good and the bad sense of the word), which we had been able to postpone until the infiniteness of the Day of Judgment, this pole has come infinitely closer, and one could join [Elias] Canetti in saying that we have already passed it unawares and now find ourselves in the situation of having overextended our own finalities, of having short-circuited our own perspectives, and of already being in the hereafter, that is, without horizon and without hope.
(qtd. in Garner 176)

For Yeats, *the pole of reckoning* arrives as a monstrous messiah; for Baudrillard, an invisible threshold has been silently crossed and humanity flounders in dystopian despair. To be sure, Homebody has internalized and articulates this sentiment. Phillips, however, conveys a dark reading of the play. He argues, "In *Homebody*, history has not so much 'ended' as it has 'failed,' its end neither a culmination of a narrative nor a proactive revolutionary moment in which contradictions are resolved but a paralyzing existential

stalemate, a postmodern dilemma, before which the prospect of a weak messiah promises little hope of escape” (6). For Phillips, the Homebody is a *weak messiah* because, in his reading, *Homebody/Kabul*'s fictional world is never redeemed. The madness of the west is replaced by the madness of Afghanistan and refuge is nowhere to be found.

To be sure, the Homebody's revolt does not reshape or reorder global terrain. At the same time, however, her radical decision, though dismally painful in the short-term, makes a tremendously positive and long-lasting impact on her family. The Homebody, guilty and disdainful enough of western entitlement to reject it wholesale, embeds herself in the uncompromising theological codes of Islamic fundamentalism as penance. In a narcissistic culture, she behaved narcissistically. In order to redeem herself, she feels obligated to sever her western ties. This rejection is not complete, however, unless all connections are cleaved. To save herself, she must abandon her family. This rescue, however, is far from self-serving. To Priscilla, Khwaja relays the Homebody's intent as articulated to him by her messenger. “She has told him to tell you this: you have suffered and will suffer more yet, she fears, because your heart which is a loving heart is also pierced through. She prays now to Allah who forgives all who sincerely repent, to forgive her and through her penitential loneliness, to forgive her daughter as well” (116). Priscilla, having already re-enacted aspects of her mother's personality, runs the risk of fully reproducing the despair Homebody describes in the monologue. By immersing herself in Islamic culture, an act Phillips understands as “her negation” and the “profound obliteration of her personhood,” the Homebody sacrifices herself for her child (17). For Phillips, however, *nothing happens* as the result of her ontological destruction. It is here

that the critic overlooks vital aspects of the text. Mahala is eventually “saved,” as are Milton and Priscilla when their perspectives are radically altered.

Homebody’s disappearance is choreographed. She fakes her murder in order to lure her family to Afghanistan and thrust upon them a sense of urgency. She exposes them to their mortality and reveals to them the fragility of their lives. This experience is what Heidegger calls *being-unto-death*. Only upon realizing the finitude of existence does existence assume depth and meaning. Homebody’s plan, however, is even more complex. She also organizes an exchange. When Priscilla learns that her mother is not only alive, but never wants to see her again, she also discovers that Homebody has arranged a trade; Homebody will marry a Kabuli Muslim, and his previous wife will return with the Ceilings to London. “In exchange that this man keep your mother as wife of his, he wish you to help remove now-wife of his who is crazy, first wife, she wish to go away, to London preferably” (77). This *crazy first wife* is Mahala, a woman profoundly dissatisfied with the direction of Afghani society, disturbed by religious fundamentalism, and who is the mirror image of the Homebody. Mahala, in flight from political and ideological oppression, rejects her society because she thinks it has gone dismally astray.

Mahala is educated, angry, and politically informed. Like Khwaja, she sees the emergence of the Taliban as the rise of totalitarianism. Like Homebody, she can no longer endure the corrosion of her culture. The Homebody, who lived in a world of books and fantasy, leaves the secular west for Kabul, and claims now that “she is an Afghan now and shall not write or speak until her hands become hands that write Dari and Holy Arabic, until she recite the Suras by heart...she will neither write nor speak”

(116). Mahala's experience is the reverse. Prior to the Taliban regime, she had access to books; she was a librarian, but the new order has "closed down the library" (86). Forbidden to work and condemned to silence, the very conditions to which the Homebody is drawn, Mahala is desperate. Mahala recoils at the political conditions that suppress agency. She admonishes Taliban oppressors because they "call themselves mullahs" and "wrap themselves in the Prophet's mantle" only to "sell drugs" and "murder children" (84). Furthermore, Mahala accuses western powers of enabling these atrocities: "America buys this, bombs, from Communist Chinese to sell in secret to Taliban through Pakistan. Afghanistan kill the Soviet Union for you, we win the 'Cold War' for you, for us is not so cold, huh?" (85). Mahala identifies the consequences of an American agenda. U.S. policy reduces Afghanistan and its people to an object that can accomplish a political-military objective. In order to "settle a twenty-year-old score with Iran," the United States finds the Taliban useful (85). Without regard to how the Taliban treats human beings, the American political machine employs the tactical usefulness of the Afghani faction. For Hannah Arendt, when usefulness determines worth, the result is horrific.

The trouble with the utility standard inherent in the very activity of fabrication is that the relationship between means and end on which it relies is very much like a chain whose every end can serve again as a means in some other context. In other words, in a strictly utilitarian world, all ends are bound to be of short duration and to be transformed into means for some further ends. (*The Human Condition* 153-4)

Only if something is useful, if it can accomplish an objective, does it earn its ontological right to existence. It is in the *chain* of means and ends, of utility, that Otherness disappears into agenda and opportunity. The Taliban is useful to the United States, an entity thousands of miles away and unaffected or unconcerned by the atrocities the religious group commits.

Mahala brings these crimes to the fore; she voices her rage. Like the Homebody, however, Mahala does not simply think without acting. In an oppressive environment, divergent speech is a political act. All around her, women are denied freedom. She tells Priscilla, “women are dying all around me, I can hear the sounds from the houses when I peek out the window, when I walk in the burqa. My cousin, her daughter, she has hanged herself. My old friend Ziala Daizangi, Hazarra from Bamiyan, threw herself from the roof” (88). These women, subjected to a fiercely patriarchal social structure, cannot speak themselves, cannot speak at all. Mahala is unwilling, even at the risk of losing her life, to conform to the subordinate role assigned to her.

The more she is exposed to Mahala’s struggle, the more ethically obligated Priscilla feels to help her. As a result of her mother’s actions, Priscilla is hurled into a foreign world, a world of Otherness and difference. Instead of hearing about or reading about the abstractness of “The Middle East” or “Genocide in Darfur,” Priscilla *experiences* the violence first-hand. She experiences what Levinas terms, *proximity*: “as signification, the one-for-the-other, proximity is not a configuration produced in the soul. It is an immediacy older than the abstractness of nature. Nor is it fusion; it is contact with the other. To be in contact is neither to invest the other and annul his alterity, nor to suppress myself in the other” (*Otherwise Than Being* 86). Proximity is nearness; it is the

immediacy of the Other's call for aid. In proximity to the Other, the self, the ego, is "led to sincerity, making signs to the other, for whom and before whom I am responsible, of this very giving of signs, that is, of this responsibility: 'here I am'¹¹⁴" (ibid. 144-5).

Priscilla cannot ignore the travails of Mahala. Confronted by the dire conditions of the Afghan woman's existence and presented by an opportunity to help this woman escape these conditions, the call of the Other becomes a deafening roar. Priscilla is unwilling to sit idly by and allow Mahala to "just...die;" Priss fears Mahala is "just one of these people who dies, and no one minds" (115). Initially, Priscilla steps outside of herself and familiarity by exploring the Kabuli streets with Khwaja. This is just the initial phase of her transformation. When exposed to Mahala, Priscilla becomes willing to make profound sacrifices for the sake of the Other.

Quango possesses the key to Mahala's emigration. He can secure the papers that she needs in order to cross the border. When Priscilla approaches Quango to ask him for these documents, she catches him trying to "sniff her knickers" and "put on her bra" so he can "have a wank" (105). Though Quango claims he came to the region as a relief worker so he could "do good" by providing "biscuits and bandages and woolly blankets," his addiction and nihilism inform his worldview (72). As a result, he places himself at the center of the universe. Devoid of ethical responsibility or obligation to the Other, devoid of the capacity to pursue anything beyond his own gratification, he tells Priscilla, "for a toss" or a "tumble," he will provide her with the letter. Priscilla, in order to ensure Mahala's safe passage, is willing to have sex with an intravenous drug user whom she does not love. She prostitutes herself for the sake of anOther.

Having secured the documents, the three linger on the border of Pakistan and prepare for their exodus from Afghanistan. Though Mahala speaks French, English, Pashtun, and Dari, she connects with Milton most effectively by speaking science. Milton explains that binary code offers to “*banish confusion*,” but, as “an unforgiving place,” the linguistic system of computer programming “spits you out” if “you don’t speak its language” (120). Without the ability to communicate, if unable to relay the signs of a given lexicon, one flounders in the void between thought and expression. Milton, having clearly articulated his disdain for the Arab Other, voices to Mahala his “*urge to communicate*” (126). No longer smoking opium in a hotel room, Milton begins his transformation. As witness to the chaos of Afghanistan, exposed to the violent strife of a foreign land, Milton undergoes *being-unto-death*. “In our dire straits,” he declares, “Kabul has emboldened me” (126). As a librarian, Mahala knows the Dewey Decimal System, a numerical code that is the international language for libraries. When Khwaja describes Esperanto, he describes a peace that results from linguistic connection. He imagines a world in which language traverses gulfs of culture or religion or history. In this sense, Esperanto can *banish confusion*.

Throughout *Homebody/Kabul*, however, language is a barrier. Homebody speaks her cryptic tongue; Milton speaks the technical language of computer programming; neither speaks Dari or Pushti. M. Scott Phillips maintains that the drama presents language as that “which can be both a means toward understanding and an insurmountable barrier to meaningful human interaction” (“The Failure of History: Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* and the Apocalyptic Context” 16). As a result, the play presents the gulf between the human mind and the things of the world, the things *in the*

world, as unbridgeable. Only the thin fabric of thought enables subjectivity; only in the utterance of signs and symbols can thought be articulated. Language, as Lacanian psychodynamics so insightfully establish, is that which permits the subject to signify; language permits the subject *to be*. In the first two scenes of *Homebody/Kabul*, however, language does not connect; it alienates. This draws attention to the profound reality that language is a dismally ineffective tool. Between the nouns and the verbs, bits and pieces of “meaning,” of “intent,” are lost in the gap between the phenomenological and the noumenal. In order for language to function, however, this must be *repressed*. In a moment with Priscilla, Khwaja, through metaphor, the language of art, explains that the human capacity for communication transcends language. “Deep within us, someone waits for us in the garden. She is an angel, perhaps she is Allah. She is our soul. Or she is our death. Her voice is ravishing; and it is fatal to us. We may seek her, or spend our lives in flight from her. But always she is waiting in the garden, speaking in a tongue which we were born speaking. And then forget” (118). Khwaja speaks of a mother tongue, a language that unites humanity and connects all speaking beings. Literally, this language is Esperanto and the fantasy of imaginary unity it engenders. Beyond the linguistic, however, this language is love; it is ethical responsibility to and for other people. It is the *language which we were born speaking and then forget*. Upon interpellation and exposure to *the they*, the subject becomes embedded in cultural practices. These practices are thematized as “right.” Individuals who deviate from these practices are punished; other cultures which do not share these practices are deemed inferior. This is the forgetting; this is the dynamic of Sameness. Khwaja speaks of a return to respect for the Other. Furthermore, he speaks love and responsibility through

poetry, a medium Heidegger holds in utmost regard. “Every thinking that is on the trail of something is a poetizing, and all poetry is thinking” (“The Way to Language” 425). Heidegger proposes that to transform thinking, to prioritize ontological attunement, is to re-imagine language. Throughout *Homebody/Kabul*, Khwaja enacts this imaginative endeavor. Speaking science here transcends science and enters world of communication, the “poetry” of human connection.

Communication is connection, and connection is an ethical act. Priscilla and Milton both traverse the gulf of egoism and engage the Other. This manifests in a culminating ethical moment. The Taliban border guard accuses Mahala of transporting documents containing the locations of strategic military targets. “You have hire this Tajik mahram. He is said to have give you papers. Written in language so no person can read, these papers you are to give to person in London. These papers are not of poems but Tajik informations for Rabbani and Massoud. Placements of weapons and this. Written in...Shefer? Code?” (131). The border guard accuses Mahala of sedition, a crime punishable by death. Khwaja’s poems “are not hymns of peace in dream language of universal brotherhood but military information for the Northern Alliance” (138). As a result, the poet was “arrested and executed...for treason against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” (135). Mahala faces the same fate. Milton, however, intervenes. “I have over two thousand pounds. Please do not kill her. I will give you all the money I have” (132). As Khwaja comes between Priscilla and the Munkrat, Milton endeavors to save Mahala. This is the climactic ethical moment of the play. Milton, the detached, self-absorbed Westerner who describes the Afghan people as savages and whose desire for material wealth is so potent that he sexualizes money, is compelled to rescue Mahala by

any means necessary. He is willing to depart with that which he loves most, money, to help this Middle-Eastern woman he barely knows. Furthermore, by proposing a bribe, Milton is putting his own safety at risk.

At this moment, the transition is complete. Milton and Priscilla engage the world and participate in the *vita activa*. Through action and exposure to the Other, fear of the Other and desire to convert Otherness to aspects of the Same dissipate. Through action and interaction, through speech and communication, “human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua men*” (*The Human Condition* 176), or as Heidegger asserts, “Da-sein is essentially being-with” and this “being-with lets the Da-sein of others be encountered in its world” (*Being and Time* 113) [120]. Though the border guard does not take the bribe, he lets the group pass into Pakistan. Milton and Priscilla step beyond familiarity; they emancipate themselves from the shackles of Sameness. In their efforts to save Mahala, they redeem themselves. They encounter their potentiality.

This encounter would have been impossible had the Homebody not made her radical decision. Her resoluteness is the catalyst for profound change. Ironically, we never witness any dialogue between the Homebody and her family. The Homebody speaks of her husband and daughter; Priscilla and Milton speak of the Homebody. Throughout the drama, the Homebody maintains spatial and emotional distance. The characteristics of her isolation, however, change in the course of the play. In the monologue, the woman is self-reflexive, self-absorbed, and ambiguous. She speaks callously of her husband and abstrusely conveys the hope that her daughter will not follow in her footsteps. Once in Afghanistan, however, the Homebody’s solitude

assumes meaning. She sacrifices herself on behalf of her family; she becomes a pathfinder, a way-shower. Moreover, her voice is unheard, her face unseen. Though she dominates the trajectory of the narrative, she is not present (certainly not onstage...whether or not she is “present” offstage cannot be determined with any certainty). In “The Way to Language,” Heidegger proposes that “the unspoken is not merely what is deprived of sound; rather, it is the unsaid, what is not yet shown, what has not yet appeared on the scene. Whatever has to remain unspoken will be held in reserve in the unsaid. It will linger in what is concealed as something unshowable. It is mystery” (409). In this context, her silence is potential energy. It is the harbinger of mystery; it is infinite possibility. The potential explodes into kinetic force as Milton and Priscilla transform. In pursuit of the *authentic*, the magic of her being, the Homebody *speaks herself* silently through action. Her abandonment is a paradoxical act of absolute devotion. Her flight to Afghanistan is that which enables ethical, spiritual, and ontological growth in Milton and Priscilla.

In the light of the for-the-sake-of-which of the potentiality-of-being which it has chosen, resolute Da-sein frees itself for its world. The resoluteness toward itself first brings Da-sein to the possibility of letting others who are with it “be” in their ownmost potentiality-of-being, and also discloses that potentiality in concern which leaps ahead and frees. Resolute Da-sein can become the “conscience” of others. It is from the authentic being a self of resoluteness that authentic being-with-one-another first arises. (*Being and Time* 274) [298]

The Homebody jettisons herself from a world she cannot abide and *becomes the conscience* of her husband and child. Her unwavering rejection of egoism drastically reshapes the trajectory of Milton and Priscilla. Though Milton's response to this event is undisclosed, Priscilla recognizes her mother's sacrifice. She claims, "I tried to kill myself," but now "I have been saved," and concludes, "in the space she's left...Some...joy? or something has been rising. Something unpronounceable inside is waking up. I...I've no words for this" (139). Emerging from its slumber is *the woman in the garden*. Priscilla, having confronted her potentiality, is beginning to remember the language she *was born speaking*. Ironically, as love and ethical responsibility, there *are no words* for this transformation.

The Homebody's behavior clearly deviates from a traditional maternal role. She abandons her family, moves to Afghanistan, fakes her own death, converts to Islam, and takes a vow of silence. Initially, Milton blames his daughter for Homebody's bizarre actions. "You drove her here, wasn't me, you tormented us both, and you drove her to, to *madness*" (93). The Homebody's decisions are so profoundly unintelligible to Milton that he deems them insane. By calling her crazy, Milton negates the Homebody's subjectivity. Michel Foucault investigates the notion of "madness" as conceived within what he calls "mechanisms of power" (38). He argues that *insanity* is the catch-all description for that which deviates from prevailing ideology. The subject that deviates is surveyed, policed, incarcerated, and extracted from the public sphere in order to maintain homogeneity.

The mechanisms of the exclusion of madness ...began from a particular point in time, and for reasons which need to be studied, to reveal their

political usefulness and to lend themselves to economic profit, and that as a natural consequence, all of a sudden, they came to be colonized and maintained by global mechanisms and the entire State system. It is only if we grasp these techniques of power and demonstrate the economic advantages or political utility that derives from them in a given context for specific reasons, that we can understand how these mechanisms come to be effectively incorporated into the social whole. (39)

There is a clear-cut socio-political utility to labeling the deviant as insane. Once termed “mad,” a subject can be partitioned away, institutionalized, extracted from the public sphere. “Madness,” however, is a socially constructed state. That which is “mad” is that which deviates from or rejects dominant cultural practices. That which is “mad,” therefore, varies from culture to culture. For example, the Homebody is insane because she utterly renounces western thinking; Mahala is “crazy first wife” because she repudiates Islamic fundamentalism and seeks creative freedom in London (77). Furthermore, the “insane” member of society is dismissed as “defective.” This accomplishes two objectives. First, the “crazy” person forfeits any credibility. As insane, he or she is nullified. Second, an individual’s urge to conform, to repress deviant tendencies, is heightened for fear that he or she will be labeled as insane. Owing to his exploration of madness, Foucault is antagonistic towards psychoanalysis. He concludes that the discipline seeks to normalize and totalize human subjectivity. Kristeva adopts an entirely different view. “Although psychoanalysis is based in some respects on madness, it is simply not true that analysts apply that label to everyone in an effort to prove us all crazy. Instead, psychoanalysis approaches madness as if it were a set of models or

structures that quietly lurk inside us and that encourage excesses and limitations—but also innovations” (*Melanie Klein* 8). What is so disturbing in *Homebody/Kabul* is that the “madness” exhibited by the Homebody and Mahala “makes sense.” In short, the drama probes the eerie insanity of innovation.

It is from within this “madness” that feminine revolt emerges. In *Homebody/Kabul*, the Homebody’s revolutionary attitude remains unspoken. Though she speaks in her monologue, her language is cryptic and sterile. It is through her action that she engages the radical. At the same time, however, Mahala, as the Homebody’s mirror image, speaks the language of revolution, the language of courage...the *mother* tongue.

I say women are braver than you men of Kabul. Queen Gawharshad rule half the world from Herat. Malalai insist to you: kill the British invaders, she insist and so then you do, because she, *she* have the courage. Young girls have march and die to fight communism and the Russian soldiers, but you, you do not die, you do not march, nothing from you while we starve in rooms, because these “heroes,” they make you feel not like pious Muslim, because you want a coward order, *le fascisme*. I go mad, British, I cannot cease shouting all day, a bird, a bird taps the window, I shout at these bird, “*Die, break your neck at the glass!*” (87-8)

Mahala confronts the passivity of her brethren. They are in collusion with the Law because it is the Law. They are in collusion with fascism because a totalitarian system provides order and does so in a way in which the individual does not have to think, does not have to question. Milton illustrates what Mahala describes as masculine conformity

to the Law. When Priscilla challenges him to engage the Afghan culture and search for his wife or her killers, he explains, “I’m not brave and I’ve never been and know what? I’ve no wish to be! You see? None! Never have!” (92). Beholden to the status quo, consumed by the chest of gold, Milton has no desire to challenge the system in which he is embedded. Before his transformation, Milton speaks the language of conformity, of docility, of cowardice. If revolt is madness, the Homebody, Mahala, and Priscilla are *insane*.

In a Lacanian context, woman occupies this revolutionary space. Although Lacan posits the paternal character of the Law, the Law can only be associated with the father if it is the father that produces the law. This is at the heart of the matter. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan claims: “not all of a woman is subject to symbolic castration” (qtd in Luepnitz 231). The “not all” here is crucial. As a subject, a woman has no choice but to assimilate into the social order, acquire language, and navigate the symbolic. At the same time, however, a woman has no literal penis that can be castrated and any castration anxiety is therefore metaphoric and never literal. Consequently, something of “woman” may escape symbolic castration or does not submit entirely to the symbolic law. It is for this reason that Derrida concludes, “that which will not be pinned down by truth [truth?] is, in truth, *feminine*” (qtd. in “Choreographies”163). In this feminine beyond, there is revolt; there is revolution. In *Angels in America*, Harper typifies this radical antagonism to the Law. Traveling with Mr. Lies through the world of her own fantasy, a world un-tethered by the Symbolic Order, she is at home in the void. She finds refuge in Antarctica, an unpopulated wasteland. She says she wants “to stay here forever. Set up camp. Build things. Build a city, an enormous city made up of frontier forts, dark wood and green

roofs and high gates made of pointed logs and bonfires burning on every street corner” (*Millennium Approaches* 101). She wants to produce, give birth to a culture that she designs, a world that can be made from scratch. Though she alludes to the unlikely possibility that she is pregnant, Harper is the mother of the culture she describes. For Kristeva, a mother is the “*master* of a process that is prior to the social-symbolic-linguistic contract of the group,” so the maternal function simultaneously bears the Law as she bears the child (“Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini” 302). This arctic paradise is a place wherein Harper can begin again. The Homebody seeks renewal in Afghanistan; Mahala seeks regeneration in London. Harper, however, longs to *create* the world that will be her salvation. In these drug-induced visions, she teeters on the brink of insanity. Once again, madness dances with revolt. Irigaray celebrates this insanity because “there is a revolutionary potential in hysteria. Even in her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desires...A movement of revolt and refusal, a desire for/of the living mother who would be more than a reproductive body” (“Women—Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order” 47). The Homebody is more than a *reproductive body*; she does far more than perpetuate paternal Law and regurgitate male subjectivity. On the contrary, she frees Milton from *the they*, emancipates Priscilla from egoism, and liberates Mahala from oppression. She is a conduit for authenticity; she is the conscience of and for the Other.

The *maternal-feminine* contains the power of reform. The maternal function wields the power to undermine the Law of the Father. After all, the law does not intrinsically originate in the father. The father may historically have been the bearer of the law, but that position is not transhistoric. As Nietzsche reminds us, the origin of the

law is of little import. What is profoundly relevant is that the law can be and must be subject to change:

The purpose of 'law' is absolutely the last thing to employ in the history of the origin of law: on the contrary, the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected. (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 56)

Convention and tradition *lie worlds apart* from *the purpose of the law*. The purpose of Law is to assemble order and structure from the abyss of the Real. The Homebody overtly rejects prevailing ideology. Her rejection, however, is not a rejection of Law. She dismisses the Law as expressed through the Symbolic order she clearly associates with the West. This revolutionary mother does not seek Lawlessness. Quango's nihilism illustrates the dangers of relativism. Though it may have taken her forty years to discover, she realizes that the Law is always already subject to *reinterpretation, transformation, and redirection*. In *Homebody/Kabul*, the reconfiguration of the Law is associated with resolute women; Lacanian ~~woman~~ is nowhere to be found in this drama. These revolutionary women, led by the Homebody, operate beyond the Law. This "feminine" domain, however, is not exclusively occupied by females. Quango and Milton traverse this revolutionary space. The Homebody, however, with radical commitment to alterity, potentiality, and ethical responsibility, enacts a powerful revolt. She shows us that *action*, that deliberate *reaction*, is salvation. Though she does not change the world, she irreversibly alters the lives of those around her. Furthermore, she

signifies the far-reaching impact that the maternal function has on subject formation and reformation. She signifies the possibilities stirring within us all.

CHAPTER 7

ETHICS, AESTHETICS AND *AGISSENTURE FEMININE*

In the introduction to this work, I outlined varying notions of the feminine-maternal as presented by Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, and Kristeva. Phallogocentric discourse and its ensuing erasure of feminine subjectivity, an erasure beginning with matricide and culminating in paternal law, reduce Woman to the Other. Once reduced to a distortion of the masculine *imago*, the feminine disappears into the folds of patriarchal culture; the mother recedes into anonymity and deferral. As Lacan clearly states, the mother, flashing crocodile jaws, evokes in the subject the terror of self-annihilation. Since Woman embodies the constant reminder of Lack, castration, and incompleteness, she must be discarded to ensure the phantasmic wholeness for which all human beings yearn. Furthermore, Freud and Lacan demand that the female-mother be complicit in her erasure.

Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of masculine and feminine subjectivity, however, transcend notions of sexuality. Their psychological theories stem from a deeply ingrained fear of Otherness. Nowhere does this aversion surface more clearly than in Freud's meditation on *Das Ding* (the Thing) and Lacan's response to this theory. In *Entwurf einer Psychologie*, Freud confronts the trauma the individual experiences when engaging the Other. The *Nebenmensch*, the neighbor or the Other, appears to the subject as a thing because, as Other, the fellow human being cannot be thematized. Since the

Other exists outside of me, I can never understand it; exteriority always slips through my grasp. Simon Critchley summarizes how Freud registers exposure to Otherness as a traumatic event.

The fellow human being is perceived *als Ding* when it screams, that is, the other presents itself in a prelinguistic scream that traumatically recalls the subject's own screaming and its own memory of experience of pain... The other, which resists my attempts at comprehension, is presented to me in a scream that recalls me to the memory of my own screaming, my own trauma, my own 'prehistoric' experience of pain, an archaic memory laid down in relation to my first satisfying/hostile object. (83-4)

This *satisfying/hostile object* refers to nothing less than another human being. Satisfying insofar as s/he meets my needs, hostile insofar as s/he reminds me of my incapacity to understand difference, the Other possesses a pre-ontological capacity to haunt and terrify me. In short, the Other threatens me insofar as it elicits my return to the pain and misery of being. Whether friend or foe, the Other must always be incorporated into my capacity for representation. By reducing the Other to an element of myself that I can understand, I destroy the Otherness of the Other. I understand the screams of the Other insofar as they become my own. Simultaneously, however, I resist the Other because it reminds me of trauma I so desperately endeavor to repress.

Lacan integrates this notion into his own psychoanalytic. In *Seminar VII*, Lacan claims that one's exposure to Otherness yields one's subjectivity. "It is through the intermediary of the *Nebenmensch* as speaking subject that everything that has to do with the thought processes is able to take shape in the subjectivity of the subject" (qtd. in

Critchley 84). The Other is “useful” insofar as it ensures the development of my “self.” As does the mirror in Lacanian discourse, the Other reflects the material and ontological limits of my existence. I *become* insofar as I witness my boundaries. Lacan, however, replaces “the scream” with linguistic utterance. “The Thing only presents itself to the extent that it becomes word” (ibid. 85). In Lacanian analysis, *Das Ding* must be repressed by and through language. Once signified and contained within the phrase, the dangers of Otherness become displaced and diffused. As Freud argues that the subject endures difference by absorbing the Other into the self, Lacan suggests that the subject bypasses the terror of Otherness by trapping difference in language. For this reason, Lacan asks: “Is there anything which can pose a more present [*presente*], more pressing [*pressante*], more captivating [*prenante*], more disruptive, more nauseating, more calculated to throw into the abyss and nothingness everything that takes place before us, than the figure of Harpo Marx, marked with that smile of which one does not know whether it is that of the most extreme perversity or foolishness” (ibid. 86). Harpo, unlike his three brothers, *does not speak*. Since Harpo is a mute, Lacan designates him as indicative of “radical annihilation,” representing the horrifying “limit of all symbolization” (ibid. 86, 72). For Freud, the Other’s scream harkens the unthematizable, unsignifiable chaos of the non-same; for Lacan, the Other’s silent, linguistically uncontained presence conveys the menacing threat of mystery.

For both Freud and Lacan, therefore, Otherness must be reduced to Sameness, for this reduction prevents the subject’s traumatic exposure to difference. In this light, phallogocentric discourse can be understood as strategic appropriation of Otherness. The Lack that plagues our psychic lives surfaces with jolting force in the face of the Other.

For Freud and Lacan, therefore, Woman's anatomical structure presents to man and to woman herself the impossibilities of wholeness and intelligibility. When Freud and Lacan reduce Woman to a distortion of the masculine *imago*, therefore, they position Woman as Other while associating the Other with a Thing. In this regard, conceptions of and relations between men and women signify more than sexual politics. Male-female communication, once situated within the Freudian-Lacanian context, signals a confrontation with Otherness, and this confrontation mirrors the ethical response to difference. If a philosophical, theological, political, or psychoanalytic tradition seeks univocality or universalization, the impulse to violently eradicate the un-same seethes at the core of any "objectivity" it purports to possess. The resulting symbolic structures, by design, compromise respect for and the preservation of alterity. Having established how Freudian-Lacanian fear of difference yields a phallogentric economy, we can see more clearly that the erasure of feminine subjectivity corresponds to erasure of a subject's ethical obligation to the Other.

For this reason, when Irigaray asserts, "sexual difference is probably that issue in our own age which could be our salvation on an intellectual level," she speaks to the gravity of acknowledging the Other's ontological viability ("Sexual Difference" 165). Recognizing ontic *and* ontological differences between men and women first emancipates Woman from the enclosure of masculine subjectivity and, second, challenges conceptions of subjectivity in which Otherness must be enveloped by and transformed into the Same. As are the Same and the Other, men and women represent two distinct modes of Being, "two who are neither halves nor complimentary nor opposed but who, while each one has a proper human identity to accomplish, can realize this task only by maintaining between

them a relation with respect for their difference(s)...which moreover is what, most radically, provides the relation between being and Beings” (*The Way of Love* 102-3). Instead of consuming Otherness, thus negating the mysteries it possesses, difference must be conceived not as a threat but as the fibers from which *human identities* are woven. For Irigaray, “the rift between the other and me is irreducible. To be sure we can build bridges, join our energies, feast and celebrate encounters, but the union is never definitive, on pain of no longer existing” (*The Way of Love* 157). When two become one, *both* parties cease to be...from their union hatches a thematized, homogenized, *inauthentic* signifier.

In this project, I have proposed that a pivotal step in preventing this outcome should be to reconsider our notions of the maternal function. This function, as a position outside paternal law, mediates subject formation. Though Freud and Lacan endeavor to disempower the maternal role, Kristevan assertions re-invest authority into motherhood. Designating the feminine-maternal as the “ultimate guarantee of society,” Kristeva does more than idealize the maternal body’s capacity to generate life (“Stabat Mater” 328). With her notion of semiotic language, she suggests that in the mother’s body and through the mother’s love, “the speaking being finds a refuge when his/her symbolic shell cracks and a crest emerges where speech causes biology to show through” (ibid. 330). Nothing short of the human body pierces symbolic language and unveils, if only for a moment, the illusory order that linguistic systems promise to provide. Clearly, the body screams; the body speaks. When Freud resists the Other’s shouts, when Lacan captures alterity in language, the body, as origin of these sounds, escapes discourse. Kristeva’s return to the body, therefore, signals a return to Otherness and therefore a return to ethics. Like

Irigaray, Kristeva links the body to the feminine-maternal because the female frame represents the intersection of what has been denied signification...the Other, the corporeal, feminine subjectivity congeal in Woman. Kristeva, therefore, expresses “the need of an ethics for this ‘second’ sex, which, as one asserts it, is reawakening” (ibid. 330).

This new ethical dimension, Kristeva claims, amounts to “an *herethics*,” a mode of signification that “is perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thoughts of death, bearable” (ibid. 330). Making bonds bearable, *herethics* exists in stark contrast to the Freudian-Lacanian terror of the Other. Instead of an “ethics” that represses difference, Kristeva’s alternative – *hers* only insofar as it is markedly different from the *his* of patriarchal subjectivation – presents the father of individual prehistory as “the link that might enable one to become reconciled with the loss of the Thing” (*Black Sun* 187). The Thing, here as unattainable object of Desire (the *Gestalt* or sense of self as unfractured), can, as Žižek asserts later in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, be to some degree reclaimed by acquiring commitment to an entity or an idea. As Heidegger valorizes Da-sein’s resolute pursuit for authenticity, Kristeva endows the archaic father with the power to alleviate the pangs of incompleteness. Unlike Lacan, Kristeva does not suggest that only integration into culture *as it is* accomplishes this objective. On the contrary, she beckons the feminine-maternal to capitalize on its unique ontological status and repudiate cultural practices when necessary. When she challenges theories that express an urge to repress the screaming thing, contain difference through symbolic language, and thematize Otherness to secure the dominance of the Same, Kristeva endeavors to rescue the feminine-maternal-Other from “the midst of [a] lethal

ocean” in which “woman is the dead one that has always been abandoned within herself” and “wastes away by striking moral and psychic blows against herself” (ibid. 198).

Multiple instances of this dynamic surfaced throughout this project. For Adela Alba and Jessie Cates, *psychic blows* culminate in the irreversible violence of suicide. Beneatha Younger and Priscilla Ceiling, however, indebted to mothers who resist assimilating into the *lethal ocean* of unjust Symbolic structures, avoid this psychological pain. At the same time, the maternal, as conceived here and in the works of Irigaray and Kristeva, operates as a conceptual position, as a *metaphorical* safeguard against the tyranny of thematization. This function, no longer alienated or quarantined by Freudian-Lacanian psychical theories, can voice dissent.

A lingering question remains. What good comes from investigating the speculations of psychical theories by way of literature? Does such an endeavor simply attempt to fortify psychoanalytics with analyses of *fictional* worlds? If ethical theories rely on aesthetic theories, does conjecture rule the day? Literary works are *fictional*, so does this mean that tragedy or resolution in a play has no bearing in our day-to-day being-in-the-world?

A brief foray into Freudian-Lacanian conception of the pleasure principle helps illuminate the issue at hand. The pleasure principle, for Lacan, can be likened to “a homeostatic device that aims at maintaining excitation at the lowest functional level” (Evans 148). This *excitation* corresponds to the threat of annihilation posed when the subject lacks appropriate distance from The Thing. Since fusion with the Other equates to the death of the “self,” “the pleasure principle is thus seen as a symbolic law, a commandment which can be phrased ‘Enjoy as little as possible’” and is therefore related

to “prohibitionism, to the law, and to regulation” (ibid. 148). *Jouissance*, on the other hand, defined by Evans as the “excessive quantity of excitation which the pleasure principle attempts to prevent,” occupies the domain of the Real. Though symbolic law functions to sublimate *jouissance* (what Žižek coins the *Sublime Object of Ideology*), artistic and literary representation occasion an expressive medium through which this surplus can emerge. In this sense, artistic representation presents a moment during which we can savor the forbidden bliss of the Real by attuning ourselves, if only briefly, to the to our potential to reshape our Symbolic world.

In *Seminar VII*, Lacan claims, “the function of the pleasure principle is to make man always search for what he has to find again, but which he will never attain” (qtd. in Evans 148). In sum, the pleasure principle (*principe de plaisir*) acts as a safeguard against the terror of the Real. Enjoyment must be curtailed because the “pleasure” of wholeness that human beings seek can be experienced only through death. Lacan here articulates Heideggerian parallels. After all, the authentic comportment of Being Da-sein seeks, a quest prompted by intimate awareness of or exposure to finitude and immanent death, corresponds to *what he has to find again, but which he will never attain*. As the Heideggerian they operates as an obstacle to authenticity, Lacan’s conception of the Law operates to sublimate desire...as authenticity can be experienced only in bursts, the *jouissance* of the Real can be experienced only proximally. Furthermore, authenticity, like *jouissance*, indicates a bending of the Law. It follows, therefore, that cultural practices function to suppress one’s access to both authenticity and *jouissance*.

In Lacanian analysis, therefore, “the true function of the Father...is fundamentally to unite (and not to set in opposition) a desire and the Law” (qtd. in Boothy 168). If the

maternal-feminine represents the death of subjectivity, the strangeness of the Thing, and the realm beyond the Law, silencing the feminine-maternal mutes the roar of our drive to jouissance...our drive to freedom...our movement toward the uneven terrain wherein desire exists *in opposition* to the Law. Lacan, however, goes one step further. In *Seminar VII*, Lacan insists that Law, produced and secured only by the paternal function, opens an oblique passage to fundamental ethical Truth. “My thesis is that the moral law, the moral commandment, the presence of the moral agency, is that by which, in our activity in so far as it is structured by the symbolic, the real makes itself present” (qtd. in Boothby 171). Taken together, the above passages suggest that matricide, a foundational component of Lacanian Symbolic structure, enables access to the ethics of the Real. Material reality, here the ethical-in-itself, *makes itself present* through *moral law* articulated by Symbolic ordering. Lacan, however, concedes, “complete sublimation is not possible for the individual” (qtd. in Evans 198). There always exist glowing coals of unsanctioned desires that paternal law cannot extinguish. Though phallogocentric culture seeks to smother these embers, they smolder in the maternal function and ignite in literature, in that imaginative realm where the screams of the mOther burn our ears.

Kristeva elucidates literature’s fiery potential. For her, “literary creation...in its imaginary, fictional essence, sets forth a device whose prosodic economy, interaction of characters, and implicit symbolism constitute a very faithful semiological representation of the subject’s battle with symbolic collapse” (*Black Sun* 195). In a linguistic context, the *subject’s battle with symbolic collapse* coincides with an individual’s reliance on symbolic language for ontological cohesion. If language permits subjectivity, the fragility of language must be sublimated. Literary language, when poetic, ambiguous,

and rhythmic, conveys semiotic communication that threatens to destroy the concreteness of symbolic signification by exuding “the nonsemanticized instinctual drive that precedes and exceeds meaning” (“From One Identity to an Other” 109).

In an ontological context, literature permits access to an ideological realm in which writer, reader, or spectator can challenge cultural practices with impunity. In this regard, when I watch *House of Bernarda Alba*, I can internalize the dangers of indiscriminate integration into existing social systems. The order that beckons me to conform may well *collapse* my authentic mode of Being, but, in literature, a “fictional” subject can resist assimilation. As a result, Kristeva tells us, “literary representation possesses a real and imaginary effectiveness” that brings us to “catharsis” and has therefore been “a therapeutic device used in all societies throughout the ages” (*Black Sun* 195). Further still, Kristeva considers literature perverse because, like the abject, “it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law, but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them” (“Approaching Abjection” 241). In the material world of ontic concretion, the maternal function possesses the power to wage this war. In the ontological realm of imagination and possibility, literary creations resist Symbolic Law. Though all mothers do not tap into their revolutionary potential nor does every literary work critique Symbolic structures, the potential for revolt exists within them. The ethics of the maternal function evidence themselves in aesthetics, for literature and the revolutionary capacity of the maternal role occupy “the very place where social code is destroyed and renewed” (“From One Identity to an Other” 101). For this reason, literary works, expressing that which cannot be sublimated, evoke the sublime confrontation with the Other, with the

Thing, with the feminine-maternal...with all that phallogocentric discourse excludes from signification.

Reading Freud and Lacan through the lens of Irigaray and Kristeva permits us to link the feminine-maternal to the Other, to the body, to sublimation, to literature, and to revolt. Though Kristeva regards poetry as literary representation best capturing these intersections, I submit theatrical performance, as literature embodied, combats the rigidity of Symbolic Law with particular effectiveness.

Unlike the novel or the poem, the play is a body of work in which bodies collide. Though the spectator engages fictional characters, s/he confronts actual living, breathing human beings. To be sure, the physical frames onstage deploy as much of a production's "meaning" as does the dialogue. In the vibrant complexity of performance, Kristeva's bio-linguistic theory of semiotic-symbolic interaction materializes before an audience. As Kristeva maintains that in verbal communication, rhythms, tones, and bodily movements threaten to undermine the primacy of linguistic signification, critic C.W.E. Bigsby tells us, "in the theatre language is deliberately played against gesture, *mise en scene*, appearance; the mouth which shapes the word also subverts the word, as facial expression, tone, inflection, volume offer a counter-current" (*Modern American Drama: 1945-2000* 6). A character's emotional state, his or her sarcasm, dismay, or pleasure, penetrates every phrase. Herein quivers the semiotic, "the space underlying the written" which comprises the "rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation," thus "anterior to judgment" and outside history and Law, presents an "enigmatic and feminine" domain (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 38). Feminine simply because it resists androcentric order, the semiotic, paradoxically both boundless and

corporeal, articulates the perversion of non-compliance. Furthermore, In *The Necessity of Theater*, Paul Woodruff contends that, when performed, a play “erases the boundary between the watcher and the watched,” fusing the spectator and the spectacle. These confluences, when contextualized alongside Kristevan terminology, suggests that theater pulses with abjection because it “disturbs identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (“Approaching Abjection” 232). As a return to the corporeal, theater depicts an ontic-ontological homecoming where an aesthetics of the body and an ethics of the Other merge.

In Goldhammer’s translation of “Stabat Mater,” Kristeva urges us to “let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words,” and produce what she calls “WORD FLESH” (162). As Lacan tells us, the subject, upon transitioning from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, replaces the corporeal with a linguistic system that excludes feminine signification, so Kristeva, by re-introducing the body into language, disinters and reanimates the body of the mOther that has been buried in phallogocentric notions of linguistic and subject formation. In theater, this resurrection comes to bear because “the word is made flesh” (*Modern American Drama: 1945-2000* 4). Drama, therefore, transmits an ethics beyond the Law and conveys representation in which one confronts *herethics* incarnate.

Irigaray wonders “whether all writing that does not question its own hierarchical relation” to sexuality, to difference, and therefore to the Other “is not once more, as always, both productive of and produced within the economy of proper meaning” (“Questions” 133). In this sense, “traditional” modes of representation depict outgrowths of signification co-opted by masculine subjectivity. It follows, therefore, that by

departing from the master tongue can the articulations of the maternal-feminine-Other become audible. Since *proper meaning* stems from cohesive, intelligible discourse, Irigaray proposes that “feminine writing,” literature from which Otherness can emerge, deviates from “the norm” in form, in content, or in both. “In what has been historically constituted as the ‘unconscious,’ Irigaray asserts there exists “some censored, repressed element of the feminine” (qtd. in Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* 171). Here, Irigaray’s description of *écriture féminine* dovetails with Kristevan semiotic theory. If we slightly rephrase Irigaray by submitting that the unconscious houses repressed elements of *the Other*, Irigarayan and Kristevan theories further coincide.

Retaining the assumptions that speaking/writing Woman equates to speaking/writing difference and that through drama, as literature in which the ordered word and the forbidden flesh converge, mOtherness comes to bear, we can investigate how theatrical works, when unconventionally structured or incorporating language not indigenous to the tradition in which they are performed, embody an Otherness that *has been historically constituted as the ‘unconscious.’*

As Freud conceives exposure to the Thing-Other as a traumatic encounter, Antonin Artaud calls drama, when committed to this exposure, Theatre of Cruelty.

The Theatre of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theatre a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigour and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood. This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so, can thus be identified

with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid. (Artaud 66).

Paying life *the price it must be paid* indicates nothing less than visualizing the world differently than the way in which prevailing ideology conditions us to see it. The resulting *moral purity* emerges from what Irigaray calls the repressed elements of the unconscious. Moreover, theater presents this alternate reality through semiotic language. To be sure, pursuing “the creation of a new physical language of the theatre, no longer based on words, on text and linear narrative,” Artaud “imagined a kind of *poetry in space* composed of gestures, incantations, gesticulations, and scenic rhythm” (Birringer 93). It is here that Kristeva’s WORD FLESH takes form. In absurdist drama, owing much to Artaud and characterized best by perhaps Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, instead of signifying what Irigaray terms *the economy of proper meaning*, ambiguous language, divorced from context, itself becomes a stumbling block to intelligibility.¹¹⁵ In contemporary theater, David Mamet consistently problematizes language via interrupted dialogue, prolonged, disturbing moments of silence, unfinished phrases, and non-sequiturs.¹¹⁶ As discussed in Chapters Two and Six, the harshness of Brechtian V-Effect, also strongly influenced by Artaud’s philosophy of drama, unsettles the audience member from the complacency of everyday existence by forcing the spectator to endure harsh lighting, non-chronological narrative, and other literary devices that obscure the “meaning” of the performance. Theaters of cruelty, absurdity, and alienation, to name a few, depict *poetry in space* and convey drama in which the movements onstage, *the gestures, incantations, gesticulations, and scenic rhythm*, endow a play with meanings that cannot be relayed through symbolic language alone.

Physical language and deliberately ambiguous dialogue, however, are not the only methods by which drama communicates Otherness. When performances employ languages or dialects that diverge from the audience's dominant linguistic practices, the play jostles the observer from the comfort of familiarity. Since Lacan asserts that (symbolic) language guarantees subjectivity, immersion in a foreign tongue disturbs, if only briefly, one's ontological stability. As discussed in Chapter Six, Kushner's use of untranslated Pushti accomplishes this objective. If I do not speak or understand a language, my ability to *speak myself* or to understand the words of the Other is drastically limited. If confined to discourse from which I am excluded, authentic self-expression or authentic engagement with the Other is either stifled or impossible. In this sense, *Homebody/Kabul* metaphorically enacts Irigaray's notion that phallogocentric discourse prevents feminine subjectivity. Simultaneously, however, by integrating Pushti in English dialogue, the play acknowledges difference and varying modes of signification. Through this acknowledgment, the work expresses "feminine writing" because it *disturbs the economy of proper meaning*. Perhaps stating the obvious, foreign languages have *proper meanings*, but the signifiers are *foreign* and therefore unintelligible, in the case of Kushner, to an English speaking audience (and to Priscilla, Milton, etc). To the same effect, playwright Cherrie Moraga inserts untranslated Spanish throughout her works.¹¹⁷

Equally compelling examples of *écriture féminine* emerge when performers articulate dialects or colloquial language. For Irigaray, to speak the language of the mOther, we must "discover and interpret" a discourse that can "remodel existing languages" ("The Three Genres" 152). In Chapter Five, for example, I discussed how Beneatha and Walter Lee Younger reproach George Murchison for parroting *whiteness*.

Adopting the prevailing mode of signification, George repudiates his ethnic identity. Far from mimicking “The King’s English,” Beneatha’s revolt materializes linguistically when she speaks (to the best of her ability) in a Yoruban dialect. Similarly, In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Josefa sings and speaks in cryptic verse. This figure, whose opposition to prevailing modes of signification prompts both her community and her family to deem her insane, is literally the madwoman in the attic. Physically restrained and socially ostracized, Josefa *willfully* distances herself from the community by speaking a language that is her own. The Homebody, too, employs language as a means of revolt. She first utilizes pedantic speech as a blockade against a world she cannot abide, then embraces silence as means for rejecting a history she refuses. As does Irigaray, Chanter understands language to be “heavy with the weight of a history of exclusionary practices – not only in relation to women, but in relation to its multifarious others,” so manipulations of dominant linguistic structures, by subverting the word, indicate revolt (*Ethics of Eros* 30). Like the dramas of Hansberry, Lorca, and Kushner, plays by August Wilson and Suzan-Lori Parks include characters who *speaks themselves* by *remodeling existing language* to express their ontological needs.¹¹⁸ As Derrida and Kristeva both associate “the feminine” with signifying practices that challenge prevailing ideology, Tina Chanter applauds “feminists who do not think ‘feminine writing’ is the exclusive preserve of women, and who thus admit the possibility that men can write like women too” (*Ethics of Eros* 29). In short, since “writing like a woman” simply means respecting alterity and presenting difference as a viable ontological status, anyone (in principle) can do it.

Though poetry and novels clearly possess the capacity to integrate foreign tongues or express divergent dialects of a linguistic system, dramatic performance enables these alternate significations to *materialize* in embodied form. For cognitive theorist William W. Demastes, “the life that grows from the theater” demonstrates “the result of material realities drawn together in ways that create a ‘life in theater’ not altogether different from a rising sense of consciousness” (9). As bodily literature, “in the theater the invisible *is* made visible; the immaterial *is* made material in a genuine and not just metaphorical sense” (ibid. 16). Peter Brook proffers similar conceptions of dramatic performance with his notion of Holy Theater, a “Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible” (qtd. in Demastes 15). This concept of *invisibility* corresponds to that which has been excluded by discourse and/or prevailing ideology.

In a Heideggerian context, the stage demonstrates a material construct upon which alternate modes of signification can come into the presence of Being. Actualized by the figures that perform it, this Being *is* insofar as it is *embodied*. Explored in detail throughout Chapter Four, Heidegger’s insists that through equipmental relations, by using a hammer for instance, the subject engages the world and the things in it. Drama, with a set and props, recreates this task of living. Moreover, by deriving meaning from external stimuli via sensory processes, one engages theatrical production as one experiences daily life. In this way, the methods by which we “understand” what occurs onstage *parallel* the methods by which we “understand” our being-in-the-world. Relying on the same affective mechanisms and sensori-motor processes by which we glean meaning from the vast materiality “beyond” the theater, we register and comprehend the actions depicted through dramatic representation.

Furthermore, when watching dramatic performance, the spectator observes decidedly *human* affairs. Though fictional, the depicted events (usually) correspond to those that could plausibly transpire in the “actual” world. While viewing the play, therefore, I “make sense of it” by hypothesizing how I might behave under similar circumstances. Were we to be incapable of doing this or were a play to restrict our capacity to accomplish this objective, dramatic representation would be meaningless.

Theatrical performance, then, is not solely a matter of signs, representations, styles, or discourses. It is not even reducible to people doing things. It is a complex partial totality consisting of various social relationships, processes, products, and agents, which has emerged from and within the larger totality of society. It has a stratified structure of its own, arising in the context and conditions of society’s ontological stratification. (Nellhaus 80)

A play, therefore, as a *complex partial totality consisting of various social relationships, processes, products, and agents, which has emerged from and within the larger totality of society*, reproduces the conditions under which we live. Despite the complexity, ambiguity, or abstractness of a fictional totality, characters communicate to each other and to the audience via verbal and bodily expression. Being-with consists of speaking and listening to and doing so, always to some extent, within the parameters of mutually acknowledged cultural and linguistic codes.

For this reason, Kristeva concludes that in the literary exists an “imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I try to harmonize in the best possible way with my experience of reality” (*Black Sun* 193). Similarly, Paul

Woodruff imagines the theater as a location in which occurs the act of “watching oneself,” and conceives the stage, therefore, as a site where “the art of being present to oneself” takes place (215). Heidegger, of course, devotes his career to (re)constituting the philosophical parameters by which such auto-disclosure becomes accessible. Only by identifying specific features of prevailing ideology and by actively questioning their legitimacy can one experience the authentic comportment of Being. As Heidegger states, “the absorption of Da-sein in the they and in the ‘world’...reveals something like a *flight* of Da-sein from itself as an authentic potentiality and from being itself,” and “in this flight, Da-sein precisely does not bring itself before itself” (*Being and Time* 172-3) [184]. In the theater, by *watching myself* and *being present to myself*, I *bring myself before myself* and the nakedness of my Being becomes unconcealed. This sublime encounter cannot occur in what Peter Brook describes as “Deadly Theater,” defined by Demastes as drama presenting “mere entertainment, a generally commercial theater that has given up on its former duties of advancing new thought or experience within its culture” (10). As *the they* at play, deadly theater lethally recirculates cultural practices and furthers the spectator’s *flight from itself*. But a living, vital theater, what we might call *agissenture feminine* (feminine acting), by ideologically, structurally, semiotically, or linguistically presenting *new thought or experience*, potentially “defamiliarises the real by dramatizing the extent to which, and the manner in which, that reality is constituted” (*Modern American Drama: 1945-2000* 4). Plays like *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *’night Mother*, exposing the injustices of cultural practices, enact the brutal violence that results from yielding to prevailing ideology and conditioning others to do the same. Dramas like *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Homebody/Kabul*, on the other hand, present these injustices as

obstacles to be surmounted. In each of these works, the playwright seeks to protect Otherness from the relentless pressures of thematization.

At the same time, however, the primary works investigated in this project employ realism as their primary mode of representation. While *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *'night, Mother* take place in one day's time, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Homebody/Kabul* position characters within a matrix of identifiable settings, situations, and cultural practices. As Lorca endeavors to "recreate" (with photographic accuracy) the conditions of Andalusian Spain during the early twentieth century, Kushner, with the exception of the *Homebody's* monologue in Scene I, presents a collision of cultures by clearly depicting the experience of Western visitors to the Middle East. Sue-Ellen Case suggests that realism merely replicates existing social structure and therefore validates it through reinscription. When situated in a "patriarchal systems of signs, women do not have the cultural mechanisms of meaning to construct themselves as the subject rather than the object of performance," so feminine subjectivity, within a phallogentric context, can only be alienated by and from "the system of theatrical representation" (*Feminism and Theatre* 120). Along similar lines, Cixous claims, "it is always necessary for a woman to die in order for the play to begin" ("Aller à la Mer" 546). In short, like Case, Cixous suggests that since social systems have been historically shaped by phallogentric conceptions of subjectivity, the male universal subsumes the feminine in any "realistic" representation of culture.

In their collaborative essay, "From Formalism to Feminism," Sue-Ellen Case and Jeanie K. Forte present Churchill's *Cloud 9* and Cixous' *Portrait of Dora* as exemplary works through which traditional notions of gender and sexuality are challenged. By

deviating in both form and content from what they perceive as the prison of realism, these works “compound the desiring female subject of the drama with the theme of homosexuality” and portray “a kind of confrontational politics” (64). The resulting mode “disrupts the very center of the traditional drama, which seems obsessively focused on” both “male/female polarization” and the “opposition of [men and women] as gendered characters” (ibid. 65). In this regard, lesbianism transcends sexuality by morphing into conceptual revolt.¹¹⁹ Though Teresa De Lauretis cautions proponents of lesbian theory that “the ways in which the new context would produce new meanings or ‘disrupt traditional meanings’ appear to be dependent on the presumption of a unified lesbian viewer/reader,” she does not go far enough (17). De Lauretis’ critique speaks to the essentialization of a lesbian population, but she appears to overlook that the dangers of conflating revolt and sexuality itself runs the risk of appropriation and essentialism. Though representations of homoeroticism certainly question hetero-normative notions of subject formation and present a method through which prevailing ideology can be questioned, to suggest that a work depicting heterosexual relationships “prescribes...marriage as that which mends all tearings in social fabric” presents obvious problems (Case and Forte 65).

These critiques of realism stem from the notion that aesthetic reproductions of the Symbolic order implicitly validate the cultural practices of which that order is comprised. According to this logic, therefore, the structural composition of texts like *’night, Mother* and *The House of Bernarda Alba* undermines their subversive content by mimetically reconstituting the material conditions that produce the oppressive circumstances the works seemingly reject. For the anti-realist, realism, in Lacanian terminology, yields to

prohibitionism, to the law, and to regulation, or, in a Heideggerian sense, re-enacts the structures of the they. I patently reject this claim. Realism does not seek to recreate “reality” in an effort to (re)convey a fixed Symbolic order. One need only read Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, Friel’s *Translations*, and countless other plays to discover this. Though experimentation in form and deviations from “traditional” modes of representation effectively disturb conceptions of “reality” by constructing alternate worlds onstage, dramas like Pirandello’s surrealist *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Shepard’s desolate and ambiguous *Tooth of the Crime*, and Vogul’s frenetic *The Mineola Twins*, for example, by implementing intelligible dialogue, ultimately anchor themselves in the Symbolic order from which they seek refuge.

As Lacan states, it is the “world of words that creates the world of things,” so linguistic structures always already both refer to and spring from the Symbolic (qtd. in Evans 159). In short, there exists no escape from the Symbolic; there exist only methods by which we can re-imagine, revitalize, or reconfigure its structure. Works of art, therefore, can expose the fragility, thus mutability, of the law, but they cannot ever operate beyond or outside the Symbolic order from which they emerge. They *can*, however, puncture the veneer of stasis and create gaps in the continuum we call reality. In short, artistic representation presents momentary access to The Real, what Lacan calls an undifferentiated totality that “is absolutely without fissure” (ibid. 159). Returning to the plays, Pirandello, like Beckett, chronicles the absurd interactions of creations abandoned by their creator; Shepard meditates on the possibilities of acting in opposition to the rigid contours of the Law; Vogul targets the extent to which culture objectifies the feminine body. In these plays, the dramatists utilize unconventional form when they

envison of social reform. I propose, however, that these works are vital contributions insofar as they present the *possibility for reform*. A work's capacity to present the possibility of revolt, reform, or cultural transformation transcends stylistic concerns. To suggest otherwise is an act of theoretical violence that potentially limits or discredits entire modes of representation.

Since exposure to the Real constitutes a brush against the materiality of existence, finitude, and the fragility of the Symbolic, therefore situating the subject in proximity to chaos, destruction, and death, the event coincides with trauma and fear. Literature occupies a privileged space insofar as it mediates this exposure. Freud tells us that through the process of identification, the process of empathizing with a fictional character or event (or by relating with Otherness), the individual can undergo the harshness of death without dying. "It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death, and whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators;" yet he concludes, "in the realm of fiction...we die with the hero with whom we have identified ourselves, yet we survive him and are ready to die again just as safely with another hero" (qtd. in Borch-Jacobsen 95). Literature, quite simply, evokes empathy. The reader-spectator identifies him or herself with the events conveyed in the text. The extent to which this identification occurs determines the extent to which the reader-spectator "connects with" the text. Clearly, however, the process of identification extends beyond mere "connection with" or "enjoyment of" a literary work. As fictional events enacted on the spatial domain of the stage or in the confines of a novel, the suicides of Adela and Hedda, for example, or the self-mutilation of Oedipus provide us with vicarious access to the abysmal conditions of the Real. Through this access, we step beyond our "selves"

and into a mediated state of fusion with the Other, with jouissance, with the wholeness that we seek.

This vicarious access reflects a *Real-ism*, and this access occurs *beyond the pleasure principle*. Any work, despite its formal structure, in which the tenuousness of the law is revealed and the boundaries erected by the Symbolic order are traversed presents to us an example of Real-ism. In Real-ism, barriers to jouissance rupture and explode. This Real-ism, far from depicting the “natural” order of things or presenting the world as it is, discloses to the spectator-reader the possibilities for Symbolic collapse. Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba* and Norman’s *’night, Mother*, works judged harshly by those who deem mimetic realism a re-inscription of cultural codes, both condemn the injustices of the Law by revealing its oppressive elements. Instead of validating the cultural practices these plays depict *realistically*, Lorca and Norman, while recycling conventional modes of representation, reject conventional ideology. Along similar lines, Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* incorporate realism to illustrate methods by which figures like Mama, Walter Lee, and Beneath Younger and Homebody, Milton, and Priscilla Ceiling Jessie can emancipate themselves from the stifling modes of signification that plague the Albas and the Cates.

Regardless of the stylistic mode, whether absurdist or realistic, the extent to which a work enables the process of identification determines the extent to which we can register our exposure to the sublime and encounter The Real. For Elin Diamond, literature functions exclusively through this process of identification.

The subject takes on, takes *in*, features of the other and is “transformed,” wholly or partially, in conformity to that model. This implies that the

subject has no prior identity; rather, identity is formed in the crucible of connections; the subject is “specified,” distinguished from all other subjects not by his immortal soul but by his identifications, and these identifications stem not from disciplined reason but from desire. (392)

Though on the one hand, as the title of Diamond’s essay, “The Violence of We,” indicates, the process of identification threatens alterity. Through identification, we impinge on Otherness by swallowing it within our own experience. On the other hand, as this passage illustrates, our capacity for identification, for empathy, yields a selfhood made possible only from within *the crucible of connections* we forge with other human beings. With whom we interact and how we do so governs “who” we are. As Heidegger asserts that human beings possess no essence apart from our preontological knowledge (our capacity – our compulsion – to emulate and integrate into a cultural matrix), Diamond here maintains that our ability to glean meaning from a literary work mirrors the process through which subjectivity emerges. Identification, the process of being-with, makes autodisclosure possible. To clarify this Heideggerian context, “*to be a person is to project a person to be*, so our being is *at issue* for us,” and “our being is at issue for us because we care about our being” (Blattner 37). This projection of personhood occurs in our day-to-day dealings with the world, but metaphorically comes to bear when we encounter literary representation. In Freudian terms, we perceive a figure as heroic because he or she *projects* a person we long to be. Similarly, characters can radiate attributes from which we recoil. As this project indicates, the revolutionary maternal function – as embodied by The Homebody and Mama Younger – *projects* the

authentic comportment of Being, the existential mode in which cultural practices do not entirely govern one's ontological status.

When contextualized with critiques of realism as a viable mode of representation, this notion of identification assumes a new dimension. From a Heideggerian perspective, humans “are primordially familiar with the world and cannot be disentangled from it,” so attempts to alienate a spectator from the spectacle in an effort to disentangle the audience from “the world” become problematic (Blattner 13). Though familiar with “the world,” we are always already severed from potentiality; we are never fully authentic, never immersed in the totality we seek. The Lacanian analytic employs this state of longing as Lack. For both Lacan and Heidegger, our *familiarity* with the world goes no further than our limited awareness of our spatio-temporal location. That which is Real, whether it be Thingness, authenticity, death, or jouissance, exists infinitely beyond our grasp, beyond language, and beyond sustainable experience. In this regard, to condemn realism as a reproduction of Symbolic Law rests on the assumption that art can somehow signify a world beyond the Symbolic, a feat that representation of any kind accomplishes only in bursts of brilliance that can never be adequately articulated.

In further Heideggerian fashion, Diamond surmises that our construction of “identity” has no rational basis. Driven by the desire for wholeness, the desire for identification, we watch a film or play and incorporate the events depicted onscreen or onstage into our own ontological realm; this process, therefore, in no way resembles the detached dynamic of the subject-object relation. We can empathize, we can identify, precisely because we engage that which we have *made* familiar or because we easily integrate into the fictional parameters of a world that *is* familiar.

At the same time, however, the process of identification becomes traumatic insofar as it threatens our sense of autonomy. In identification, the borders of the “I” disintegrate and blur into the realm of the Other. For Kristeva, this experience thrusts the subject into abjection. In an encounter with the abject, “meaning collapses,” and from within this chaos, “I” brush against “a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (“Approaching Abjection” 230). Here, Kristevan abjection can be likened to Diamond’s description of identification. The horror that “I” am *radically separate* and exist in complete ontological isolation is amplified by the fact that “I” am devoid of a central core, that “I” am *formed in the crucible of connections*.

Mounting her own critique of realism in “Modern Theater Does Not Take (A) Place,” Julia Kristeva warns that if drama seeks merely to replicate existing constructs, “this obliges playwrights and actors...to play complacently with the verisimilitude of an antiquating society’s antiquating fantasies” (134). For feminist critics of realism, these *fantasies* are hetero-normative conceptions of subjectivity while Brechtian Marxists equate realism with *antiquated* economic and political systems. Kristeva, like Irigaray, therefore calls for a “remaking of language” and, at least in this essay, is skeptical that “traditional” modes of representation will produce a revolutionary signifying practice (ibid. 134).

Ironically, despite the critique of realism she articulates in “Modern Theater Does Not Take (A) Place,” in her discussion of *Oedipus the King*, Kristeva argues “that our eyes can remain open provided we recognize ourselves as always already altered by the

symbolic – by language. Provided we hear in language – and not in the other, nor in the other sex – the gouged-out eye, the wound, the basic incompleteness that conditions the indefinite quest” (qtd. in *The Audience* 139-40). This *indefinite quest*, the pursuit for wholeness and jouissance, is perhaps most accessible in a sublime encounter with the Real. This encounter, as Kristeva repeatedly suggests, occurs when one engages art. In Sophocles’ work, Oedipus confronts the rawness of his material reality and cannot bear the sight. Since the actions occurs in a play, spectators experience Oedipus’ trauma, but the fact that the horrors depicted onstage are fictional mediates this experience. To be sure, Sophocles employs mimetic representation. Though he does not mirror the “actual” world, he constructs the world “as it ought to be.” Similarly, returning to Kristeva’s passage above, since we are *always already altered by the symbolic*, our exposure to the Real is forever mediated by language. When viewing the drama, however, *our eyes can remain open* to the horror of seeing the Real, but we are not destroyed by the vision. This is *Real-ism*.

For Hubert Blau, this luxury of sight occasions “that hallucinatory moment when what we’re looking for is what we appear to be listening to, the mortal subject of theater, the unnameable thing of desire that is cadaverized by speech” (*The Audience* 139). As does Kristeva, Blau here speaks of an illusory access to *Das Ding*, to a total truth that offers the empty promise of ending Lack. For Blau, this illusory access emerges as *the mortal subject of theater*. We look to theater, to the site of confrontation, as if the narratives enacted there can somehow alleviate the pains of being. This salvation, however, can never be anything but illusory. For Blau, however, this *hallucinatory moment* offers infinite promise. He describes performance as “a reflection on limits,” as

the kind of thought that is deliberately, even relentlessly, subjunctive and provisional, putting out interrogative feelers, often thinking out loud what it does not quite (yet, if ever) understand, self-reflexive, yes, parenthetical, no doubt elusive, or allusive, trying out an idea, taking it back again, saying it another way, not saying at all, but finding a gesture for it, putting it up for grabs in the exhaustive play of perception that, at some limit approaching meaning, always seems to escape, thus keeping meaning alive. (*The Dubious Spectacle* 319)

How easily this frantic meditation on drama can be applied to the art of being. As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Heidegger argues that our most basic interactions with the world stem from our pre-ontological, inarticulate aspects of Being, aspects we cannot quite (*yet, if ever*) understand. In the act of performance, the beauty of this unintelligibility approaches abjection and mingles with jouissance.

As a literary mode, drama functions by designating and developing roles. The action and plot of a play, as we all know, advances because actors dutifully respect the nature of their parts and how each part fits into the work as a whole. Were the players to improvise, deviate from script, or rearrange the chronology of a text, the drama, as conceived and organized prior to performance, would cease to be. What would follow? Chaos? Madness? A superior production? Who knows? What matters most is that each actor possesses the power to, at any time, revolt. More likely than not, the *fear of reprisal* keeps an actor from extemporaneousness. Unemployment would surely follow and a bad reputation might brand this individual for years to come. Directors and peers would certainly deem such behavior insane. The event, after all, would expose the

fragility of theatrical production...any dramatic work is always at the mercy of the cooperation of all involved.

Performance, however, is never limited to the stage. Are cultural practices not stabilized and perpetuated by this same dynamic of collusion, complicity, and cooperation? Freudian and Lacanian subjectivation occurs, has occurred, because we submit to phallogentric authority. Irigaray and Kristeva establish alternate theories of subject formation in which we can find refuge from notions of psychical development scripted by a patriarchal tradition. Heidegger, too, urges us to rethink our roles and to pursue the liberating potential of authentic Being. In so doing, we forge selfhood *in the crucible of identifications*; we navigate a slipstream of cultural networks, adopt modes of being, slough them off, in a finite recurrence we call living.

Revealing that which has been systematically excluded from or swallowed by discourse – the mOther, the body, the Thing – *agissement feminine* theatrically conjures the political elements of dramatic performance. In *Between Past and Future*, Hannah Arendt defines politics as “a kind of theater where freedom could appear” (qtd. in Dietz, *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* 173). In this political theater, “the space where I appear to others as others appear to me” constitutes the ongoing drama of civic affairs (*The Human Condition* 198). Their interplay, however, is *civil* only insofar as it shelters “the living essence of the person as it shows itself in the flux of action and speech” (ibid. 181). *Action and speech* and reaction and response, the fundamental components of drama, comprise the core of Arendtian political theory. As dramatists stage existence, Arendt urges us to participate in the theater of life. Words and deeds, however, assume their significance only to the extent to which they respect and preserve

difference. Likewise, theater is “worth watching” when it forces us to confront language, practices, or desires of the Other.

The plays I have explored presented varying conceptions of the maternal role. For Bernarda and “Mama” Cates, the mother functions as an extension of patriarchal mechanisms while Lena and the Homebody decisively disavow paternal Law. Whether via mimetic realism or experimental, abstract expression, dramatic representation – as corporeal, semiotic, visceral communication – brings us nearer to the maternal-feminine, to Otherness, to the Thing, to all that has historically remained unsignified. At the risk of reduction, I propose that, at its core, artistic representation either recycles or rejects dominant signifying practices. In *The Audience*, Herbert Blau concludes that theater should revolt and remain ever willing to

engage, implicate, inform, challenge, defy, intimidate, solicit, terrorize or disrupt the audience, invite them on stage or box them out, and do it within the frame of the proscenium or the hemisphere of a thrust, from behind a scrim or under white light, or otherwise dispersed, out of the theater altogether, on the streets, subways, in factories, prisons, or shopping malls, at the edge of the ocean in full sunlight, or, deploying the teasers and tormentors, with the audience again in the dark. (381-2).

Ever moving through this infinite darkness, we can prematurely decompose in the tomb of cultural expectations, or we can reform, limb by limb, through ethical encounters with Otherness. The theater can be the fountainhead of this event. Plays can *and should* expose how Symbolic Law, conveyed to and experienced by the subject as the fruit of a sacred tree, rests on fragile and shifting soil that, when no longer fecund, can be dredged

and excavated until more fertile earth is uncovered. As Heidegger suggests, the human being can reconfigure its ontological status by breaking away from the tyranny of *the they*, and I propose that *agissement feminine*, by articulating and enacting the jouissance of mOtherness, stages the transformation.

NOTES

1 Readers already familiar with these thinkers can skip the following summaries and proceed to page 51.

2 “The first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the sexual instinct has a sexual object outside the infant’s own body in the shape of the mother’s breast. It is only later that the child loses that object, just at the time perhaps, when the child is able to form a total idea of the person to whom the organ that is giving him satisfaction belongs. There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his mother’s breast has become the prototype of every relation of love” (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 88).

3 “No doubt the simplest course for the child would be to choose as his sexual objects the same persons whom, since his childhood, he has loved with what may be described as damped-down libido. But, by postponing of sexual maturation, time has been gained in which the child can erect, among other restraints on sexuality, the barrier against incest, and can thus take up into himself the moral precepts which expressly exclude from his object-choice, as being blood-relations, the persons whom he has loved in his childhood. Respect for this barrier is essentially a cultural demand made by society. Society must defend itself against the danger that the interests which it needs for the establishment of higher social units may be swallowed up in the family” (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 91).

4 The notion of the Primal Horde originally appears in Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) as "the primitive horde" in which he speculates on the nature of human social formation during prehistoric time. The Primal Horde is the notion that early social organization revolved around a chieftain-father who kept close guard over the women of the village. He 'possessed' them and exiled all male progeny to ensure his position of power and sexual potency. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud proposes that: "one day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde" (500). The act of patricide distributes power more evenly; each brother can compile a harem of his own since the women are no longer the 'property' of a single ruler. Eventually, however, the absence of the father produced a power vacuum. No individual brother could acquire the absolute power that the patriarch once possessed. Furthermore, the murder of the father induced a sense of guilt in the sons and this guilt produced patriarchal religious structures; the father-god replaces the murdered father.

5 In "Leonardo DA Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood," Freud articulates the dimensions of this developmental phase. "When a male child first turns his curiosity to the riddles of sexual life, he is dominated by his interest in his own genital. He finds that part of his body too valuable and too important for him to be able to believe that it could be missing in other people whom he feels he resembles so much. As he cannot guess that there exists another type of genital structure of equal worth, he is forced to make the assumption that all human beings, women as well as men, possess a penis like his own" (460).

6 “The biological factor is the long period of time during which the young of the species is in a condition of helplessness and dependence. Its intra-uterine existence seems to be short in comparison with that of most animals, and it is sent into the world in a less finished state. As a result, the influence of the real external world upon it is intensified at an early differentiation between the ego and the id is promoted. Moreover, the dangers of the external world have a greater importance for it, so that the value of the object which can alone protect it against them and take the place of its former intra-uterine life is enormously enhanced. The biological fact, then, establishes the earliest situations of danger and creates the need to be loved which will accompany the child through the rest of its life” (*Seminar XX* 154-55).

7 Lacanian psychoanalysis is complex and often difficult to understand. This is in part due to the fact that his texts have been translated from the French, a process in which his puns and nuances are lost. The accessibility of Lacanian discourse is obscured also by his self-referential style. In his works, he often addresses a reader he imagines as already well-versed in his canon. As a result, I have relied heavily on Mikkel Borch-Jacobson’s *Lacan: The Absolute Master* (1991), Bruce Fink’s “The Subject and the Other’s Desire” (*Reading Seminars I and II*, ed. Bruce Fink, 1996), Brachner’s *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change* (1993), *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (ed. Jean-Michel Rabate, 2003), Ellie Ragland-Sullivan’s *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (1986), Richard Boothby’s *Death and Desire* (1991), and Jane Gallop’s *Reading Lacan* (1985), and Elizabeth Grosz’s *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*

(1990). Though all of these works provide detailed analyses and summations of Lacan's work, I found Borch-Jacobson, Grosz, Ragland-Sullivan, and Boothby to be most helpful.

8 As Elizabeth Grosz explains, The Real, experienced as need, "is the experiential counterpart to nature" and "comes as close to instincts as is possible in human existence" (*Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* 59). As will be discussed shortly, the Real cannot be thematized or understood and ultimately gives way to the compulsion for coherence (initiated during the mirror phase and identified by Lacan as the Imaginary order) that the Symbolic order (through language) appears to provide.

9 Fink here alludes to two lacks. Returning to Freud is helpful to understand this concept. As Freud argues that the male child perceives womanhood as the result of castration, Lacan suggests that the child, attuned to its own Lack, the child projects its experience onto the Other and, in so doing, presumes its mother shoulders the same burden of Lack and incompleteness.

10 In French, "nom" (name) and "non" (no) are phonetically indistinguishable. In this context, Law In-the-Name-of-the-Father assumes richer significance.

11 Like Freud, Lacan explains the idealization of the penis in an anthropological context. Just as Freud presents the scenario of the Primal Horde as an explanation for patriarchal social structure, castration anxiety, and incest taboo, in "La Relation D'Objet et Les Structures Freudiennes," Lacan attributes androcentric culture to the trajectory of the physiological development of our species to our evolutionary process. "There is a whole series of things in the signified that are there, but which are borrowed by the signifier...in order to give the signifier, if we may say so, its first weapons—namely,

those extremely elusive and yet very irreducible things, of which precisely the phallic term, the pure and simple erection, the pure and simple raised stone, is an example, of which *the notion of the human body as erected is another...a number of elements, more or less related to bodily posture and not simply to the felt experience of the body*” (qtd in Borch-Jacobsen 230; my emphasis). Lacan explains the archaic origin of phallic primacy. The image of the erection is the image of uprightness, the notion of the human body erected and, as such, contains within it the origin of humanity, of a prime-original biped that walked upright and could distinguish its ambulatory capacity from that of other creatures, perhaps a being called Homo Habilis. Stones that form the faces at Easter Island, the pillars of Stonehenge, and the pyramids in Egypt (the Washington Monument?) have been erected; they have been placed upright. For Lacan, these icons are attempts at achieving Phallic wholeness and are a testament to that primal urge. The penis, therefore, is not the embodiment of this wholeness, but, as an organ that can be made erect, it most readily conveys the symbolic power of the desire for completeness, a power that, in the Lacanian paradigm, cannot be articulated through images of the female reproductive organ.

12 *Objet a* corresponds to the object of desire. Though *petit objet a* can refer to a material thing, human desire for *objet a* can never be fulfilled. In his *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Dylan Evans states, “*a* denotes the object which can never be obtained, which is really the CAUSE of desire rather than that towards which desire tends” (125). In this sense, this “object” can be the mother’s breast, can be the Phallus itself, and refers to anything the subject feels is missing or must be acquired. Psychological

Lack traces back to *objet a*. For extensive analysis of this concept, see Chapter 7 of Mikkel Borch-Jacobson's *Lacan: The Absolute Master* (specifically 227-37).

13 Elizabeth Grosz explains that fetishism results when a subject refuses to reject the mother. She elucidates also why fetishism is more common in males. "The fetishist demands that the mother have a genital organ the same as his own. His disavowal functions to ward off threats of his own organ, threats which force him to acknowledge the possibility of its loss. In place of the missing maternal phallus, he will position the fetish (shoe, raincoat, underwear, etc.)" (*Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* 118).

14 Marxist Louis Althusser elaborates on this concept when he determines that a political body's culture, its superstructure, is produced by Ideological State Apparatuses and maintained by Repressive State Apparatuses. The ISA is made up of "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 1489). Examples of these institutions are churches, schools, law, political system(s), art, and the family. The role of the ISA is to ingrain in the subject traditional and societal norms, the doxa. These norms are enforced by RSA's, like the police, the army, bureaucratic administration, which employ "suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to 'discipline' not only their shepherds but also their flocks" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 1489). Subjects are assimilated into the ideologies to which they are exposed; any 'deviant' philosophy is removed from academic curriculum, public policy, religious doctrine, and 'appropriate' ideology is transmitted from generation to generation.

15 “Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging sensation and, still further down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up in the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire” (“Approaching Abjection” 231).

16 After the brothers killed the father, they replaced him with a totem, a symbol for the once omnipotent ancestor. The brothers experienced guilt resulting from the patricide. Freud claims that at this point “the dead father became stronger than the living one had been” (*Totem and Taboo* 143). The brothers’ guilt transformed into repentance, and respect for paternal law as authority emerges. Respect for this authority is the foundation of the social pact. Part of this contract, of course, is the taboo of incest.

17 Although symbolic language is associated with paternal law, it is not to be confused with Lacan’s Symbolic Order.

18 Though primarily discussing Luce Irigaray, Naomi Schor’s “This Essentialism Which is Not One” focuses on this problem and suggests that one can essentialize essentialism.

19 The *good enough mother* is a term in reference to the object-relations psychology of Melanie Klein, a theory on which Kristeva expands in her work, *Melanie Klein*.

20 The notion of ‘justice’ is ambiguous. For our purposes, a ‘just’ symbolic order is non-oppressive, enables agency, respects alterity, and permits authentic Being. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

21 In his 1998 translation of Lacan's *Seminar XX*, Bruce Fink elucidates; "Woman with a capital *W*, Woman as singular in essence, does not exist; Woman as an all-encompassing idea (a Platonic form) is an illusion. There is a multiplicity of women, but no essence of 'Womanhood' or 'Womanliness'" (fn. 28 7).

22 When dealing with "the nature that receives all bodies," one must "always call it by the same name, since it never at all abandons its own power. It both always receives all things, and nowhere in no way has it ever taken on any shape similar to the ones that come into it; for its laid down by nature as a molding stuff for everything, being both moved and thoroughly configured by whatever things come into it; and because of these, it appears different at different times; and the figures that come into it and go out of it are always imitations of the things that *are*, having been imprinted from them in some manner" (*Timaeus* 82-3) [50 C].

23 Since they possess no access to the purity of Form, Plato considers females to be ethically inferior. As a result, one can witness "pleasures, pains, and appetites that are numerous and multifarious...in children, women, household slaves, and in the so-called free members of the masses – that is, the inferior people" (*Republic* 117) [431 c].

24 Jacobs seeks "to theorize an underlying cultural law that is not reducible to the structure of Oedipus" (x-xi). In chapters 5 and 6, Jacobs relies heavily on the Oresteian myth in which Orestes, after murdering his adulterous mother, Clytemnestra, flees his home in Argos due to his horrific pain and guilt. She claims that "psychoanalysis becomes blinded at the moment Oedipus gouges out his eyes," while Orestes "gives him [Oedipus] back his sight" (56). Though Jacobs work provides fascinating alternatives to

the Oedipal dynamic, the method by which an Oresteian law can replace Oedipal dynamics remains unclear.

25 “Woman’s autoeroticism is very different from that of man. In order to touch himself, he needs an instrument: his hand, a woman’s genitals, language...As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without the need for a mediation...Woman ‘touches herself’ all the time...for her genitals [*sexe*] are formed of two lips that embrace continuously” (qtd. in Stone 22).

26 Judith Butler maintains that in her critique of Plato’s *Timeaus*, Irigaray situates the feminine as “always outside” the Form-matter transformation, therefore “the outside is ‘always’ feminine” (*Bodies That Matter* 48). In so doing, Irigaray perpetrates “idealizing and appropriating the ‘elsewhere’ as the feminine,” so Butler wonders, “what is the ‘elsewhere’ of Irigaray’s ‘elsewhere’? If the feminine is not the only or primary kind of being that is excluded from the economy of a masculinist reason, what and who is excluded in the course of Irigaray’s analysis?”(ibid. 49). For Butler, the binary logic of masculine-feminine stems from hetero-normative sexual politics in which homosexuality assumes an alienated position. In short, Butler suggests that when Irigaray situates “the feminine” as Other of the Other, “deviant” sexualities and ethnic minorities remain the Other of the Same. Indebted primarily to Foucault’s notions that prevailing ideology, as a structure of power, imprints upon subjects “appropriate” identities (see *History of Sexuality, Discipline and Punish*, and/or *Madness and Civilization*), Butler argues in her work that the body is a text upon which dominant modes of signification are inscribed. For Butler, therefore, femininity and masculinity comprise artificial and culturally

contingent signifying practices. For further critiques of Irigaray's essentialism, see Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Monique Plaza's "Phallogomorphic Power' and the Psychology of 'Woman,'" Janet Sayers' *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism*, and Abigail Bray's "Not Woman Enough: Irigaray's Culture of Difference."

27 Chapter Four is partially devoted to these parallels. In addition, though "*the they*" is the "traditional" translation of *Das Man* (appearing most notably in John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson 1962 translation of *Being and Time* and in the 1996 Joan Stambaugh translation of *Sein and Zeit* that I reference in this project), Hubert Dreyfus, in his reading of Heidegger's German, translates the term, *Das Man*, as "the one" instead of "*the they*." The literal translation of the German is "the man;" the original German adds the definite article to *man*, which like the English "one" or the French "*on*" is used as an indefinite personal pronoun.

28 Metatheatricality is an obvious reference to Brechtian epic theater, also termed metatheater. In *A Short Organum*, Brecht describes epic theater as, "the exposition of the story and its communication by suitable means of alienation constitute the main business of the theatre," and that this process of "alienating an event or character means first of all stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them" (qtd. in Brooker 191). This alienation effect, *verfremdungseffekt* or V-Effect, is Brecht's mode of representation. Far from realism, the V-Effect jettisons the audience from the complacency, disturbs them from the "dream" of fiction, by constantly reminding them that they are watching a play, observing an artfully

constructed world. Brecht asserts that in his dramas, “what is obvious is in a certain sense made incomprehensible, but this is only in order that it may then be made all the easier to comprehend” (ibid. 192). Therefore, when Brecht uses harsh lighting, an active and visible narrator, and/or placards to designate scene change, he is constantly reminding the spectator that s/he is sitting in a chair and watching a play. In so doing, the audience is alienated from the narrative as narrative. For Brecht, this alienation enables the audience to pierce the veneer of plot and see straight into the ideological impact of the events depicted. For example, *Mother Courage* is a play depicts the amoral greed of Anna Fierling. Set in the Thirty Years War, the character peddles her wares to Lutherans and Catholics alike; she takes no side and pursues only self-preservation. Premiering in Zurich in 1941, the drama presents the ethical dilemma of neutrality to an audience in Switzerland, a country that declared neutrality amid the German aggression of World War II. Lorca, with his stated objective of “photographic realism,” is on the opposite side of the spectrum of Brecht. Though both employ the theatre to critique cultural practices, their methods are decidedly different.

29 Stainton cites the James Graham-Lujan and Richard L. O’Connell translation of *The House of Bernarda Alba*. In this version, Adela emerges wearing a white petticoat and corselet.

30 In act 3

31 Following economic depression and general civil unrest, Spain embraced left-wing government in 1931. The socialist policies, however, did not improve social conditions as quickly as the population demanded and in the fall of 1934, the socialist left

was ousted for right wing government in a public election. Several labor organizations, most notably the trade unions and coal miners, feared that right wing government would morph into intolerant fascism akin to Hitler's rising regime in Germany. When these labor groups organized into a militia of thirty thousand armed men, the government responded with force. Concerned that socialist interests threatened the solvency of right-wing power, General Francisco Franco seized control and declared war on left-wing political agencies. Lorca, an outspoken member of left-wing political interests was targeted for "seditious" activities. In 1933, Lorca enlisted in an organization called Association of Friends of the Soviet Union, voiced his concerns for Hitler's activities in Germany, and supported the socialist party, The Popular Front, in 1936. Identified as an enemy of the state, Lorca was forcibly detained on August 16, 1936 and shortly thereafter disappeared (Stainton 444-457).

32 In November of 1931, Lorca approached his friend, Carlos Morla Lynch, in hopes of establishing a traveling theater group that "would perform classical works—Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderon de la Barca—in the villages and marketplaces of rural Spain, so bereft of culture" (Gibson 320). Lorca determined that the passivity of isolated villages in the countryside contributed to the success of Franco's ascension to power. This troupe, as visualized by Lorca, would be peopled by artists, writers, and performers aligned with the anti-Franco Republican party, and the events would, through artistic representation, "participate in the shaping of the New Spain," a Republic devoid of totalitarian rule (ibid. 320). Lorca proposed not simply a traveling theater; he conceptualized "a permanent *barraca* or barn in which to perform plays throughout the year" in Madrid (ibid. 321).

Though Lorca's idea never came to fruition, his project of politicalized artistic resistance to oppression became known as *La Barraca* (Gibson 320-324).

33 Nineteenth century French playwright, Eugène Scribe, produced over 250 plays between 1815-1855. His legacy, however, is his structural approach to drama. His concept of "the well-made play" relies on a formulaic structure. Lee A. Jacobus defines this structure as the following:

1. A careful exposition telling the audience what the situation is, usually including one or more secrets to be revealed later.
2. Surprises, such as letters to be opened at a critical moment and identities to be revealed later.
3. Suspense that builds steadily throughout the plays, usually sustained by cliff-hanging situations and characters who miss each other by way of carefully timed entrances and exits. At critical moments, characters lose important papers or misplace identifying jewelry, for instance.
4. A climax late in the play when the secrets are revealed and the hero confronts the antagonist and succeeds.
5. A denouement, the resolution of the drama when all the loose ends are drawn together and explanations are made that render all the action plausible. (647)

In plays like Molière's *Tartuffe*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, and Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, this structure dominates the action onstage.

34 C.B. Morris claims that “*La Casa de Bernarda Alba* is not simply a drama of the Andalusian countryside, but one located in a small and specific area of the Vega of Granada” (*Son of Andalusia: The Lyrical Landscapes of Federico Garcia Lorca* 135).

35 In “One Is not Born a Woman,” materialist feminist Monique Wittig seeks to “destroy the idea that women are a ‘natural group’” (2014). She proposes that a “lesbian society,” a society apart from men, autonomous and independent, would “pragmatically reveal that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a ‘natural group’” (2014). *Bernarda Alba* appears to occupy a position of authority and power, a position unfettered by masculine influence, a position, in Wittig’s terms, in which ideology could be reshaped and refigured.

36 Heidegger’s project, *Being in Time*, probes the extent to which our inherited conceptions of Being so often divorce philosophical meditation from the material reality of being-in-the-world. The Cartesian mind-body split illustrates this separation. For Heidegger, the abstractions of detached philosophy become irrelevant. Instead of assisting humanity in addressing the riddle of Being, “objective” theorizing compartmentalizes the human experience, producing what Heidegger terms “*the they*,” the omnipresent, yet nebulous and invisible, force that shapes the parameters of an individual’s subjectivation. *The they* comprise prevailing ideology, and thoughtless compliance to the shapes and contours of “appropriate” behavior (potentially) limits an individual’s ontological development. The *authentic* subject questions cultural practices

and is willing to operate outside the bounds of convention. Chapter Four discusses this issue in detail.

37 Historian Allen Josephs argues, “In Andalusia, ancient, passive, syncretistic, absorbtive, things have not changed, have not evolved, have not progressed, partly through oppression and partly because the Andalusians sensed that evolution or progress as it developed in the West was not suitable to them. Some collective instinct meshed perfectly with the vagaries of history, and the Andalusians ‘revolved’ rather than ‘evolved.’ We in the West moved ‘forward.’ Thy moved ‘backward,’ especially by comparison. The continuum of history did not stop in Andalusia, but the absorbtive, syncretistic nature of the culture tended to neutralize any sense of motion. All the survivals of antiquity are both the results and the proof of this function” (127). This *antiquity* is evident in conceptions of gender that were inherited from Spain’s Golden Age. Lia Schwartz Lerner describes the worldview to which Andalusions remained steadfast throughout the early twentieth century. “Medical, legal, religious, and artistic discourses in Spain’s Golden Age privileged the male body. Women were thus conceived as imperfect notions of men: they were considered colder, weaker, and less stable. The gender system of the one-sex body was based on the principle of hierarchy and reciprocity; the male was superior and the female inferior. The boundaries between male and female were thus of degree and not of kind. A man and a woman needed to unite sexually for conception, yet the male represented efficient cause, while the female represented only the material cause” (9). This worldview clearly reflects Platonic notions of subjectivity and gender (feminine, devoid of essence, is receptacle for male

subjectivity). In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, women are presented as either cold and calculated (Bernarda) or hysterical and emotionally unstable (Adela) or insane (Josefa).

38 Irigaray is simultaneously challenging phallogentric psychoanalytic traditions and the historical applications of these conceptions. Her essay “Woman on the Market” is also a response to Levi-Strauss’s *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, an anthropological study in which he describes marriage as often the result of capture, of gift-giving, of purchase, and of right.

39 In Spain, women are not granted suffrage or the right to engage in the electoral process until 1931. Although the play is written and performed in 1936, the cultural demands that Bernarda imposes on her daughters have been constructed over time. If civilization is the confluence of tradition, ideology, education, religion, philosophy, politics, etc, it is the amalgamation of prevailing and historically dominant values. If women play no role in the political process, their contribution to the construction of culture is institutionally denied.

40 In Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda, like Bernarda, is enslaved by cultural norms and societal expectations. She suppresses her desires for personal freedom if those desires do not conform to propriety or convention. She justifies her self-imposed confinement with her tragic mantra, “People don’t do such things.” In Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*, Kristine, a cook and domestic servant like Poncia, expresses views in which class status and God’s will are mutually inclusive. On one hand, she states, “when aristocrats pretend they’re common people—they get *common!*” (748). The implicit comparison here suggests that there is an association between status and integrity. Kristine also subscribes to Christian

ideology: “The Savior suffered and died on the Cross for all our sins, and if we go to Him with faith and a penitent heart, He takes all our sins on Himself,” but this same God “is no respecter of persons, for the last shall be first...” (760). Kristine respects the Symbolic order and all of its subsequent delineations, like class status and gender roles, because these demarcations, the Symbolic order itself, is the manifestation of a divine plan. The collusion enacted by women (and by extension any particular group whose agency is limited by institutionalized mechanisms) is fortified by the belief that God breathes life and legitimacy into cultural law.

41 At the same time, Lacan’s understanding of psychical development subjects males to castration anxiety and to the sacrifice of *jouissance*. Referring to Freudian assertions, Dylan Evans explains, “the pleasure principle functions as a limit to enjoyment; it is a law which commands the subject to ‘enjoy as little as possible’. At the same time, the subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment to go ‘beyond the pleasure principle’. However, the result of transgressing the pleasure principle is not more pleasure, but pain, since there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear. Beyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this ‘painful pleasure’ is what Lacan calls *jouissance*” (92). Women, however, are not *as subject* to castration anxiety because women have no penis to actually lose. Though castration anxiety is metaphorical anxiety (the penis will never be “lost”; the fear, however, compels the subject into Symbolic structures), it is doubly metaphoric for women, hence “she has a supplementary *jouissance* compared to what the phallic function designates” (*Seminar XX* 73). Furthermore, as *not-whole*, as without the phallus, she is not as

subjected to Symbolic law. This is why Freud notoriously claims that woman has an underdeveloped superego (ergo inferior ethical judgment). On the one hand, therefore, the *cruelty* of the Lacanian paradigm is equally applicable to all subjects; pleasure is taboo. On the other hand, however, this schema is *crueler* to women because “compensation” for unbearable pleasure is the Symbolic order, a network of phallogentric law. Lacan also claims, “woman has more of a relationship to God” because as Other to phallic law she exists in the realm of the unintelligible. This provides woman with access to operate beyond the law, but this position also alienates the feminine to an unspeakable distortion of male subjectivity.

42 In “Draft K,” Freud’s letter to Fleiss on January 1, 1896, the psychoanalyst describes neurosis as a “choice.” More than that, however, he categorizes hysteria as “a primary experience of unpleasure—that is, of a passive nature. The natural sexual passivity of women explains their being more inclined to hysteria” (96).

43 Considering French etymology, French *perverse* in English means “perverse” or “contrary to.” The prefix, “per,” derives from the Latin and, according to the OED, signifies “away entirely, to destruction, to the bad” (Latin meaning retained in both English and French). The French pronoun, “*vers*,” means “toward,” a meaning retained in the word, “version.” The Latin, “*pervertere*” is “to turn away evilly.” The French, “*verser*,” is “to shed” or “to remove.” Similarly, “*renverser*” is “to reverse.” When Lacan utilizes the term *per-verse*, the Latin-French origins of the term suggest a *turning back of*, a *turning away from*, a *reversal of*, or a *shedding of* castration anxiety and the normative functions of the Oedipus complex. Dylan Evans describes the Lacanian

perverse as any psychological structure operating as “an infringement of the normative requirements” for subject formation (138). Kristeva’s term, *pere-version*, is phonetically identical to the Lacanian term, *per-version*. In this context, not only does Kristeva summon the perverse and the father (*pere*), she retains the notion of the turning away. In the Kristevan sense, feminine perversion does not shed or turn away from paternal law (when such a reversal is “appropriate”).

44 Lacan positions *all* subjects, male and female, as a fissure, the split between an illusory ego produced in the mirror stage and the “knowable” subject of enunciation articulated in the Symbolic and through language. Lacan speaks to this divide when he defines the subject “as that which is represented by a signifier for another signifier,” ultimately rendering the subject “an effect of language” (Evans 196). In one sense, therefore, subjectivity for every human being is an illusion, a fantasy. At the same time, however, the Symbolic order is the mechanism through which subjectivity is fashioned. If patriarchal law fabricates and maintains this order, the fantasy through which subjectivity can be achieved are shaped exclusively by patriarchal *versions* of this fantasy.

45 In the Catholic faith, Mary was not decidedly characterized as *Theotokos* (mother of God) until 431. What followed this declaration was a cult of the Virgin, virgin worship that conflates Judeo-Christian ethics with feminine purity. Sexual activity is essential in procreation of a species, yet the physical body is a source of sin and defilement. The Virgin Birth, therefore, is a profoundly powerful event. Since the feminine has historically been associated with the body and therefore with the taboo, the

virgin is a beacon of purity because she is both untainted and reflective of the birth of “God.” Throughout the seventeenth century, Spain was plagued by drought and famine. Andalusia was hit particularly hard by these events and flooded by sick, unemployed, and starving beggars. The Andalusian people rallied around the Virgin for reprieve. In 1713, a shrine to the Virgin was erected in the town of Almonte. Holy weeks in Seville and La Romeria del Rocio are religious festivals that subsequently developed as homage to the Virgin (Allen Josephs 120-123). Veneration of virginity is an outgrowth of male subjectivity. The “pure” woman is she who represses instinctive sexual desire. This repression is precisely what Bernarda’s community expects of its women; this repression is precisely what Bernarda demands of her daughters.

46 Franco, Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot all systematically assassinated social “deviants,” political dissidents, and “intellectuals” in order to homogenize their cultural landscape. On September 24, 2007, Iranian President Ahmadinejad spoke to students at Columbia University. When asked about Iranian execution of homosexuals, the president responded, “In Iran, we don’t have homosexuals, like in your country. We don’t have that in our country. In Iran, we do not have this phenomenon. I don’t know who’s told you that we have it” (*Washington Post* online <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/24/AR2007092401042.html>).

47 In Beckett’s *Endgame*, Hamm, a blind and crippled occupant of a nightmarishly apocalyptic world, a world devoid of nature, kinship, and meaning, a world in which the ontological protection provided by the Symbolic has been stripped away, revealing the

true nature of the abyss, asks Clov, “have you not had enough? Of this...this...thing” (2461).

48 Returning to *Endgame*, Clov, Hamm’s minion and caretaker, when asked by Hamm why he stays in the shelter, why he continually subjects himself to Hamm’s harsh and disrespectful treatment, replies, “there’s nowhere else” (2461). In Clov’s case, there is literally nothing outside their cell, nature has been annihilated and the landscape has been reduced to a lifeless void. In *our* case, *there’s nowhere else* outside the Symbolic order. The stakes are high...for Lacan claims that the Symbolic is fundamentally androcentric.

49 In Matthew C. Roudane’s interview with David Mamet, a contemporary of Norman’s, the playwright describes dramatic realism as a play “with a clear beginning, a middle, and an end. So when one wants to best utilize the theatre, one would try to structure a play in a way that is congruent with the mind that perceives it” (qtd. in Demastes 111). Mamet clearly defends realism from the standpoint of cognitive science. Realism is thematically effective because a narrative with an identifiable chronology mimics the human temporal experience. In this sense, realism does not reflect a dominant, patriarchal enterprise but instead recreates psychological conceptions of time and space.

50 Brown suggests that in the play, the consumption of food parallels the women’s hunger for power. Mama devours candy throughout the drama, but Jessie eats nothing at all. Brown reconciles this inconstancy by describing Jessie as “an unhappy overweight woman” (73). This description, however, is troubling. Although in the 1983 production

of *'night, Mother*, actress Kathy Bates, a heavysset woman, is cast as Jessie, nowhere do Norman's production notes indicate that Jessie has a large physical frame.

51 "The Symbolic order in its initial functioning is androcentric. That is a fact" (qtd. in Ragland-Sullivan 289).

52 Julia Kristeva's postulation of the (ungendered) *Archaic Father* as a third pole, a symbolic conception beyond the mother-child dyad is "the keystone of our loves and our imagination" (*The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt* 53). This Third Term, as the love object of the mother, is maternal ideology, ideology that may or may not conform to prevailing cultural practices. For Kristeva, maternal ideology should only conform to prevailing ideology, to the Symbolic, *if*, through putting the Symbolic "on trial," prevailing ideology is compatible with her own beliefs. If the mother is subsumed by prevailing ideology, if she does not put the Symbolic "on trial" and instead unquestioningly integrates into social structure, Lacan's notion of inherent patriarchal structure results. Irigaray, too, recognizes the importance of the Third Term. "From the interaction between the subjective and the objective of two worlds, a third arises of which the expanse is generated thanks to the withdrawal imposed by difference. The constitution of such a place, always becoming, calls for a relation between subjective and objective where the one could never assume nor integrate the other because the one and the other are two" (*The Way of Love* 9).

53 In Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Librada's daughter is a young woman who engages in sexual behavior unsanctioned by marriage. As a result of her subversive

act, she is dragged from the Vega and beaten to death. Chapter 2, pages 94-5, discusses this event in detail.

54 See Chapter 1, pages 25-40.

55 The Father of Individual Prehistory is a far cry from Lacanian phallogocentric propositions. For Lacan, Woman cannot be symbolized, “cannot signify anything” because “she is not-whole” (*Seminar XX 73*). Furthermore, in androcentric dynamics, female subjectivity is contingent on the male gaze; a woman actively pursues an image that the man projects as his object of desire. The male gaze, therefore, is a *one way street*. Kristeva’s notion of the idealized other, however, is a mutual process. The woman is not the only party to experience this idealization; the male is subjected to the female’s idealized notion of him.

56 Though the mother is the biological origin of the child and though the mother is the source for the child’s needs and the object of the child’s demands, the mother does not teach the child to love by loving merely the child. Maternal love for a child is prerequisite for the child’s material wellbeing, but the mother teaches the child to love by having an outside love-object. By loving someone or something beyond the child, the child understands expressions of love, expressions that are not exclusively related to the mother-child dyad. Furthermore, if the mother’s capacity for love is only articulated through the mother-child dyad, the mother effectively loses her “identity.” Her “selfhood” is interfused with her child. This entanglement prevents the child from individuating, separating from the mother, and constituting a *sense of* psychological autonomy.

57 As discussed in Chapter 2, Helene Cixous argues that a patriarchal Symbolic order is dependent upon woman's collusion to her oppression. "Philosophy is constructed on the premise of a woman's abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery's functioning" ("The Newly Born Woman" 39). As Bernarda Alba is a *dutiful mother* in collusion with cultural practices that suppress feminine agency, Thelma Cates participates in this collusion.

58 In *Nausea*, Jean Paul Sartre equates being with absurdity and pain. To exist is to endure horror. Self-destruction is a means by which this pain can be alleviated. The *nothingness* to which Sartre refers can be likened to Lacanian *jouissance*. "My thought is me: that's why I can't stop. I exist because I think... and I can't stop myself from thinking. At this very moment - it's frightful - if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing. I am the one who pulls myself from the nothingness to which I aspire" (135-6).

59 The *dutiful mother* holds her child responsible for her child's unhappiness. In *'night, Mother*, Jessie is to blame for her depression. If she had been willing to integrate into society, she would not be so dissatisfied. This mother-daughter dynamic is evident also in Paula Vogel's, *How I Learned to Drive*. When Li'l Bit wants to go spend a week at the beach with her uncle Peck, a man that molests her throughout her life, Bit's mother claims that Peck "pays entirely too much attention" to her daughter and says that she's not "letting an eleven-year-old girl spend seven hours alone in the car with a man." (88). Peck is Bit's uncle; he is *family member*. He's not just some strange man. The fact that Bit's mother is initially so vehemently opposed to an uncle and niece spending time

together suggests that she has suspicions that their relationship may possess a dark dimension. In spite of her suspicions, however, the mother gives in but adds a disturbing caveat, “All right. But I’m warning you, if anything happens, I hold you responsible” (88). This *anything* is sexual molestation. Instead of confronting the issue and preventing the exploitation of her daughter, Bit’s mother is not only complicit in the abuse, she overtly *blames* Li’l Bit, an eleven-year-old girl, for any improprieties that might (and do) occur.

60 In his article, “Cogito, Madness and Religion: Derrida, Foucault and then Lacan,” Žižek discusses the notion of *fake participation*. “It is a well-known fact that the “Close the door” button in most elevators is a totally disfunctional placebo, which is placed there just to give the individuals the impression that they are somehow participating, contributing to the speed of the elevator journey - when we push this button, the door closes in exactly the same time as when we just pressed the floor button without ‘speeding up’ the process by pressing also the ‘Close the door’ button. This extreme and clear case of fake participation is an appropriate metaphor of the participation of individuals in our ‘postmodern’ political process” (<http://www.lacan.com/zizforest.html> 02/09/08). Although Žižek here targets the political process and the illusion that a democracy represents collective will, his anecdote relates to one’s “position on the bus.” For Jessie, remaining on the bus, remaining within the bounds of the Symbolic, is not an option. She *chooses*, therefore, to disembark. This victory, however, is pyrrhic in that, by getting off prior to the desired destination, she will find herself “fifty blocks from where [she’s] going.” She will find herself alone and detached. Simultaneously, to

remain on the bus, to yield to the Law, is not a deliberate choice. One is conditioned to do so from birth. The problem in the play, as is the problem in a patriarchal order, is the bus, itself. If the Law is oppressive, if the law privileges the masculine subject, the “choices” available to the female passenger are dismal. She can remain on the bus and be ushered to a destination that is not her own, or she can leave the bus and face the potential psychological oblivion and alienation of living “outside the law,” the position of the revolutionary or deject. Revolution, however, is only possible if the course of the bus is altered. If Jessie simply gets off the bus to boycott its trajectory, she enacts *fake participation* by performing a solitary and self-contained act. Critics have attacked the play for precisely this reason—Jessie’s suicide accomplishes nothing. At the same time, however, if the play is read as a work that exposes the artificiality of feminine agency, the *fakeness* of female choice in an androcentric Order, the text can initiate awareness, prompt change, and provoke an ethical obligation to reshape the Symbolic.

61 This follows the Freudian-Lacanian trajectory of the *Phallic Mother*. For Freud, “the girl’s Oedipus complex is much simpler than that of the small bearer of the penis; in my experience, it seldom goes beyond the taking of her mother’s place and the adopting of a feminine attitude towards her father. Renunciation of the penis is not tolerated by the girl without some attempt at compensation. She slips—along the line of a symbolic equation, one might say—from the penis to a baby. Her Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift—to bear him a child” (“The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex” 665). For Lacan, “The desire of the mother is the phallus,” for she is devoid of a penis and yearns to symbolically fill that

void by giving birth to a child; concurrently, “if the desire of the mother is the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire” (“Signification of the Phallus” 1309).

62 In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams dramatizes this dynamic. Like the epileptic Jessie Cates, Laura Wingfield suffers from pleurosis and is dominated by Amanda, her overbearing mother. Amanda is akin to Bernarda Alba and Thelma Cates, for Amanda endorses notions that women are dependent upon masculine authority. Deeming her daughter unfit to take care of herself, Amanda aggressively urges Laura to find a husband. When Laura is complacent in her search for men, Amanda articulates a clear notion that women must depend on men to survive. See pages 3-4 of Chapter 1.

63 It is important to distinguish between separation from the mother and dismissal of feminine subjectivity. Kristeva employs the term *matricide* for the necessary destruction of the mother-child dyad. This destruction is imperative for the child to develop autonomy and psychological independence. This notion of *matricide* is different than a blanket *rejection* of the mother in a subject’s reception of paternal law. If the mother is dismissed as non-paternal, her validation of the law is impossible.

64 This figure is based on Kristeva’s sessions with Isabel. “Isabel decided to have a child at the darkest moment of one of her depressive periods. Disappointed by her husband, distrustful of what appeared to be her lover’s ‘childish inconsistency,’ she wanted to have her child ‘for herself.’ Knowing who fathered it mattered little to her. ‘I want the child, not the father,’ the *virgin mother* reflected. She had to have a ‘reliable companion’” (“Illustrations of Feminine Depression” 392).

65 In an interview conducted by Carolyn Casey Craig in 1991, Norman echoes Chodorow's theories on motherhood. "The unspoken fear is that if one partner leaves, if either questions the perfection of mother-daughter love by being 'different,' we are both destroyed. There is only one thing in the world that approaches letting go of our mothers, more wrenching than giving up the illusion that she loves us unambivalently. It is separating from—letting go of—our daughters" (179).

66 Written in 1983, *night, Mother* is produced at the height of the Cold War. In the 1980s, The People's Republic of China engaged in a variety of methods to control the flow of information. Foreign television channels were banned in the country, and "controversial" art was monitored. "One famous incident in the early annals of Chinese contemporary art involves *China/Avant-garde*, the first nationwide exhibition of avant-garde art held at the National Gallery of Art in Beijing, which included close to three hundred works by 186 artists. The show opened in February 1989, just a few months before the Tiananmen Square incident, and was shut down twice during its two-week run" (<http://visualarts.walkerart.org/oracles/details.wac?id=2226&title=Lexicon>). As recently as 1998, the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China (MPS) initiated the Golden Shield Project. This initiative endeavored to control internet service providers, search engines, and various other web-related services in an effort to control the extent to which Chinese citizens could control information online (http://www.dd-rd.ca/site/_PDF/publications/globalization/CGS_ENG.PDF).

67 Upon entry into *the mirror phase* and the subsequent acquisition of language, an infant departs from its perceived fusion with the mother and enters the Symbolic and the

Law of the Father. In so doing, the child experiences the Oedipal drama, castration anxiety, and assimilation into the linguistic and ideological system of culture. For Lacan and Irigaray both, acquisition of language is accompanied by a profound sense of *Lack*. Not only do words not correspond to things, producing a gulf between the intelligible world and the world-in-itself, language itself is a consolation prize. See Chapter 1, pages 19-21.

68 In *Phaedrus*, Plato articulates the Socratic notion of speech. Socrates, through telling the myth of Theuth and Thamus, condemns the written word. Socrates claims that writing is fundamentally dishonest. Writing is the product of an absence. The writer produces a text, but this text is portable and not contingent on time or space. In other words, the written word is an orphan, and the words are disconnected from the paternal presence of the speaker. In the myth, Thamus (the subject/son), presents Theuth (the god/king/father) with the gift of writing. Theuth rejects the gift and claims that writing is not a technology that helps with memory. Instead, Theuth states that writing will only lead to forgetting. In *Plato's Pharmacy (La Pharmacie de Platon)*, Derrida deconstructs these ideas and asserts that Socrates' logic here encapsulates a metaphysics of presence. The presence of the speaker when speaking ensures the validity of the spoken word. The absence of the writer is devoid of this validation. This is the birth of logocentrism. Furthermore, the Lacanian psychical model relies on this idealization of presence. Subject formation, for Lacan, revolves around the *presence* or the *absence* of the Phallus.

69 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

70 Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets I am not come to destroy but to fulfil (Matthew 5: 17).

71 The Cartesian cogito, Kantian transcendental idealism, the Hegelian idea, and Husserl's transcendental ego are all attempts to access the Platonic realm of the Idea. These philosophical assertions rely on the presence of a fixed external reality that contains core Truth. Just as astrophysics pursues the 'singularity,' philosophy has been haunted by a fascination with metaphysical presence and fueled by the desire to isolate, identify, and explain THE central and original source from which universal Truth springs. *Being and Time*, Sections 1-26, introduces a genealogy of problematic, historically inherited conceptions of Being ("The Greeks" – Kant). "What is Metaphysics?" is another work in which Heidegger surveys the Western tradition. "The Question of Being: Heidegger's Project," by Dorothy Frede, summarizes Heidegger's rejection of Platonic and Aristotelian approaches to Being. In "Overcoming Metaphysics," Heidegger focuses his critique on Descartes and Kant. Hubert Dreyfus' *Being-in-the-World* provides an overview to Heidegger's departure from metaphysics (see Introduction, Ch. 3, Ch. 4).

72 "In the *ego cogito sum*, the *cogitare* is understood in this essential and new sense. The *subjectum*, the fundamental certainty, is the being-represented-together-with –made secure at any time – of representing man together with the entity represented, whether something human or non-human, i.e., together with the objective. The fundamental

certainty is the *me cogitare = me esse* that is at any time indubitably representable and represented. This is the fundamental equation of all reckoning belonging to the representing that is itself making itself secure. In this fundamental certainty man is sure that, as the representer of all representing, and therewith as the realm of all representedness, and hence of all certainty and truth, he is made safe and secure, i.e., *is*” (“The Age of the World Picture” 150). As a thinking thing, the subject thinks itself into existence. The human capacity to conceptualize Being generates Being: *I think therefore I am*. This is the *fundamental certainty* that enables the subject’s intelligibility. As intelligible, as that which can be represented and therefore understood, the Being of beings becomes *safe and secure*. This compulsion for clarity and “tidiness” further obscures the human relation to Being while proffering to “solve” the quandary. For further analysis of Heidegger’s response to Cartesian philosophy, see “Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn,” by David Couzens Hoy.

73 In “The Reification of Language,” Richard Rorty states that Heidegger “retreated from” traditional “discourse” and into “single words” because inherited concepts “had to be abandoned as soon as they ceased to be hints (*Winke*) and became signs (*Zeichen*)” (339). When terms like *form, matter, origin, purpose, energy, and truth* become tools in a philosophical kit, each term possessing a history and theoretical context, the words lose their pliability and capacity to point toward (*hint*) and become frozen (*sign*). The result, as readers of Heidegger quickly discover, is a new and frustratingly ambiguous vocabulary. Instead of utilizing the lexicon available to him, Heidegger returns to “simple” words like *disclosure, authentic, resoluteness, equipment*. Since Heidegger

claims that the nature of Being *is* the nature of being-in-the-everydayness-of-the-world, he (re)-“invents” his own vocabulary and infuses common terms with “existential” connotations. In her introduction to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak provides another examination of Heidegger’s language in *Being and Time*.

74 Throughout this project, this concept will be presented as “Da-sein” and Dasein. This discrepancy is the result of translation. Joan Stambaugh uses a hyphen in her translation of Heidegger’s “being there.” The earlier translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson translates Dasein with no hyphen. Since I am working from the Stambaugh translation, I will present the hyphenated version, Da-sein, as it is presented in her 1996 translation. At the same time, however, I will be citing works in which authors reference the Macquarrie-Robinson version and therefore employ the unhyphenated Dasein. As a result, two distinct representations of “being there” are present in this chapter. Though these terms are identical in meaning, the discrepancy must not be overlooked. This speaks to the complexity of Heidegger. Not only are his concepts difficult, they are further complicated through the process of translation. Throughout this essay, I will be providing German terms. When appropriate, I will define the term according to Stambaugh, Dreyfus, and Macquarrie.

75 Hubert Dreyfus calls this matrix “background practices” (11). These background practices are the factual conditions of the subject. Charles Taylor equates the preontological with an a priori *bodily* agency. This notion of agency, however, does not relate to a sense of volition. On the contrary, Taylor refers to the specific “bodily capacities that humans have” and how this “embodied agency” is a “pre-understanding’

of what it is to act, to get around in the world, the way we do” (“Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger” 319, 327).

76 See Chapter 1, 25-40.

77 See Chapter 1 (25-40), Lacan’s *Seminar XX* (pp. 70-80), “Lacan and Philosophy,” by Charles Shepherdson.

78 “The Real is an entity which must be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure... The paradox of the Lacanian Real, then, is that it is an entity which, although it does not exist (in the sense of ‘really existing,’ taking place in reality), has a series of properties – it exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects” (qtd. in Ingram 5).

79 The process of self-interpretation is what Heidegger calls *existence*. “Cultures as well as human beings exist; their practices contain an interpretation of what it means to be a culture” (Dreyfus 15). For further explanation, see Dreyfus’ *Being-in-the-World*, Chapter 1.

80 Joan Stambaugh translates *Gleichgültigkeit* as “indifferent mode;” I elect to use Dreyfus’ term, “undifferentiated.”

81 Althusser incorporates the notion of interpellation in a Marxist sense; the subject of ideology is interpellated into prevailing power structures and this process of integration secures and maintains the dominant practices of social organization (See *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, specifically “On the Reproduction of the Conditions of Reproduction,” “Reproduction of Labour-Power,” “Infrastructure and

Superstructure,” and “The State”). Althusser’s notion of interpellation is a re-imagining of the Lacanian concept of assimilation into the Symbolic order (For more on parallels between Althusser and Lacan, see Joseph Valente’s “Lacan’s Marxism and Marxism’s Lacan: From Žižek to Althusser”). Preceding them both, Heidegger’s terms like *authentic*, *inauthentic*, *undifferentiated*, *publicness*, and *the they* suggest his theory for subject formation. Though each of these thinkers come from different problematics (Marxist, psychoanalytic, ontological), I use the terms, “interpellation,” “Symbolic,” and “*the they*” interchangeably to illustrate both the conceptual parallels and differences among these theories.

82 *The they (Das Man)* is a key notion in Heidegger’s conception of subject-formation. See *Being and Time*, Sections 114-130, 170-195, Dreyfus’ *Being-in-the-World*, Chapter 8, Penelope Ingram’s *The Signifying Body*, Chapter 3, Tina Chanter’s *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, Chapter 2, and Charles. B. Guignon’s “Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy.”

83 In his essays, “Against the Crowd” and “The Present Age,” Soren Kierkegaard condemns the public sphere and designates the faceless, amorphous mass of “the mob” as an impediment to individual ethical responsibility. In “Heidegger and Theology,” John D.Caputo elaborates on Kierkegaard’s influence on Heidegger.

84 Leveling down is a direct reference to Kierkegaard: In “The Present Age,” Kierkegaard attacks “the crowd” for anaesthetizing people. “The public is the real Leveling-Master, rather than the leveler itself, leveling is done by something, and the public is a huge nothing.”

85 “As creatures of *reason*, human beings now make their actions subject to the rule of abstractions; they no longer tolerate being swept away by sudden impressions and sensuous perceptions; they now generalize all these impressions first, turning them into cooler, less colourful concepts in order to harness the vehicle of their lives and actions to them. Everything which distinguishes human beings from animals depends on this ability to sublimate sensuous metaphors into a schema, in other words, to dissolve an image into a concept” (“On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” 878).

86 In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (specifically “Woman, Science’s Unknown” and “Speculum”), Irigaray confronts the phallogentric assertions of Freud and Lacan. Citing Lacan’s “mirror stage” of development, Irigaray argues that only a speculum can adequately reflect woman. This is the reflective surface that *does not* render woman incomplete because it can *look inside* a woman. Margaret Whitford’s “Introduction” to *The Irigaray Reader* provides further commentary.

87 See Chapter 1, 27-41 to this work.

88 “Before recognizing itself as identical in a mirror and, consequently, as signifying, this body is dependent vis-à-vis the mother. At the same time instinctual and maternal, semiotic processes prepare the future speaker for entrance into meaning and signification (the symbolic)” (“From One Identity to an Other” 104). These processes include metabolization and respiration. One consumes food and expels waste; one breathes in oxygen and expels carbon dioxide. What is established through these processes, albeit physiologically and involuntarily, is the distinction between self and

other. Internalization and comprehension of this distinction occurs during the mirror stage.

89 If we recall Hubert Dreyfus' translation of *Das Man* as "the one," Kristeva's claim that the deject *is never one* takes on a richer significance. See footnote 27 for further clarification.

90 It is important to note, however, that Heidegger had no interest in constructing "feminist" philosophy (for such a task was hardly conceivable as recently as de Beauvoir's time), but some feminists have found his argument and methodology useful when mounting their philosophical and political projects. Similarly, some feminist theorists, Butler and Wright, for example, have employed Lacanian psychoanalysis, phallus notwithstanding, when developing feminist conceptions of subject formation.

91 Colin Davis, in *Levinas: An Introduction*, provides extensive analyses of Levinas' core tenants. "In Levinas' reading of Western thought, the Other has generally been regarded as something provisionally separate from the Same (or the self), but ultimately reconcilable with it; otherness, or alterity, appears as a temporary interruption to be eliminated as it is incorporated into or reduced to sameness. For Levinas, on the other hand, the Other lies absolutely beyond my comprehension and should be preserved in all its irreducible strangeness...Levinas' endeavor is to protect the Other from the aggressions of the Same" (3). In *Otherwise than Being*, a response to fundamental ontology, Levinas equates Dasein and its relation to facticity to the violence of shared intelligibility, to the eradication of Otherness. Tina Chanter explores Levinas' critique of Heidegger in *Time, Death, and the Feminine* (25-36).

92 *Verfallen* is translated also as “falling prey” and “entanglement.” Though one does not fall from a “state of grace,” one *falls away* or *turns away* from one’s potentiality when falling in or *fleeing into publicness*. This notion of fallenness is *not* an antagonistic position towards other people. As Dreyfus claims, “simply by being socialized Dasein takes over the fallenness of the one” (235). In *Being-in-the-World*, Dreyfus devotes Chapter 13 to the process of falling. As undifferentiated, the subject has fallen in with prevailing norms for conduct. As inauthentic, the individual has turned away from its “self.” To be sure, however, the authentic mode is constantly threatened by the peril of falling and falling again. As Dreyfus states, “resisting falling requires constant effort” (236). Though when living authentically, the individual *will fall*, resolute vigilance against this fall is precisely that which makes the authentic individual authentic.

93 The hammer is Heidegger’s most famous example of this notion of thingness. “When we take care of things, we are subordinate to the in-order-to constitutive for the actual useful thing in our association with it. The less we just stare at the thing called hammer, the more actively we use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, as a useful thing. The act of hammering itself discovers the specific ‘handiness’ of the hammer” (*Being and Time* 65) [69]. Referring to Dasein’s equipmental relation to the material world, Heidegger’s notion that preontological knowledge accords humans the ability to use “things” to accomplish tasks thus becoming at home in the world, Iris Marion Young argues that Heidegger “seems to privilege building as the world-founding of an active subject” and that “this privileging is male-biased” (253). As if to solidify her argument, she posits,

“on the whole, women do not build” (ibid. 255). In her critique, she reduces the equipmental relation to merely erecting structures. Though Heidegger does refer to building in order to become *at home in the word*, his analysis of equipment does not restrict Dasein’s use of equipment to construction (“Building, Dwelling, Thinking”). Equipment is “essentially ‘something in order to...’” (*Being and Time* 64) [68]. We utilize objects in a goal-oriented fashion, from pens to sewing needles, in all of our affairs. Furthermore, Heidegger goes to great pains to establish that a “thing” is “useful,” and therefore equipment, insofar as it accomplishes a specific objective, but objects exist in a network; as Saussure posits that signifiers only function within a mutually recognized system of other signifiers, objects are useful to the extent that they relate to other useful objects in the microcosmic context of the task at hand. *I use my computer to produce this document. I require access to scholarly works; I need an Internet Service Provider; I need Microsoft Word; I need a desk for my computer; I need an electrical outlet...etc. All of these things – a laptop, books, the web, software, furniture, electricity – function in congress as I employ them when producing this study. It is a seamless, Zen-like operation until something breaks or the power goes out.*

94 See Chapter 2, page 110.

95 In a *New York Times* review, Atkinson wrote, “the play is honest. She has told the inner as well as the outer truth about a Negro family in the Southside of Chicago at the present time...*A Raisin in the Sun* has vigor as well as veracity and is likely to destroy the complacency of anyone who sees it” (qtd. in Brown-Guillory, 38).

96 Though Leonard Ashley chastises Hansberry’s “conservative” politics, Hansberry was a significantly active member of the Civil Rights Movement. While at University of Wisconsin in 1948, she was involved with a group called The Young Progressives of America, an organization devoted to mobilizing the black community. Leaving Madison for New York City, she became active in the cultural and political developments in Harlem. Hansberry produced the text for *The Movement*, a book of photographs chronicling the African American struggle for equality. She also became involved in the publication of *Freedom*, a New York based monthly newspaper focused on the advancement of the black people. She was a writer for the paper for over four years and her activity there attracted the attention of the federal government; her passport privileges were revoked by the U.S. State Department (Effiong 31-33). Hansberry also participated in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a group of students that traveled to Mississippi to increase the African American political movement in the South (Bower 94).

97 As Heidegger presents three compartments of Being, undifferentiated, inauthentic, and authentic, Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, characterizes the three properties of human being: labor (living), work (integrating), action (engaging/reforming). See Chapter 4 of this work.

98 In an interview with an anonymous source, Hansberry addresses the complex relationship between religious faith and political reform. “Well, this is one of the glories of man, the inventiveness of the human mind and the human spirit: whenever life doesn’t seem to give an answer, we create one. And it gives us strength. I don’t attack people

who are religious at all, as you can tell from the play; I rather admire this human quality to make our own crutches as long as we need them. The only thing I am saying is that once we can *walk*, you know—then drop them” (*To Be Young, Gifted and Black* 185). Critics have often interpreted Beneatha as Hansberry’s autobiographical character. This notion is bolstered by a 1958 interview with Mike Wallace in which she exclaims, “Beneatha is *me*, eight years ago” (qtd in Cheney 60). At the same time, however, Hansberry identifies herself with Joseph Asagai. According to a letter from February of 1959, Hansberry’s personal correspondence to an unnamed university professor clearly articulates her notions of the Yoruban character. “The young man to me represents intellect; warm and free and confident. These have always seemed to me the primary characteristics of certain colonials that I have known from India and West Africa. They generally have the magnificence of actively insurgent peoples along with the sophisticated ease of those who are preoccupied with the eventual possession of the future. Despair cannot afflict this man in these years; he has ascertained the nature of political despotism and seen it not the occasion for cynicism—but an ever growing sense of how the new will never cease to replace the old. He thinks man and history are marvelous on account of this view. Finally, it is my own view” (Qtd. in Carter 60).

99 As racial tension in the American South increased between the 1930s and 1950s, large numbers of blacks moved northward to pursue economic opportunity and escape an environment of physical violence. Many of these emigrants had previously functioned as sharecroppers before relocating to urban centers north of the Mason-Dixon line. “More and more African-American males experienced a shift in occupation from farm worker to

unskilled laborer,” and as a result, there was an increase in unemployment and a rise in recipients of social services and welfare (Jewell 28). Not only did blacks have limited access to education, federal and state laws, combined with cultural practices, prevented African Americans from obtaining employment. “Only 1 of every 1,000 jobs created between 1970 and 1983 went to African American males” (ibid. 68). These numbers are *after* affirmative action legislation. Considering that, in 1970, 6% of the African-American community earned a college degree, the trajectory of the black worker was profoundly limited by social and economic practices (ibid. 69).

100 Sociologist K. Sue Jewell outlines the underlying mythology of inferiority constructed around the black race.

1. African American families possess cultural values that are impediments to success in American institutions.
2. African American children have lower levels of academic achievement compared to white children because they are intellectually inferior due to biological deficiencies or because of cultural deprivation.
3. African American families are poor because they have a culture of poverty.
4. African Americans engage in more crime than other racial and ethnic groups because they are members of a criminal subculture. (163)

101 The Herero are a Bantu speaking people that occupy Namibia and Botswana. Herero women wear distinctively traditional garb. They don an ankle-length dress, long sleeves, a bodice, and often a shawl. In addition, the women wear a hat that is designed

to emulate the horns of the cattle the Herero raise. In 1904, the Herero engaged in a war against German colonial occupation. Unwilling to surrender its cultural identity to a foreign power, maintaining Herero tribal practices under the threat of forced assimilation into European culture represented an ideological component of an armed conflict. The physical appearance of Herero women was (and still is) a visible expression of culture and ethnic pride, an expression that assumed greater significance during this period of cultural strife. As *Death and the King's Horseman*, Wole Soyinka's play about Nigerian resistance against the British Empire, positions Yoruban women as the catalysts for revolt against the English, it is the Herero women whose clothing expresses the distinct identity of the tribe. Lena's *noble bearing* indicates an ethnic pride that, through its connection to the Herero, possesses revolutionary dimensions.

102 With his notion of the *Nebenmensch* complex, Freud identifies that the specifically human capacity to acquire knowledge of and pass judgment on an object revolves around empathy. *I see another human being in physical pain and I can relate to the conditions of that pain.* At the same time, however, *I see in the other facial expressions that register his/her physical discomfort. The facial expressions, however, are not my own. I cannot relate at all to the exteriority of the other. My face looks different; my expressions would be uniquely different.* One can empathize with the other insofar as the other can be reduced to something intelligible in one's own world of symbolic structures. As Freud points out, however, there is that which escapes intelligibility. There is that about the other (whether the other is an object or a person) which is truly Other. For Freud, this absolute Other is *das Ding*, the Thing (*la chose*).

For Freud, exposure to the Thing is a physical event. Aspects of the other that can be ‘understood’ are those that correspond to events in one’s life that have produced memory traces. Freud here remains steadfast to the biological dimensions of his theories of psychical development. Lacan integrates the Thing into his theories, but jettisons the biological component. For Lacan, the absolute alterity of the other, the Otherness of the other, is a concept emerging not through bodily experience; familiarity with alterity exists as a pre-original condition within the human psyche as that which is always already inaccessible. The Desire to fuse with the mother is but a symptom of the Thing’s absence. Essentially, all Desire is desire for *das Ding*. Lacan renames this Freudian concept. *Objet a* is the Lacanian counterpart to *das Ding*.

103 It is important to note the potential structural inconsistencies of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Critic Harold Cruse brings these problems to light when he wonders “how a poor family of Southern origin has a \$10,000 insurance policy or how a daughter attends medical school, or how a chauffer has the connections and political pull to get credit to buy into a business” (qtd. in Abramson 263). Furthermore, it is curious how a family cramped in an urban ghetto, a family that struggles to provide young Travis the fifty cents he needs to bring to school, can afford to provide guitar lessons, acting lessons, and horseback riding lessons to Beneatha, the only member of the family that does not generate income.

104 In August of 1955, for example, fourteen year old, Emmitt Till, a young man visiting Money, Mississippi from his home in Chicago, was tortured and murdered for allegedly saying, “bye, baby,” to a white woman. The sexual innuendo was deemed

unforgivable by the white community and the boy was brutally tortured then murdered. All individuals tried for perpetrating the crime were acquitted (See Chapter 2 of Juan Williams', *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*).

105 In *Africa and the Blues*, Gerhard Kubik notes that "slave traders often encouraged dance and music among the captives on slave ships, to prevent their falling into depression and dying" (6). Music was the only signifying practice available to the African people abducted and condemned to labor. Upon arrival in the U.S., the influences of native African culture shaped black musical expression in the South. Ed Morales makes a direct connection between Nigerian folklore and early black music in America. He argues that Robert Johnson's "Cross Road Blues" is steeped in Yoruban mythology; the song is a "thinly veiled reference to Eleggua, the orisha in charge of the crossroads" (qtd in Roberts 277).

106 In the 1950's, conservative legislation amended the Aid For Dependent Children Act, signed into law by Franklin Roosevelt in 1935, and the US welfare program underwent significant alteration. One such change to the welfare program was the "Man-in-the-house" policy. Under its stipulations, mothers were ineligible for federal aid if they lived with a man. The "Man-in-the-house" policy was designed to deter families from applying for and receiving financial assistance from the government. Authorities conducted random "midnight raids" on the homes of welfare recipients to make sure that "welfare mothers" were compliant with federal regulations. Ultimately, the "Man-in-the-house" policy did not lower the number of welfare recipients; beneficiaries of federal assistance increased 13% between 1950 and 1960 (Jewell 27-29). "Hence, through overt

and covert practices, social welfare agencies, not African American wives, forced men out of the home. Thus, the African American female-headed household, created through separation, divorce, or non-marriage, has been system-precipitated” (ibid. 29).

107 As Ruth unpacks boxes, she sings, “*Oh, Lord, I don’t feel no ways tired! Children, oh, glory hallelujah!*” (110). Ruth employs this mode of expression to celebrate the new home. Walter Lee also sings a spiritual when celebrating the new home. “*I got wings...you got wings...All God’s children got wings*” (122). The irony here is that the *glory* and the *wings* of freedom are a house in an all white neighborhood.

108 There was a staged reading to which the public was invited in December of 1997 at Chelsea; the July performance was the premiere of full production.

109 Though the languages are translated in the text, the luxury of translation afforded the reader is not extended to the audience member.

110 <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/22/entertainment/ca-48445> 07/08/2008.

111 Although this project has consistently deconstructed Freudian theory, his conceptions of the uncanny are insightful. Freud claims, “every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety,” so we can therefore “understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* [‘homely’] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche*” (944). Though Freud posits misogynistic assertions in regards to the framework of the human psyche, his notions of sublimation and repression are germane.

112 In *The Question of Being*, Heidegger crosses out “Being” (~~Being~~) in order to “ward off [*Abwehrt*]...the habit of conceiving “Being” as something standing by itself”

(qtd. in Spivak xv). Lacan applies this Heideggerian approach in his notions of femininity.

113 In her essay, “Ontology and Equivocation,” Elizabeth Grosz explores this conception of woman Other. She elucidates the complexity of the issue. In one sense, this otherization “is perhaps a necessary condition for the very existence of an ethics” because justice and reciprocity “presume a common or neutral ground” (91). At the same time, however, aligning this common ground with masculine subjectivity “is clearly an attempt to master and control, not simply the terms by which sexual difference is thought but the very conceptions of the feminine and woman” (92).

114 Genesis 22 recounts the story of Abraham’s willingness to obey Yahweh and sacrifice Isaac. When God addresses Abraham, Abraham articulates unwavering faith by saying, “Hineini,” Hebrew for “Here I am.” Levinas, like Kierkegaard did before him, refers to the story of Abraham to convey the mission of the human being, that is, obligation to the infinite, which for Levinas, is the human face.

1And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

7And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

11And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

115 Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* deprive the audience of context and force the spectator to piece together plot through inference. Ionesco's *The Lesson* makes similar demands on the observer.

116 Aptly named, Mamet's *The Cryptogram* advances awkwardly and dialogue does little to provide any coherence to the work. Under these circumstances, the limits of language emerge. That which remains *unspoken*, in this case the rapid deterioration of a family, conveys as much "meaning" as the words the characters articulate.

117 See *Shadow of a Man*.

118 See Wilson's *Fences* and Parks' *The America Play*.

119 Other arguments suggest that representations of lesbianism occasion a method through which hegemonic social structures can be critiqued. See Kate Davy's "Constructing the Spectator: Reception, Context, and Address in Lesbian Performance" (1986) and "Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative: *Dress Suits to Hire*" (1989), Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarno's "The Female Subject in Chicano Theatre: Sexuality, 'Race,' and Class" (1986), Glenda Dickerson's "The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward a Womanist Attitude in African-American Theatre (1988), Sue-Ellen Case's "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" (1989), Teresa de Laurentis' "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" (1990), and Jill Dolan's "Practicing Cultural Disruptions: Gay and Lesbian Representation and Sexuality" (1992). For male perspective on homosexuality as revolt, see David Savran's *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers* (1992) and David Roman's "Performing All of Our Lives: AIDS, Performance, Community" (1993).

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