Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering

A YORK UNIVERSITY PUBLICATION

MOTHERING, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Spring/Summer 2005
Volume 7, Number 1 $15

Featuring articles by Johanna H. Stuckey, Ruby K. Newman, Trudelle Thomas, Chris Klassen, Justyna Sempruch, Andrea Lieber, Aurélie M. Athan and Lisa Miller, Jill Scott, Natasja VanderBerg, Barbara Bickel and Vanessa D. Fisher, Hinna Mirza Upal, Becky R. Lee, Julieanna Frost and many more...

Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering

Mothering, Religion and Spirituality

Spring/Summer 2005
Volume 7, Number 1

Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson, York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
Tel: (416) 736-2100 ext. 60366 Email: arm@yorku.ca;
Website: www.yorku.ca/crm

The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering
(ISSN 1488-0989) is published by
The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) is the first feminist organization devoted specifically to the topics of mothering and motherhood. ARM is an association of scholars, writers, activists, policy makers, educators, parents, and artists. ARM is housed at Atkinson College, York University, Toronto, Ontario. Our mandate is to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of feminist, academic, and community grassroots research, theory, and praxis on mothering and motherhood. We are committed in both membership and research to the inclusion of all mothers: First Nations, immigrant and refugee mothers, working-class mothers, lesbian mothers, mothers with disabilities, mothers of colour, and mothers of other marginalized communities. We welcome memberships to ARM and submissions to the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering,* our biannual publication, from all individuals.

Membership and Subscription Information

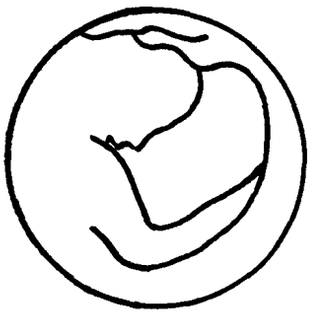
Full individual memberships are available for $75Cdn/US; institutional memberships are $100Cdn/US for 2005. A full membership includes membership to the association, a members directory, a biannual newsletter, participation on a listserve, pre-registration for annual conferences, and a subscription to the biannual *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering,* as well as regular information mailings with respect to upcoming events, lecture series, conferences, workshops, and fundraisers. Basic and student memberships are also available, as is a subscription solely to the journal. Please see the last page of this journal for detailed information and order forms.

Submission Guidelines

In order to submit articles, book reviews, or poetry to the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering,* contributors must be a member of ARM. The journal will only consider material which is not under consideration at any other journal or publication. Please contact us for a list of upcoming themes as well as a copy of our style sheet. Articles should be typed, double-spaced, no longer than 3750 words (or 15 pages), and accompanied by a diskette. Art or photographs may accompany your work. ARM reserves the right to edit manuscripts for length and conformity to our editorial guidelines and house style. We will not publish writing that is sexist, homophobic, racist, or in any way discriminatory. Submissions will be blind-reviewed by a guest editorial board. Articles printed in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the staff of the journal, or of our funders.

Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering

Mothering, Religion and Spirituality



Spring/Summer 2005
Volume 7, Number 1

Contents

Folio

Book Reviews

Front Cover

"The Eternal Mother and Child," photograph by Joe Paczuski.

"Mother and Child" is the creation of Florence Wyle (1881-1968), whose work is also featured at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery in Ottawa. The sculpture is located in front of the Mothercraft building, located at 32 Heath Street West, near the Yonge/St. Clair intersection in Toronto. Mothercraft provides service coordination for families of children birth to six years with developmental delays, family assessment and support, and early intervention for mothers and children affected by substance abuse.

Trudelle Thomas

Planting Seeds of Peace
Fresh Images of God

In the name of peace, thinking people must make a point of understanding the fear and logic that motivate fundamentalist movements, whether Islam, Jewish, or Christian. Such movements contribute to terrorism and strife by fostering an "us versus them" mentality, arrogance, and patriarchal/martial imagery. In contrast, there is an "emerging paradigm" of Christianity gaining popularity in the U.S. and beyond. One important aspect of this paradigm is a more inclusive view of the Deity. Especially relevant for mothers are images of God that emphasize the relational qualities of spirituality. The author argues that we need images for God which 1) grow out of a child and mother's ordinary, familiar frame of reference; 2) are relational, focusing on intimacy and interaction in such a way as to promote an awareness of God's presence between the child and others, including female others; and 3) focus on the free, active response of the individual.

The author goes on to argue in favour of images of God as Mother, Guide, and Friend. These three images are biblically based and are especially valuable for mothers and children. God as Mother is life-giver, creator, nurturer, and protector. God as Guide is a coach, mentor, teacher, and encourager. God as Friend connotes freedom, mutual respect, companionship, shared interests, commitment, and the sharing of meals and other basic needs. By offering an alternative to patriarchal battle imagery, these images of God can help Christians respect other traditions and promote peaceful coexistence. The article draws upon research by Karen Armstrong, Marcus Borg, Elizabeth Johnson, and others.

When terrorists attacked the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, theologian Karen Armstrong was not surprised. She had recently published a book tracing the world-wide rise of religious extremism in the twentieth century. While many commentators saw the attacks as a throwback to the past,

she viewed them as a uniquely modern phenomenon, one not limited to radical Islam. In a new preface to *The Battle for God* (2001), Karen Armstrong challenges readers to understand the fear that drives religious extremism, whether it be Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Only by understanding the visceral fear that lies at the heart of fundamentalism can people combat it. Armstrong is convinced that deep-seated fear can lead to nihilism that sees the secular world as having no value. Lest such fear run rampant, we need to transform our religious imaginations. Several current scholars resonate with Armstrong's conviction that religious symbolism shapes attitudes toward peace-making and war-making. Thoughtful attention to religious symbols can help us avoid the violence and separatism of religious extremism. Attention to religious symbols is of special importance to mothers since we are usually the ones who first transmit religious values.

The battlefield metaphor

Armstrong (2001) describes herself as a "free-lance monotheist" with a passion for the three Abrahamic traditions (Islam, Judasim, and Christianity). Her insights have helped me, a lifelong Christian, to come to greater clarity about how to pass my faith on to my young son. Like many parents, I want to equip my child to live a meaningful, ethical life. I hope to transmit a sense of Mystery—an intuitive awareness of the spiritual world, discomfort with easy answers, and the moral strength to live heroically in difficult times. Armstrong helps me articulate religious questions and metaphors in such a way that I can transmit my spiritual tradition, while planting seeds of respect and peace; her insights could be adapted just as well by parents who are Jewish or Muslim. In the following paper, I argue that mothers of young children are in a unique position to plant seeds of peace to counter religious extremism. We can do so by reclaiming under-celebrated images of God, specifically images of God as Mother, Guide, and Friend.

In *The Battle for God*, Armstrong (2001) traces the rise of fundamentalist sects within Islam, Judaism, and American Christianity. What I find most remarkable about her book is the common ground among extremist groups within these three traditions. She outlines particular traits of fundamentalism that cut across different religions: a belief in the literal truth of Scripture; a narrow definition of religious belief; an "us vs. the mentality" that pits believers against non-believers; and martial and patriarchal imagery for the Deity.

Armstrong (2001) builds on her observation that fundamentalists are reacting to the modern world out of a visceral fear. This fear recoils from many aspects of modernity; it seeks refuge in a return to the "fundamentals" of faith. However, these so-called "fundamentals" are *not* rooted in tradition; rather they are a modern distortion of traditional religious values.

The fundamentalists' tendency to view themselves as specially chosen by God leads to arrogance. Such arrogance often fosters a disregard for the values of empathy, compassion, and tolerance—values that lie at the heart of these

three world religions. Many fundamentalists undermine the very values they are ostensibly fighting to preserve; the things that Jesus preached in his Sermon on the Mount (such as humility, peacemaking, thirst after justice) receive inadequate attention.

Moreover, fundamentalists view the world in terms of "us versus them" (believers vs. unbelievers) and embrace martial imagery; they believe themselves to be engaged in a battle between the evil people and God's Chosen people. This combination of arrogance, lack of empathy, and martial imagery is a volatile mix that leads to literal (not just spiritual) warfare that takes a devastating toll.

Islamic extremists believe they are serving God through acts of violence; Armstrong (2001) sees similar aggressive values and rhetoric within Protestant American fundamentalism as espoused by public figures such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson. Instead of ridiculing and dismissing such movements, Armstrong argues that thinking people need to address the underlying motivations—specifically the distaste for modernity, the desire for religious meaning, and deep-seated fear of difference, especially religious difference.

The emerging Christian paradigm

Historian Marcus Borg makes a similar argument in *The God We Never Knew* (1998). He focuses not on world religions but on American Christianity, suggesting that there is an "emerging paradigm" of Christianity that addresses religious yearning and fear of modernity but without aggression. This emerging paradigm represents a movement that is both religious and intellectual; it tries to integrate twentieth-century discoveries in science and history with the values of justice, compassion, and religious devotion. Over the last ten years Borg and others have written several books that articulate this emerging Christian paradigm, attracting an enthusiastic following across North America and beyond. Borg emphasizes the importance exploring images of the Deity and their impact on human morality and social relations.[1]

Like Borg, theologian Elizabeth Johnson (1998) asserts that Christians need to change the way they imagine and speak about God. This need is crucial, not just for Christians but for all thinking people: "Literal patriarchal speech about God is both oppressive and idolatrous. It functions to justify social structures of domination/subordination and an andro-centric world view that is inimical to the genuine and equal dignity of women while it simultaneously restricts the mystery of God" (40).

Johnson (1998) explains that how we see God influences the kind of people we become. If one sees God as a Mother, Guide, and intimate Friend, for example, a person will see her own maternal work, her adult maturation, and her inward experiences as part of her faith; in contrast, if she sees God primarily as a Father, Judge, and Lord, she will likely have a more distant, subservient, and perhaps even legalistic relationship with God. Moreover, how a person sees

God will also shape what she expects from family, religious congregation, workplace, government, and other institutions. For example, if a woman sees God as a Wise Woman who guides her through life, she will not readily accept a secondary role in the workplace or in her church. Similarly, if she sees God as "co-madre" or "co-creator," she will expect and cultivate greater cooperation with others as well as with God.

Johnson argues that in addition to justifying social oppression and restricting our understanding of God, patriarchal God-talk disposes people to violence and war. She calls for "extended theological thinking about God in female images" as an "essential element in reordering an unjust and religiously deficient situation" (1998: 57). Both Borg (1998) and Johnson (1998) value images of the Divine that communicate immanence, inclusiveness, respect for the earth, and human dignity for both males and females.

The emerging paradigm of Christianity is particularly significant for Christian women who are in their active mothering years. I maintain that such women need to be discriminating about the religious imagery and language we accept, for at least two reasons: First, because mothers play an essential role in transmitting religious values and images to children; second, and equally important, because mothers are human beings seeking to affirm their own dignity and to better to understand the Divine, usually in the face of oppressive social structures. The rest of this paper will explore three metaphors for God that I believe are of special relevance for mothers and the young children in their care.

Containers for spirituality

Elaine Aron (1998), a psychologist, explains that every person's life is filled with "containers" that hold and shape our lives. Some of these containers are concrete, such as certain clothing, a home, a neighborhood, a favourite building or place in nature. Relationships with other people can be healthy containers—such as a trusted parent, friend, teacher, or spouse. Then there are the inward, intangible containers: a person's deepest beliefs and values, philosophy of life, memories, attitudes, and inner worlds of prayer, images, and meditation.

Aron (1998) goes on to explain that the *tangible* containers *seem* the most real, but it is the *intangible* ones that are really the most reliable. People can endure horrible experiences (like prison, serious illness, concentration camps) if they have inner resources. She describes people who have endured concentration camps but remain spiritually intact because "no one could take from them their private love, faith, creative thinking, mental practice, or spiritual exercise" (1998: 60).

Though Aron (1998) is not focusing on children, the relevance is clear. It is in the early years that we lay the groundwork for children's spirituality as we provide language, images, and practices to give shape to their natural spirituality. Usually it is mothers who are in a position to provide physical containers (home, food, clothing, routines) as well as relational containers. These can be

the foundation for the spiritual containers that will last long after early childhood is forgotten. We want our children to be spiritually strong and resilient, like the weighted toy clowns that can right themselves no matter how many times they are knocked over. To foster such strength, we need to weight them with sand, so to speak—to give them a strong grounding. We do this by providing children with relevant, authentic, spiritual practices.

Aron goes on to explain that "Part of maturing into spiritual wisdom is transferring more and more of your sense of security from the tangible to the intangible containers" so that ultimately we can "conceive of the whole universe as our container" (1998: 61). A spiritual life that begins in childhood can equip a child with resources that can last throughout life.

One of the most important ways to ground our children with "sand" is to equip them with helpful images of God. Of course, ultimately, the human mind cannot understand God. But we can at least *begin to understand* God through language, image, and story. Scripture and tradition offer many metaphors for God: Father, King, Lover, Rock, Stronghold, Mother. These are not literal descriptions of God; rather each one is a metaphor that sheds light on an aspect of God. But some of these (like King or Lover) are beyond the range of modern children's experience. Others (like Lord or Father) are so familiar in religious circles that they may not have power to reach children. Moreover, as Johnson says, they can be used to justify patriarchal social structures as God's will.

As Johnson (1998) observes, an over-emphasis on male imagery has led to oppressive and idolatrous political arrangements; we desperately need female imagery and "God-talk" to correct this imbalance. Another theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, echoes Johnson: "Whatever is keeping the subordination of women alive in the Church cannot be the spirit of God.... [W]e must refuse to cooperate in the devaluation of our persons or humanity" (182, 202; quoted in King, 1998: 49). In any case, Christians in every age are faced with the task of re-discovering ways to talk about—to imagine—God.

Interpretive frameworks

Mothers foster children's spirituality by providing tangible and relational containers that foster security. In our choice of religious stories and images, we are also transmitting to children an interpretive framework that helps them make sense of the world. An interpretive framework is important because experience never occurs in a vacuum—it is always understood within a larger context. The language we have to speak of God's involvement with humans shapes our interpretive framework and, conversely, our interpretive framework limits the available language.

To expand our interpretive framework, Johnson (1998) turns to the Hebrew Bible with its longstanding Wisdom tradition: A guiding spirit was present before the beginning of the world and continues to permeate all of Creation. Certain books of the Hebrew Bible—like Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes—speak boldly of Holy Wisdom and her presence is evident

throughout the Bible. Similarly, the New Testament often mentions the Holy Spirit in feminine terms. The Gospel of John, parts of Acts, and the Epistles all refer to a Spirit intimately involved in human affairs, promising "the peace that passes understanding." Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, she believes, are rich sources of more expansive names for God. Johnson writes of Holy Wisdom (Sophia) as a "robust, appropriate name for God ... the absolute, relational, liveliness that energizes the world" (1998: 245).

Three images of God are especially fruitful for mothers and children: Mother, Guide, and Friend. Such images share several qualities. All three grow out of a child and mother's ordinary, familiar frame of reference; they emphasize that God is in the home, not just the church-building. They are also relational; they focus on intimacy and interaction in such a way as to promote an awareness of God's presence in the interaction between the child and others, including female others. And finally, all three focus on the active response of the individual. While God is powerful, humans also are powerful too, and are called to action. The images of God as Mother, Guide, and Friend offer an alternative approach to patriarchal battle imagery.

God as Mother

God as Mother is an evocative metaphor; it not only connotes tenderness and nurturing, it also suggests creativity, person-making, and protection. One aspect of God as mother is the way She mothers us, whether we are adults or children. When novelist Madeleine L'Engle was born in 1918, her mother was sick and unable to hold or cuddle her baby much. Instead, L'Engle as an infant was often placed in a wire basket on a shelf, comparable to the plastic cribs used in hospitals today. L'Engle (1996) feels she was damaged by her prolonged early separation from her mother. Throughout her life (even into her 80s), L'Engle spoke of God as "Amma" (her counterpart to Abba; what many would call Mama or Nana). This proved to be a very healing name for God. "When I am feeling down on myself, inadequate, clumsy, worthless, I need the mother to pull me back on her lap, fold the protective wings about me, rock me, tell me that it will be alright," she writes. "I need the Amma God to rock me, to tell me that I am infinitely valuable, God's child, loved exactly as I am" (1996: 129). Whether we imagine God holding us in her lap, braiding our hair, rocking us to sleep, or tenderly feeding us, the effect is to affirm God's personal love and nearness.

Another aspect of God as mother is the way She shares mothering with us, She is our "co-madre" or "other mother" as we nurture and guide our children and others in our care. With our bodies—our brains, hearts, hands, wombs, and breasts—we mothers co-create the world with God. This creation happens dramatically in gestation and physical birth as we create a new human being out of our very flesh. Less dramatic but just as important is the ongoing "person-making" that mothers continue day after day through changing diapers, reading stories, soothing, and instructing.

In the book *Maternal Thinking,* philosopher Sara Ruddick (1990) writes about the preservation (protection), training, and nurturing that are universal components of childrearing; all these are part of the ongoing formation of a child, the person-making, which mothers continue as long as children are in their care. In her view, these are all forms of mothering that need not be carried out by biological mothers. All the caring professions—such as teaching, nursing, social work, medicine—are arenas where women can co-create with God.

Such creating is not limited to the caring professions. Mothering can also be a metaphor for all life-giving, creative action. Human beings (men, women, *and children*) are co-creating with God as we "mother" all things into existence, including imaginative ventures in science and technology, the arts, the discovery of new ideas and new worlds. From Madame Curie to Sally Ride to J.K. Rowling (whose *Harry Potter* series has helped so many rediscover reading), women partner with God to create the world anew.

As we are ourselves mothered, so we mother the world, and our relationship with God can be a central part of the process. By affirming our connections with God as Mother, mothers can help children also believe in an intimate, powerful, and benevolent God.

God as Guide

God is also a guide, mentor, teacher, or coach. All these are relationships that children understand readily because, at their best, they are extensions of the motherly role. Because a guide has more experience and knowledge, she is able to help to help a younger person to grow and eventually reach equality. As a child's world grows larger, she acquires (in a healthy society) more coaches and mentors who can equip her with needed skills.

Such guides are important for mothers, too. In many cultures, it is common for a birthing woman to have a doula, an older woman who stays in her home while she recovers from childbirth and establishes a new relationship with her children and others. Today such a role might be filled by a woman's mother or an older neighbour or friend. It is more common to associate mentors with the workplace where ideally a mentor is a seasoned worker who unselfishly assists a younger person. Mentors are important not just in the early years but throughout life, and adults need mentor-friends just as young people do. Such guides might be found in a pastor, spiritual director, older friend, or even a favourite saint.

Whether we speak in terms of coach, teacher, doula, or mentor, a guide is a powerful image of God because it connotes caring, helpfulness, and generosity. Johnson (1998) reclaims Sophia, the Spirit of Wisdom, from the Hebrew Bible. There Sophia is portrayed as a guide who invites all beings to a banquet, who calls all to follow the path of life, who promises intimacy, peace, and delight. Johnson sees a connection between Sophia and the Holy Spirit in Christian theology, in that Sophia is a force that works with God the Father:

"Sophia comes toward human beings, tests and challenges them. She is a beneficent, right ordering power in whom God delights and by whom God creates" (1998: 88). Like a mother, a guide offers encouragement and support, but she also invites us to grow into more; she "tests and challenges" us.

This image of God as Guide is evident in the teachings of Alcoholics Anonymous and various Twelve-Step recovery groups. Such groups speak of God as their "Higher Power," a force that is both personal and transcendent, who guides them toward healing. Turning to a "Higher Power" has enabled millions of people to salvage lives wrecked by addiction, bringing dramatic healing to them and their families.

God as Friend

A third rich image for God is that of friend. Theologian Sally McFague (1988) points out that friendship, of all human relationships, is the most free. Mother, spouse, worker, and siblings are all roles created by necessity, while a friend alone is freely chosen. Friendship connotes mutual respect, pleasure in each other's company, shared interests, a commitment to trust and loyalty, the sharing of meals and other basic needs.

Friendship is characterized by companionship and familiarity. A companion is literally one who is "with bread." L'Engle describes family and friends as "the people we are committed to, the people we treat with love and respect, and eat our meals with ... the people we forgive" (qtd. in Chase, 1998: 103).

Friendship is also a remarkably resilient and versatile kind of relationship. Deep friendships endure through many phases of life in ways that other relationships may not. Think of the ten-year-old who is discovering the difference between a buddy and a true friend, the college student who finds her first kindred spirit in a new place, the spouse who grows into a trusted friend, the widow who enjoys travelling with dear friends. Friendship endures throughout the various stages of life.

Because of the intimacy of friendship, it is similar to what L'Engle describes as "the flash." As an awkward, lonely child, she first experienced God's presence as an intuitive "flash ... [a sense of] love all about her and around her, breathed out from some great, invisible, hovering Tenderness" (L'Engle and Brooke, 1985: 18, quoting *Emily of the New Moon*).

In the Hebrew Bible, the term for God who brings hope in the midst of darkness and struggle is *Shekinah* (pronounced SHEK-in-ah or shek-KI-nah). *Shekinah* connotes "the dwelling" or "the one who dwells" close to her beloved people, just as a friend offers refuge and understanding during good times and bad. Shekinah is often associated with light, luminosity, or insight, much like L'Engle's "flash." Perhaps the most familiar manifestation of Shekinah was the pillar of fire by night (and pillar of cloud by day) that guided the Israelites through the desert wilderness. Just as a friend can communicate through a knowing glance or a nod, humans often experience the presence of God as a flash of awareness.

Matthew and Dennis Linn and Sheila Fabricant Linn conduct healing workshops around the world, helping people to heal from past hurts and traumas. The focus of these workshops is changing people's image of God. "We encourage people to ask for healing. If you don't have—consciously or unconsciously—a good image of God, you can't do that," says Sheila Fabricant Linn. They encourage an image of a loving God, present in all life experiences, good and bad, sometimes using a notion of God as mother and nurturer. Their workshops have helped people who have experienced the loss of a loved one, torture, war, and abuse. "One of the easiest ways to receive healing is to change your image of God," says Dennis Linn (qtd. in Schuck-Schreiber, 1997: 14).

To sum up, as mothers we can equip ourselves as well as our children, with healing, empowering images of God. Three such images are Mother, Guide, and Friend. They foster spirituality that is rooted in daily life and ordinary contemporary experiences. They promote loving attention to personal relationships, including a personal relationship with God. The are also conducive to an active human response to God, one that may include questioning, critical thinking, innovation, and social as well as personal transformation. Johnson (1998) argues that such images are long overdue, and that we need them to fuel efforts toward a more just society. I'll let Johnson have the last word:

> [New images of God promote] the investigation of a suppressed world directed ultimately toward the design of a new whole. Shaping this kind of speech is not an end in itself but must be received as an essential element in an unjust and deficiently religious situation. (Johnson, 1998: 57)

[1]Borg (1998) has reached a huge audience throughout the United States and beyond. Feminist scholars paved the way for Borg, especially in regard to images of God; some of the more noteworthy are Elizabeth Johnson (1998) (*She Who Is*); Mary Daly (1975) (*The Church and the Second Sex)* and (1974) *Beyond God the Father*); Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1995) (*In Memory of Her* and (1992) (*But She Said*); Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992) (*Sexism and God-Talk*); and Margaret Hebblethwaite (1994) (*Six New Gospels*). In addition to these western theologians, authors from other cultures have contributed important ideas, including Kwok Pui-Lan (1995) (Chinese author of *Discovering the Bible in a Non-Biblical World*) and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995) (Nigerian author of *Daughters of Anowa*). For a concise and readable introduction to Christian feminist theology, see *Whispers of Liberation: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament* by Nicholas King (1998).

References

Aron, Elaine. 1998. *The Highly Sensitive Person.* San Francisco: Broadway Books.

Armstrong, Karen. 2001. *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism.* New York: Ballantine.

Borg, Marcus J. 1998. *The God We Never Knew: Beyond Dogmatic Religion to a More Authentic Contemporary Faith.* San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.

Chase, Carole F. 1998. *Suncatcher: A Study of Madeleine L'Engle and her Writing.* 2nd ed. Phildelphia, PA: Innisfree Press.

Daly, Mary. 1975. *The Church and the Second Sex.* New York: Harper and Row.

Daly, Mary. 1974. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Hebblethwaite, Margaret. 1994. *Six New Gospels: New Testament Women Tell Their Stories.* London: Geoffrey Chapman.

Johnson, Elizabeth. 1998. *She Who Is.* New York: Crossroad.

King, Nicholas. 1998. *Whispers of Liberation: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament.* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Kwok, Pui-Lan. 1995. *Discovering the Bible in a Non-Biblical World.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

L'Engle, Madeleine. 1996. *Penguins and Golden Calves: Icons and Idols.* Wheaton, IL: Shaw.

L'Engle, Madeleine and Avery Brooke. 1985. *Trailing Clouds of Glory.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

McFague, Sallie. 1988. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. 1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Ruddick, Sara. 1990. *Maternal Thinking.* London: Women's Press, 1990.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1992. *Sexism and God-Talk.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 1995. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins.* New York: Crossroads.

Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 1992. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Aurélie M. Athan and Lisa Miller

Spiritual Awakening Through the Motherhood Journey

Motherhood is an opportunity for creative spiritual growth and transformation in women. This potential lies latent in the intense emotional experiences inherent in mothering which are designed to be fruitful and to accelerate spiritual development. We interviewed first-time mothers regarding the revelations they came to via the challenging experiences of motherhood. Mothers described the lessons they learned as spurring a rebirth, as if they themselves were born, with new eyes, awakened to a reality of life which they had not known before. They spoke in intensely spiritual language even though at times they themselves did not acknowledge or realize it mirrored the basic spiritual tenants of compassion, patience, surrender, and Divine love. While listening to their collective voices, we could not help but hear the universal story of the hero myth. In deciding to mother a child, women are in fact spiritual heroines called to the daunting adventure of motherhood, where through a series of trials they are brought forth into a richer, more mature condition. When occurring against a cultural backdrop, however, that does not recognize nor honor mothering as a critical window for spiritual awakening, women navigate this journey unassisted and are at higher risk for dysfunction. It is time then to change the current myth of motherhood to a new conceptualization that recognizes spirituality as an essential and integral part of the mothering experience for the betterment of all mothers, their children, and the ultimate renewal of society.

It is time to change the myth of motherhood. Motherhood is in fact an opportunity for creative spiritual growth and transformation in women. This potential lies latent in the intense emotional experiences of mothering which are identical in quality to those described by William James as essential to religious conversion: "emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements.... And emotions that

come in this explosive way seldom leave things as they found them" (1985 [1902]: 198). These rearrangements, or new realizations in women, are precipitated by a series of unique transitional crises from conception onward, and have been described in a diverse range of writings from the scientific to the literary (Bondas and Eriksson, 2001; Leifer, 1977; Lederman, 1996; McMahon, 1995). The conflicts which new motherhood sets off result in contradictory feelings that are simultaneously negative and positive and equally strong (Luthar, Doyle, Suchman & Mayes, 2001; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Despite the confusing anguish of a "persistent and painful warring" of antithetical emotions, maternal ambivalence is natural and purposeful (Oberman & Josselson, 1996; Parker, 1995). The joy and pain inherent in the day-to-day experiences of mothering are designed to be fruitful and growth inducing by ultimately accelerating a woman's spiritual development (Madaras, 1999; Parker, 1995). When occurring against a cultural backdrop, however, that does not recognize ambivalence as the defining feature of this transitional process, nor honors mothering as a critical window for spiritual crisis and transformation, women navigate unassisted, conflict is exacerbated, and mothers are at higher risk for dysfunction. We studied a voluntary answering to the call to motherhood in order to offer an alternative myth, a new lens through which to understand the countless individual experiences of "becoming a mother" and their shared similarities. It is our hope that through reading the collective voice of motherhood via the women we spoke with, others will identify with the conceptualization of mothering as a journey of heroic proportions—and by doing so, will be provided with a context to realize their own spiritual awakening for the betterment of themselves, their children, and the ultimate renewal of society.

A spiritual stance toward conflict and change

Universally, the religious and philosophical traditions have understood conflict to be the motor of transition, the very activity of Life, or Creation setting the world in motion and renewing it. For example, Heraclitus was one of the first Western philosophers to describe nature as ruled by an underlying law of change. As Daniel Graham (2002) asserts, Heraclitus debated that without the constant conflict of opposites, there would be, "no alternations of day and night, hot and cold, summer and winter, even life and death.... Conflict does not interfere with life, but rather is a precondition of life" (5). In Eastern Hindu thought, the universe is believed to come into existence through the creating of pairs of opposites and is maintained by their interplay (Coward, 1989). For the Christian and the Buddhist alike, conflict is the suffering inherent in the duality of all human experience, and cannot be avoided (Coward, 1989). Instead, spiritual disciplines employ this knowledge to turn discomfort into paths of personal transformation (Coward, 1989). Mystics seek a conscious relationship with God by using elaborate physical and cognitive techniques to prompt distress and revelation (Daschke, 1993). The daily tasks

or "acts of motherhood" are in themselves akin to ascetic exercises often marked by painful bodily sensations, distortions in time and space, and paradoxical thinking. In the Jungian worldview there is no spiritually neutral ground and motherhood, like the mountaintop, or the church pew, is no exception. Through motherhood women have the unique opportunity to initiate spiritual growth and awaken the saint or hero within whose "very being illustrates the possibilities of courage of spiritual generosity, rather than narrow concerns of the ego-self" (Oatley & Djikic, 2002: 106).

Spirituality or an enduring relationship with Creation is essential for the well-being of the mother and her child (Daschke, 1993). Relinquishing the small and finite demands of the ego, to something other than the self, or larger than the self, liberates women from the slippery slope of maternal ambivalence and lets them "get on with it." Getting stuck in obsessive rumination, or identifying with one side to the exclusion of the other, inevitably leads to imbalance, stagnation, and illness (Aziz, 1999). Mothers find themselves unable to effectively resolve the crisis at hand, and spiral downward toward depression. A spiritual stance offers an alternative approach. By entering into a dialectical relationship with Creation whereby the conscious will is surrendered, guidance in the form of messages begins to rise up from the unconscious and all around. These messages can lead to revelations that spur movement forward, while teaching the basic spiritual tenants of compassion, patience, surrender, and divine love. It is in this seemingly irrational stance where the psyche integrates the experience, reorganizes, and evolves.

We interviewed first-time mothers regarding the revelations they came to via the challenging experiences of motherhood. Mothers described the lessons they learned as spurring a rebirth, as if they themselves were born, with new eyes, awakened to a transcendental reality that they had not known before. They experienced a "change of values in which the trivial and unsubstantial" was replaced by a bigger picture, or was "more clearly distinguished from what has true value in this life" (Matsu-Pissot, 1998: 323). As creators and caretakers of life themselves, mothers spoke to the spontaneous stirrings of compassion and acceptance, the pleasures of connection and community, profound unconditional love, sacred moments that seem to defy the limits of time and space, and a sense of unity with a protective guiding force. Women spoke to mourning the death of an old self and the conscious struggle of welcoming a new one that felt more authentic, more honest, integrated, and with a newfound agency. Our mothers spoke in intensely spiritual language even though at times they themselves did not acknowledge it or realize it to be so.

While listening to their stories, we could not help but hear the universal story of the hero myth. By deciding to mother a child, women are called to a great adventure, where through a series of trials they are brought forth "into a richer, more mature condition" (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 152). A spiritual heroine is someone who has left familiar territory so that she may achieve something beyond the normal range of experience and come back to commu-

nicate it (Campbell, 1996). Women who answered the daunting call to motherhood and traversed the path successfully returned from their journeys replete with what Joseph Campbell (1996) refers to as the ever-present bliss of Creation to tell us about it.

The call to motherhood: a call and a response

For Dereck Daschke, "consciousness cannot bring about its own transformation" (1993: 246). Left to its own accord, the self is comfortable and needs, "numinous energy ... to induce change by introducing images, ideas, and emotions which run counter to a person's normal conscious functioning—a dream, for instance, or a vision, or a paradox" (Daschke, 1993: 246). When life confronts us to explore a larger reality, these symbolic catalysts arrive, "paralleling the universal themes found in religious and mythological literature" (Aziz, 1999: 67). Like the white rabbit in Wonderland, they are an invitation, a challenge, to take a creative leap and awaken to a new reality (Koestler, 1969). They are the hero's call to adventure—and they require a response. The call and response, married in dialogue, are one in the same. In this sense, the moment a woman hears the call to motherhood, she has "conceived" her child. One participant described her ambivalence with whether or not to become a mother. The voices of her yet unborn children would beckon, and she would converse with them, until one day she responded affirmatively:

> *I think there's just never a reason, you just go with your instinct. You say Ok, now I'm ready.... It's probably biological. I'm calling it intuitive ... or you could say it is their spirits that it was their time to come. And I actually did, I mean, I did always feel that I could hear them and feel them, and I could talk to them and say, you know, "Just be patient with me, be patient, you're going to come, your going to come."*

Her first child arrived soon after. The idea of "aural insemination" has been illustrated for centuries in the story of The Annunciation in which The Virgin Mary conceives the Christ-child through the ear immediately upon hearing the divine decree: "Thou shalt conceive" (Lehnhof, 2002). Conception dreams are equally common in the great faiths of the world. Heroes and heroines are conceived by their mothers at night, while dreaming. The sacred child is said to enter the womb through an auspicious dream, as in the example of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, who came to his mother among other things, as an elephant, a full vase of fragrant Mandara flowers, and the moon lighting the universe (Moon & Elder, 1991). Another participant described an analogous sign heralding her child's conception: "I remember, lying in bed one night and having this amazing ... perfume, this incredible smell, and it was just something that I just felt incredibly peaceful and calming, and I knew then that I was pregnant." Arthur Koestler (1969) agrees: we are quite literally our most *creative* when the rational mind is suspended and inspiration is received

through our senses during dreams, trances, or synchronistic encounters.

Surrendering to the signs

The forces of Destiny begin to fulfill themselves from the moment of "conception" onward, with or without full cooperation of the conscious will (Campbell, 1996). Assistance in the form of advice, books, inner dialogue, and people pour forth for the mother-to-be, along with more signs that say "you're on the right track." Together they are what Campbell refers to as the guardians or supernatural aids who are "the benign, protective power of destiny" (1996: 71) that offer guidance throughout the journey. However, not all will grant the sensation of being pitched forward on the path or helped. In fact some may appear to do the exact opposite, stopping or thwarting progress. To the uninitiated mother, these contradictory experiences are difficult to process, as further attempts to move forward prove ineffective. The great myths of the world should then serve to remind that the very activity of Creation is governed by its own law of change and momentum. Its judicious pace is meant to keep mothers from ordeals they are unready or unprepared for and transmits the indispensable spiritual lessons of acceptance and surrender: the renunciation of perceived control and inappropriate expectations which only function to resist true spiritual growth (Campbell, 1996). Often, movement begins again once a mother has thoughtfully surrendered this ineffectual stance. This is exemplified in the story of one woman's struggle with adoption:

> *Interestingly enough the weekend that my daughter was born I didn't know that I had become a parent. I was away visiting some friends ... [when] I said, "You know... it's never going to happen. I'm just never going to get a baby. Nobody is going to want to give a baby to me. I'm a single mom." So nobody is going to want to give their baby to me. It's just not going to happen. And I'm going to make that spare room ... into an office ... that's it. The day that I got the actual phone call about her ... I'm riding with my friend in her car ... and she said, "What do you want to do today?" And I said, "Let's go buy me a bike." ... I had another six months before I was going back to work and I thought that would be fun. I'm never going to get a baby. So let me have a bike. The phone rings and it's a message from this guy [at] ABC.... It was so far out of my head that this was ever going to happen that I didn't even connect it with ABC adoption. Because of my work ... I often get phone calls from ... news organizations ... so I kind of scratched the number in a box because I don't even have a pen that works and I call him back.... I said, "Oh my God it's the adoption agency." They had been trying to get in touch with me and my phone at home, the answering machine was there with her kids, [who] had knocked out the cord so [it] wasn't picking up messages. There were all these ways ... that things almost didn't come together ... [but] it worked. And she was the right baby for me. And I waited for the right little girl. And that's what everybody kept saying. But*

> *it's so interesting for me that I had kind of let go of the idea. So I don't know if that's a sign, but I had completely thought this is never going to happen and I had let go of the whole idea. And then all of a sudden it arrived. And there she was. And then I became a parent like that [snaps fingers].*

Crossing the threshold spiritually

With the "personifications of destiny to guide and aid" (Campbell, 1996: 77), like the hero, mothers must cross a dangerous threshold that divides the before and after. Beyond them lies darkness and the unknown regarding all the future may have to hold. Nevertheless, the adventure must move forward and cannot retreat backwards. The inevitability of the next transition is at hand. For the previous adoptive mother, she described crossing this threshold nearly instantaneously and without much preparation or emotional gestation, in one moment, with one set of words, she was changed forever:

> *[W]hen you adopt ... you don't know when it's going to happen. I mean I had thought about it, but you don't have anything physical to tell you are going to become a parent. So when you are pregnant you have this time period that's adjusting and thinking. You already are a parent when you are growing that baby inside you. But when you adopt it's all of a sudden. Like you go from zero to 60 in one second [slaps hands together]. But when you adopt it's all of a sudden. You know, you just ... that minute I got that phone call I became a parent. And the first time I called the adoption agency and I sent them the money and did the whole thing and they said, "Ok here is the foster family that she is staying with, you can call her." And I was like, "I can call her?" They said, "Yeah, this is your baby you can call her and find out how she is doing and talk to the foster mother." And that was amazing. And the first time I called her I told [the foster mother], "Her name is Laura." I'm going to cry. [And] she goes, [voice cracks] "Laura, your mommy is on the phone." And I just went, "Oh my god, I'm a mom!" So that was the moment when she said it and that was really emotional. That was really ... still is. When she said that to Laura I was, you know, all the way up in New York, and she was all the way down in Florida, and I didn't even know what this baby looked like, but she was my baby.*

For mothers who conceive of their children bodily, there is the additional physical component to each changeover. In this instance they must cross the threshold through the process of giving birth. The preoccupation with safe passage across initiated during pregnancy, intensifies as the actual moment approaches (Waldenstrom, Hildingsson, Rubertsson & Radestad, 2004). Like pregnancy, but now exponentially more intensified, childbirth itself engenders great contradiction, pain and ecstasy, joy and fear, (Baker, 1992; Buckley, 2002; Monk, 1998; Spivak, Spivak, & Vistrand, 1994; Vaughn, 1983) and mothers must engage Creation to successfully traverse the experience. A spiritual stance

toward the suffering of labor facilitates a mother's ability to use the pain in ways that can even launch her into ecstatic states otherwise normally impossible (Ayers-Gould, 2000; Mander, 2002). During such deep psychic regression states Dmitri Spivak and colleagues (1994) described mothers as experiencing mystical "oceanic-like feelings"(317), absorbed in the polar emotions of joy and pain which are finally understood as one in the same (Vaughn, 1983). In another study Mormon women used paradoxical descriptions of childbirth because the experience was so distinct from any ordinary joy they had known (Callister, 1992). Comparable revelations were described by one participant:

> *The first time was the most extraordinary ... it was more like I was out of body ... the actual physical experience of giving birth is so tremendous ... because it's also physical, I had an epidural for the pain, but you still go through enough pain and exhaustion, you know, and it's all new ... but it's the most beautiful thing that can happen in the world ... the experience of the vagina opening up and the child coming out, it's the vision of the tree giving forth and growing ... and everything, the images, the blood, the birth and rebirth, it's all so extraordinary ... it is an experience of the life-giving force. It's a tremendous thing, and we give it. We women are, we truly are a vehicle for life, [we] perpetuate it. That's on that level ... and then there's also that sense of belonging.*

In this sense, the pain of labour links women compassionately to the suffering of all human beings and teaches them again the one lesson shared by the major world religions: surrender. To help with surrender, women in traditional societies have historically called upon "gods, goddesses, totems, nature spirits" to ease the logical mind so that they can go "to the edge where thought ceases and the mystery is entered" (Rawlings, 1995). England and Horowitz (1998) shared one mother's experience with true surrender whereby the "thinking-mind plummeted into an immense silence" and she "felt bathed in love and well-being" (England & Horowitz, 1998: 9). One of our mothers stated a similar experience while birthing her child:

> *Being a mom, having her, and going through the process of having her, you know, I like to think like I'm someone who's in control.... I'm a control freak, and I like to control everything. And this was something that was so out of my control. The whole pregnancy, the whole delivery, and I don't think that I did anything, me myself. I don't feel that I was able to do anything to guide it. I felt like it was just all happening, and I was just experiencing it, and I was almost like just a conduit for all this, but something was helping it along. And something was doing ... she certainly did a big part of it too, it just felt like I was getting guidance from somewhere, you know, and I didn't know where, and I wasn't in tune to what that was, but somebody sure was looking out for me. And everything*

> *went so well, and afterwards I was like "Wow! What just happened?" I just delivered a baby and it went really well! I don't feel like I had any sense of control over it!" You know what I mean. Usually you have a sense of control, and you say: "Look at what I did!" I didn't feel like I could even do that. It was more like, "Look what I was given", more than "Look what I did". Do you know what I mean? And that was so weird, and for someone who is used to being in control, and is a control freak, boy it blew me away. And I realized... I think that helped me realize, "I think there is something else out there", because I didn't do that, I wasn't in control of that and that was amazing. So something helped me there, because I wasn't doing that, you know? But I did it, and I was really amazed how everything kind of worked together to make it happen, and I was like, "Oh my god! I didn't know my body could do these things!" You know, and it did a good job. My body hasn't let me down, it just performed amazing things, it did a good job! And I had no control over it!*

Birth is dangerous to the ego which strains to control the event only to discover that it controls nothing. Looking at birth as a unique chance to commune with Creation creatively allows mothers to move beyond the narrow confines of their egos and experience a greater reality (Baker, 1992).

Belly of the whale: A call to character

As Edward Robinson (1985) aptly stated: "once the creative imagination is committed to conceiving an order of reality that is 'wholly other,' nothing will ever look or be, quite the same again" (252). One participant described how everything changed after she had her baby:

> *Something went on in your head, and all of a sudden you're aware of everything. It's like you're over-sensitized, and it's like this extra thing turns on, this extra button turns on and you become aware of everything, and it makes you really tired, because you are paying attention to everything. You know when you're listening real hard and you get real tired because you are listening so hard. That's what it felt like at first, and that's when I realized "ok I'm a mom, and there's someone who really needs you", and when you're looking at this baby and how helpless they are you realize "Wow! I have a big responsibility" you know, and that hit me. The first couple of nights home it really hit me.*

This awakening to the new realities of life at both the transcendental and mundane level is overwhelming and difficult to process. Now on the other side, mothers experience acute ambivalence when they realize the enormity of their new responsibility, how it is nothing like they expected and how deeply they long for their old reality. Instead of "conciliating the powers of the threshold" the hero is "swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died"

(Campbell, 1996). It is here within, where a mother glimpses the dark side of her nature as described by one mother: "during those first couple months when we brought [the babies] home.... I don't really know if that's ... just lack of sleep...[but] you lose your mind." Another mother described in detail her devastation:

> *I think that the whole time you're pregnant, you know that you're going to be a mother, but it really doesn't hit you until you have the baby in your arms. And I think our little girl was probably about a week old, and I had already entered my post-partum depression, and my husband was sitting across the rocking chair from me, and I was nursing [her], and he was trying to talk to me and all I could do was cry, and I said to him, that "I will never do this again... I will never, never have another child again... because this is what happens", and I looked down at her, and meant what happens is, this is what happens, and he said, "What does that mean?" And all I could ever think was I've totally ruined, or changed my life. I will never have another moment to myself; I will never sleep again; I will never be able to walk away free, and um, she will always be dependent on us. And I didn't realize how enormous that responsibility was, when I was pregnant, but I realized how enormous it was when she was about a week old, and I had not slept for, you know, a week, and ... I think that was the first time I thought, "Oh, Gosh, I'm a mom," and everything I do is going to affect this little one.*

However, the passage through the jaws of the whale is the identical task of death and rebirth, a life-destroying and life-renewing act. As Ananda Coomaraswamy says: "No creature can attain a higher grade of nature without ceasing to exist" (qtd. in Campbell, 1996: 92). Perseverating the suffering and not resolving the conflicts or denying it altogether, only serves to keep mothers stagnated in depression to incredible detriment. Down in the belly, the task this time is to give birth to her self. It is Creation's call to character, prompting a surrender of the ego once again to a greater calling. Having had a child transform her life, a mother must now decide how she will define her new life and how she will live it. A mother can move on only by truly mourning her losses and letting go:

> *At first it was ... I felt like, I felt like a part of me died. I felt like I was in mourning, and I was really sad, almost like grieving. I definitely felt like I lost, I lost myself... it felt like somebody died, then I realized well, it's not that bad, not that somebody died, it's that this life I used to have that was all about me is no longer, and it's ok, I was ready for that to change anyway. And then I got used to it, and it doesn't necessarily mean that you lose everything about yourself, but you do lose a lot, a lot of freedom...but it wasn't dramatic, it wasn't like when [my daughter] was*

> *born, "Woo she's born!" I didn't have a feeling like "Woo I'm born!", it was more of this ... over time acceptance of well, you know I was saying goodbye, it felt like I was saying goodbye to what I was, the woman that I was, and I was saying "I'm not losing everything, but losing quite a bit," but saying hello to something new. It took a couple of weeks of getting adjusted to that and accepting that, and you almost feel like you had to let it go. I felt like I had to let it go, grieve, say goodbye, and then I had to accept this new thing into my life. And at first I resisted. At first I felt like I was complaining, you know, just upset that this had happened, and maybe I was way in over my head, and why did I do this? I didn't know I would be giving up so much, I should be really excited and I'm not really excited, I'm kind of ticked off that I've got this bad and good, and then it went to accepting, and "you know what? I'm going to make this good. I will be able to get back some of myself with this, and I'm going to be different." It's a different life, you know, and now I look forward to it, but I had to say goodbye to the other stuff first.*

Like Jonah, a mother is not spit out to shore to continue on in the journey until she has authentically committed to her new circumstances (Barlow & Cairns, 1997). Her freedom must involve working directly with the fears that create a toxic imbalance on the one hand as the total avoidance of maternal responsibility, or on the other, hyper-rigid dedication. Either way, the anxieties of the ego "concretize the small self at all costs" (Trad, 1990). Mothers should use their vulnerability as an opportunity to delve deeper and resolve issues that they may have even been denying for most of their lives. Rather than resisting the task and creating a "labyrinth of hiding places" that spiral downward, dialoging with the fear (engaging Creation) is the only true liberation (Hart, 2000).

Road to transcendence

In Constance Barlow and Kathleen Cairnes' (1997) grounded theory of the mothering experience, a mother's acceptance of her responsibilities manifests itself in an "emerging dedication" defined by "affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement" with her child and the world. Engagement is "the intention to mother, committing to new life circumstances" and falls under the larger core category of "Expansion of Self" (Barlow & Cairns, 1997). Likewise Joseph Campbell (1996) describes the hero as finally grasping at this stage that she is not alone, but that there is a benign power present everywhere in the smallest experiences, engaging and supporting her. Women now speak of time in the presence of their children as joyful, with a profound appreciation of the "simple things." As described by Leanne Domash, for Donald Winnicott the expression of creativity (the expression of Creation) is at its height in the transitional space between mother and child (Domash, 1988). Whereas before these interactions may have engendered conflict, the transformed mother now

has new eyes that "turn crises into marvels" (Linthorst, 1993: 19). This newly expanded awareness automatically sees spiritually and appreciates life experiences from "a different angle- from the divine angle," the angle Creation was pulling for all along (Linthorst, 1993: 19-20):

> *But you also see things that are just, you know, that are wonderful? You go out for a walk ... like today we're leaving to come to school and we are walking up the street and there are piles of snow on the sidewalk where people shoveled and ... she was in her little snowsuit...just sat down on the pile of snow and just looked so happy. "The snow is really crunchy mom." And you know, she wants to play with it, she wants to taste it, she wants to experience it. And then in that, that is all new and wonderful. Although I've always ... you know, I've played with snow my whole life. So being able to experience those things.*
>
> *A wonderful thing about having children is that you can see everything with new eyes, I guess. Like a thing that you may have become immune to, that it doesn't seem that interesting, you know ... you may walk past those hub caps, and he will kind of focus in on things. Like I took him to the zoo in Central Park ... we went to the penguins, and I kind of enjoyed the penguins, you know that sort of new experience... you know, re-experience things.... What Andrew might be experiencing, when he sees these things ... like light and dark was a big deal for him.*

Another mother described how this worldview is now a virtue that has made her a better, happier person:

> *My husband says I have an amazing amount of patience with her, and I'm not a patient person ... that's definitely ... one of the virtues that has improved for me. It was not my virtue. I like to speed through things, especially things that I'm kind of bored with. I get bored easy, well now, it's not like that. Now I actually want to take things slow and I want to sense it, and I want to see what it's about and that's really not me. Well it is me now, but it really wasn't me. I always wanted to be that way, but I am more that way now. Well, gee, when your day is centred around very simple things, you know. You know, I'm not running around doing these crazy things anymore. It's simple things like, "She held the rattle today...yeah!" It's like a big thing. This is such a simple thing ...and all of a sudden you're appreciative of these little things: "she noticed the light today," "she noticed this today." And you're becoming aware of those things, so I don't know, maybe that's why you become more aware of simple things, and more appreciative of simple things. You slow down a little bit.... It feels good. It feels really good. People seem to notice it too. People say, "Boy you look a lot more relaxed." I have these little lines on my face that seem to have ... even*

with the lack of sleep, they seem to have disappeared! [laughs] I guess they were tension lines.

Freedom to live–life's elixir

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye sees thee" (Job 42:5 RSV). Grace, the Elixir, the gift of Creation to mothers is being returned to the present moment in their lives where they are no longer dulled to the world, but engaged (Campbell, 1996). Being present heightens mothers' capacities for intuition, compassion, and connection. One mother emphatically described the change in herself as a radical one: "Well there's been a shift in me. I am capable of greater love, less resentment, you know? So definitely, there's been a radical shift in me and my approach to other people in my life ... and greater compassion? Absolutely." An authentically engaged mother is one that is no longer commanded by the rigid, self-interested ego, but is rather operating from an authentic self that is a flexible, generous, self-renewing agent. Creation, the source of life and nourishment is now within the mother herself, and she and the "inexhaustible world fountain" are one in the same (Campbell, 1996). What fed her, now feeds her child: "[It's] the loss of ego. Love is about giving of your self totally. When you have little beings who are totally dependent on you, you have no choice but to give completely of yourself, so that they will have a basis to start their lives... so they can stand on me until they can stand on their own."

The descriptions of the changes experienced by mothers match well with those having achieved self-acceptance and expansion of consciousness through the therapeutic relationship of a spiritual teacher. A study on unconditional love revealed several themes that emerged in response to the experience of receiving divine love from a guru: transpersonal or mystical qualities, nurturance, psychological healing, finding ones' authentic self-nature, the fostering of a heightened sense of understand or commitment to the sacred or spiritual, greater awareness of unconditional love within one's own being, and a shift in perception of the self in relationship to the world (Matsu-Pissot, 1998). In the case of motherhood, the child can be thought of as the guru, who as a force of nature is a powerful ambassador of G-d's love and expression. As Kahlil Gibran (1986) said on children: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself" (17). The child as Creation is the first observer, and confirmer of the spiritual potential dormant in each woman waiting to be lived out. One participant wished all women could experience spiritual revelation through the journey of mothering a child:

I have a friend who ... is a social worker and loving and very giving and all the rest and has a great spirit. I know that she would be the most amazing mother. I want her to have a child, I think, because ... it would give her that evolution of the spirit kind of like what we have been talking about. It is inexplicable. I want her to have that experience because she already has it

naturally, but it would just enhance it, almost like a quickie [laugh]. It is like the cliff notes to the meaning of life.

At the conclusion of the hero-task, the wall of Paradise dissolves, and the meaning of life is revealed (Campbell, 1996).

References

Ayers-Gould, J. N. 2000. "Spirituality in Birth: Creating Sacred Space Within the Medical Model." *International Journal of Childbirth Education* 15 (1) 14-17.

Aziz, R. 1999. "Synchronicity and the Transformation of the Ethical in Jungian Psychology." Carl in B Becker, ed. *Asian and Jungian Views of Ethics. Westport*, US: Greenwood Press/Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. 65-84.

Baker, J. 1992. "The Shamanic Dimensions of Childbirth." *Pre- & Peri-Natal Psychology Journal* 7 (1): 5-21.

Barlow, C. A., & K. V. Cairns. 1997. "Mothering as Psychological Experience: A Grounded Theory Exploration." *Canadian Journal of Counselling* 31 (3): 232-247.

Bondas, T., & K. Eriksson. 2001. "Women's Lived Experiences of Pregnancy: A Tapestry of Joy and Suffering." *Qualitative Health Research* 11 (6): 824-840.

Buckley, S. 2002. "Undisturbed Birth: Nature's Blueprint for Ease and Ecstasy." *Midwifery Today Int Midwife* 63:19-24.

Callister, L. C. 1992. "The Meaning of the Childbirth Experience to the Mormon Woman." *The Journal of Perinatal Education* 101 (1): 50-57.

Campbell, J. 1996. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. New York: MJF Books.

Campbell, J., & B. D. Moyers. 1988. *The Power of Myth* 1st ed. New York: Doubleday.

Coward, H. 1989. "Jung's Conception of the Role of Religion in Psychological Transformation." *Humanistic Psychologist* 17 (3): 265-273.

Daschke, D. M. 1993. "Individuation and the Psychology of the Mystic Union." *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 12 (3): 245-252.

Domash, L. 1988. "Motivations for Motherhood and the Nature of the Self-Object Tie." in J. Offerman-Zuckerberg, ed. *Critical Psychophysical Passages in the Life of a Woman: A Psychodynamic Perspective.* New York: Plenum Medical Book Co./Plenum Press. 93-101.

England, P. & R. Horowitz. 1998. *Birthing from Within*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: Partera Press.

Gibran, K. 1986. *The Prophet* .1st large print ed.. New York: Phoenix Press.

Graham, D. W. 2002. *Heraclitus: The Doctrine of Flux and the Unity of Opposites*. Online: http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/h/heraclit.htm. Date accessed:

September 10, 2004.

Hart, T. 2000. "Transformation as Process and Paradox." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 32 (2):157-164.

James, W. 1985 [1902]. *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Koestler, A. 1969. *The Act of Creation.* New York: Macmillan.

Lederman, R. P. 1996. *Psychosocial Adaptation in Pregnancy: Assessment of Seven Dimensions of Maternal Development.* 2nd ed. New York: Springer Publishing Co.

Lehnhof, K. R. I. d. w. R. E. s. A. C. i. P. L. 2002. "'Impregn'd with Reason': Eve's Aural Conception in *Paradise Lost.*" *Milton Studies* (41): 38-75.

Leifer, M. 1977. "Psychological Changes Accompanying Pregnancy and Motherhood." *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 95 (1): 55-96.

Linthorst, A. 1993. *Mothering as a Spiritual Journey: Learning to Let God Nurture Your Children and You Along With Them.* New York: Crossroad.

Luthar, S. S., K. Doyle, N. E. Suchman & L. Mayes. 2001. "Developmental Themes in Women's Emotional Experiences of Motherhood." *Development & Psychopathology* 13 (1): 165-182.

Madaras, E. I. 1999. "Journeys Inward: Portraits of Three Women's Growth Through the Entry into Motherhood." *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: the Sciences & Engineering.* 60 (6-B): 3002. US: Univ Microfilms International.

Mander, R. 2002. "The Meanings of Labour Pain or the Layers of an Onion? A Woman-Oriented View." *Journal of Reproductive & Infant Psychology* 18 (2): 133-141.

Matsu-Pissot, C. 1998. "On the Experience of Being Unconditionally Loved." in Ron Valle, ed. *Phenomenological Inquiry in Psychology: Existential and Transpersonal Dimensions.* New York: Plenum Press. 321-334.

McMahon, M. 1995. *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-Transformation in Women's Lives.* New York: Guilford Press.

Monk, H. 1998. "Birth Stories: An Ecstatic Birth." *Birth Gazette* 14 (4): 30-31.

Moon, B. A. & G. Elder. 1991. *An Encyclopedia of Archetypal Symbolism.* 1st ed. Vol. 1. Boston: Shambhala.

Oatley, K., & M. Djikic. 2002. "Emotions and Transformation: Varieties of Experience of Identity." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 9 (9-10): 97-116.

Oberman, Y., & Josselson, R. 1996. "Matrix of Tensions: A Model of Mothering." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 20 (3): 341-359.

Parker, R. 1995. *Mother Love/Mother Hate : The Power of Maternal Ambivalence.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Rawlings, L. 1995. "Re-imagining Birth." *The Birth Gazette*11 (4): 14-17.

Robinson, E. 1985. "The Experience of Transfiguration." *Religious Education* 80 (2): 246-254.

Spivak, D., L. Spivak & K. Vistrand. 1994. "Altered Psychic States in

Physiological Delivery: Definition of the Problem." *Human Physiology* 20 (4): 314-318.

Trad, P. V. 1990. "On Becoming a Mother: In the Throes of Developmental Transformation." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 7 (3): 341-361.

Vaughn, B. J. 1983. "Ecstatic Components of Childbirth: A Psychological and Phenomenological Investigation." *Birth Psychology Bulletin* 4 (2): 33.

Waldenstrom, U., I. Hildingsson, C. Rubertsson & I. Radestad 2004. "A Negative Birth Experience: Prevalence and Risk Factors in a National Sample." *Birth: Issues in Perinatal Care* 31 (1): 17-27.

Weaver, J. & J. Ussher. 1997. "How Motherhood Changes Life: A Discourse Analytic Study with Mothers of Young Children." *Journal of Reproductive & Infant Psychology* 15 (1): 51-68.

Johanna H. Stuckey

Ancient Mother Goddesses and Fertility Cults

The concept of "Mother Goddess" has a long scholarly history beginning at least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century with J. J. Bachofen (1973 [1861]) and continuing into the twentieth with R. Briffault (1927) and E. O. James (1959). Closely associated with this concept is that of the "fertility cult." Many feminists, especially during the Second Wave, found the possibility that pre-history had been ruled by a mother goddess very exciting, for it suggested that women had once wielded power, even supremacy, indeed that there may have been a period when humans lived in a matriarchy. The fact that the scholars promoting these concepts were almost all male should have been a warning to us, but the ideas were both timely and seductive. However, it is now clear that these concepts—the Mother Goddess, fertility cults, and, indeed, matriarchy itself—are patriarchal myths dependent on patriarchal dichotomies such as body/mind. To say so does not deny that many ancient goddesses known to history were mothers and part of what may be called "fertility cults." Yet they were also highly complex entities with wide-ranging domains and powers. The goddesses of pre-history were probably similar.

In explaining goddesses in ancient images and myths, the usual scholarly tendency, at least until recently, has been to label them "mother" or "fertility" goddesses and thereby to confine them to "fertility cults," a form of religious devotion normally devalued in the scholarly literature. Many, though by no means all, of these goddesses were indeed mothers and also were often concerned with fertility. However, in classing them primarily as mother or fertility goddesses, interpreters obscure the varied nature of their authority.[1]

In even a cursory examination of such images and myths of the female divine from the ancient world, we can see that ancient goddesses such as Egyptian Isis, who was unquestionably a mother, exhibited enormous range

and complexity in their characters, powers, and areas of responsibility. At the same time, they could be mothers and involved with fertility.

What I plan to do here is, first, to examine the origins of the concept "mother goddess." Then I will present short analyses of visual and written material about ancient eastern Mediterranean goddesses: Mesopotamian Inanna-Ishtar, Canaanite Anat, Canaanite and Israelite Asherah, Greek Demeter, and Greek Hera. All of them have been categorized as mother or fertility goddess or both. Finally, I will briefly consider a selection of prehistoric female figurines that interpreters have seen as representing motherhood and fertility in the form of a universal Great Mother or Mother Earth.

Three major problems, as well as two often unexamined assumptions, have a tendency to mislead both scholars and non-scholars in their attempts to rediscover and explain ancient goddesses.

First, goddesses from historical times were integral to male-dominated, polytheistic cultures that worshipped both male and female deities. Goddesses were definitely not the only or even principal deities in such cultures, nor can we speak of "goddess religions" or "goddess cultures" as having existed in ancient times (Tringham and Conkey, 1998: 37; Westenholz, 1998: 63; Frymer-Kensky, 1992: vii). This fact necessitates our keeping in mind the probability of male bias in the original presentation of these goddesses.

Second, most of the written evidence about ancient goddesses comes from elite religious sources and usually applies to the official religion of a state, but not to that of ordinary folk, though there is normally some overlap (Bowker, 1997: 350). Scholars classify these as two kinds of religion: official or elite, comprising state and temple worship, and folk or popular, the cultic practices of the common people. Typically, women's spiritual devotions fall into the latter category. Though popular religion has left very little documentary evidence, archaeology can detect it in the form of cult places and cult objects (Holladay, 1987: 268-269). Many of the latter are female figurines. Scholars are wont to dismiss popular practices as a corrupted form of religion (Toorn, 1998: 88), despite the fact that it was the way in which the majority of people worshipped. Normally, scholars put fertility-cult practices into the category of popular religion.

Third, scholars have tended to concentrate on texts almost to the exclusion of the enormous amount of visual material now available:

> Anyone who systematically ignores the pictorial evidence that a culture has produced can hardly expect to recreate even a minimally adequate description of the culture itself. Such a person will certainly not be able to describe the nature of the religious symbols by which such a culture oriented itself. (Keel and Uelinger, 1998: xi)

Before coming to any conclusion about the nature of a goddess in a mythic text, interpreters need to examine and try to interpret any related visual

material. A concomitant problem is the careless way in which some scholars and many non-scholarly writers on goddesses use visual material. For instance, not all ancient images of females represent goddesses, not all images of fat females depict pregnancy or motherhood, and not all images of naked females are evidence of fertility cults.

Two main assumptions are rife in goddess studies: first, the tendency to interpret all ancient goddesses as aspects of a single great goddess, "the Many in the One, the One in the Many" (Stuckey, 1998: 141-143; Eller, 1993: 132-135). Large numbers of non-scholars hold this view, though scholars are by no means immune to it. This position may be the result of their looking at both ancient and modern polytheistic traditions through monotheistic lenses (Stuckey, 1998: 151; Westenholz, 1998: 63). Ancient goddesses were very different one from the other, while still occasionally overlapping in functions and powers and even, at certain times and in some places, blending into one another. The second assumption is what I have called elsewhere the "myth of the fertility cult," one of the topics of this paper.

Both scholars and non-scholars seem satisfied to describe most ancient goddesses as fertility and mother goddesses, the implication being that all goddesses fit into the category "Great Mother" (Westenholz 1998:64; Day 1992:181). They assume all goddesses represent earth or are firmly fixed in nature and, often, that they preside over sexually-based fertility cults (Hackett, 1989: 650). Indeed, the "designation 'fertility goddess' ... has allowed predominantly male scholars to dismiss ... the role of goddesses in ancient religions" (Fontaine, 1999: 163-164). Close examination of the evidence, however, shows that ancient goddesses were complicated entities with powers, realms, and functions just as often pertaining to culture as they are to nature (Goodison and Morris, 1998: 16, 18). Further, though many ancient goddesses functioned as channels of fertility, actual responsibility for fertility, certainly in male-dominated cultures, lay with male deities (Hackett 1989:68).

The concepts of "mother goddess" and "fertility cult" have a long history tracing at least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, and, significantly, their principal exponents were male, a fact that should cause suspicion. In 1861, in his myth-based work *Das Mutterrecht* ("Mother Right") (1973 [1861]), Johann Jakob Bachofen proposed that all societal development passed through stages characterised by their increasing approach to moral perfection. A Venus-like goddess represented the first stage, one of promiscuity and immorality. Matriarchy, the second stage, was the realm of an earth mother, one of whose primary concerns was fertility. For Bachofen, patriarchy was the third and highest stage of societal evolution and the closest to moral perfection (80-81, 98, and throughout).

The "Great Goddess," also a fertile earth mother, was a central concept of Sir James Frazer's extremely influential work *The Golden Bough*, which appeared in twelve volumes from 1890 to 1915 (Frazer, 1960 [1927]: 435 and throughout), and she was also the focus of Robert Briffault's 1927 three-

volume study *The Mothers*.

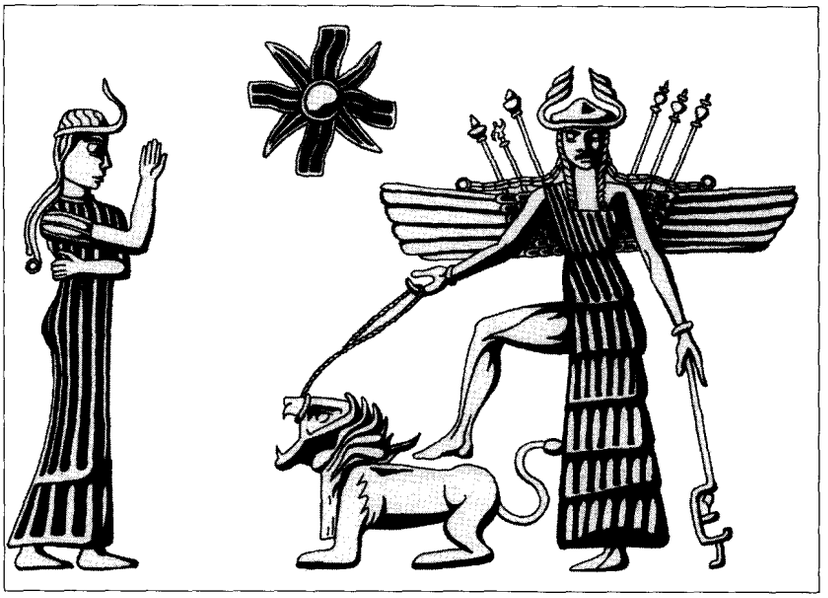
Turning to psychology, we note that Carl Gustav Jung posited as intrinsic to the human psyche a dualistic "Great Mother" archetype made up of a good, nurturing mother and terrible, devouring mother (Jung, 1964: 94-95; 1968 [1935]: 102). Jung's disciple Erich Neumann (1970 [1955]) devoted a major book to the topic. Joseph Campbell, also a Jungian, perpetuated the mother-goddess archetype in his writings on myth, especially in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, first published in 1949 (Campbell, 1964: 113 and throughout), and *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (1965: Chap. I, 9ff. and throughout).

Modern scholars of religion and archaeology have also contributed to the dissemination of belief in the existence of a once universal mother goddess. In 1959, historian of religion E.O. James published a detailed examination of the concept in *The Cult of the Mother Goddess* and, in his history of religious ideas, Mircea Eliade called the goddess "Mother Earth" (1981 [1978]: 40). Further, James Mellaart, excavator of the Neolithic town Çatal Hüyük (1967: 180), was not the only archaeologist who "eagerly embraced" the idea of mother goddess to explain the huge number of female figurines appearing in digs (Motz, 1997: 185).

In recent years, however, most scholars have come to regard "the Mother Goddess interpretation ... with increasing scepticism" (Burkert, 1985: 12) and have realised that, as Andrew Fleming argued in 1969, the "Great Mother" goddess is a myth (Goodison and Morris, 1998, throughout). What is more, along with matriarchy, it is a myth that males created and, until recently, it was primarily men who promulgated it.

A brief discussion of some prominent goddesses of the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean will demonstrate that a few are not mothers at all, and some are mothers almost incidentally. A few might fit the category "mother goddess," but even they have other important areas of responsibility. A large number of ancient goddesses are integral to the fertility and prosperity of their land, but usually only in conjunction with one or more male deities. Sometimes they received worship as part of a fertility ritual, though the focus of the rite was normally their male consort.[2] However, if there is any evidence of their being sexually active, the tendency of many scholars is to put them into the category of fertility goddess.

Inanna-Ishtar "... was the most important female deity in Mesopotamia in all periods" (Bienkowski and Millard, 2000: 156), and her origins go back deep into pre-history. From around 3000 BCE, the beginning of history in Sumeria, Inanna wielded immense power, but in a male-dominated pantheon. Her labelling as a fertility goddess has tended to obscure her complex nature. Alone or jointly with a male god, she controlled a number of elements, both natural and cultural, that were important to Sumerian society, among them, storms and rains, the harvest storehouse, warfare, morning and evening stars, and sexual love, including prostitution (Jacobsen, 1976 :135-139). She also



Triumphant Inanna-Ishtar, winged, with foot on her lion, her eight-pointed star symbol above her, being worshipped by a lesser goddess. Black-stone cylinder seal, Akkadian, ca. 2334-2154 BCE. (S. Beaulieu, after Wolkstein and Kramer, 1983: 92).

controlled the *me*, "the gifts [or attributes] of civilization" (Williams-Forte, 1983: 176). In addition, Inanna was central to maintaining the fertility and prosperity of the land, and, in connection with its maintenance, she conferred the right of sovereignty on Mesopotamian monarchs (Stuckey, 2001: 94-95; Frymer-Kensky, 1992: 27). Kingship was one of the *me* (Wolkstein and Kramer, 1983: 16).

Although Inanna fulfilled a number of female roles, such as "sister, daughter, sweetheart, bride, and widow," she was never a wife or, as far as we know, a nurturing mother (Stuckey, 2001: 90). A few ancient texts refer to certain kings as Inanna's "sons" (Wolkstein and Kramer, 1983: 70-71, 161 note 31), but, to date, there is little evidence that Inanna mothered them though she may have given birth to them (Lapinkivi, 2004: 125). Rather the references may be examples of the use by ancient peoples of kinship terms to describe close relationships between deities or between deities and humans, especially royal ones (Coogan, 1978: 56).

Inanna's Babylonian counterpart Ishtar began quite early to assimilate many of Inanna's characteristic, until, finally, Ishtar supplanted Inanna. By no means as complex a goddess as Inanna, Ishtar was in charge, primarily, of warfare and of sexual love (Bienkowski and Millard, 2000: 156).

Anat and Asherah were two of the great goddesses of the ancient Levant, modern Syria, Lebanon, and Israel (Stuckey, 2002). Like Inanna and Ishtar, they also functioned as members of male-dominated pantheons. Like Inanna

and Ishtar, they have both been classed as fertility goddesses and, in Asherah's case, also as a mother goddess.

In the mythic poems from ancient Ugarit on the Syrian coast,[3] the young Anat, an aggressive warrior, delights in wading in the blood of those slain in battle and, like Hindu Kali, hangs severed heads and hands on her person (Coogan, 1978: 90-91). Anat's usual epithet "Virgin or Maiden" does not denote a sexually chaste woman, but rather one who has not yet borne a child (Day, 1991: 145). So Anat is never presented as a mother in the texts, although she does have an almost maternal side, particularly towards her half-brother and perhaps lover Baal: "Like the heart of a cow for her calf, / like the heart of a ewe for her lamb, / so was Anat's heart for Baal" (Coogan, 1978: 111). From their interpretation of a damaged tablet, some scholars argue that Anat was indeed sexually active, and so they class the violent goddess as a fertility deity (Coogan, 1978: 108).

Goddess suckling princes. Ugarit. Ivory bas-relief, 1550-1200 BCE. (S. Beaulieu after Pope 1977: Plate XI). Early archaeologists at Ugarit found a few exquisite ivory furniture panels, on one of which a goddess suckles two young males, possibly royal heirs. Anat is the only goddess described in the Ugarit peoms as flying anywhere. This beautiful winged deity is probably Anat.

The only female activity that we might class as mothering comes from an Ugaritic poem which refers to both Anat and Asherah as "the two wet nurses of the gods [and princes]" (Coogan, 1978: 66). The fact that princes suckle at the breasts of the two goddesses does not necessarily mean that either was a mother goddess. The gesture of suckling refers rather to their close connection with royalty (Walls, 1992: 154). As does the goddess Isis in Egypt, perhaps the Canaanite goddesses take princes to their breast to validate them as heirs.

Asherah was the most important of the Canaanite goddesses, and, of all the Canaanite goddesses, she was the most likely to have been a mother goddess, since the Ugaritic poems often describe her as "the Mother of the Gods" (Coogan, 1978: 97).

However, being a mother was by no means her only, or even most

important function. Asherah was a divine mediator (Coogan, 1978: 99-101). She was also trusted advisor to El and, in that role, a power broker and potential king maker (Coogan, 1978: 111). As Elat, *the* goddess, she was probably female counterpart of the supreme god El. She was certainly the highest-ranking Canaanite goddess and next only to El in authority.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Asherah was an important Canaanite goddess in Israel and Judah. What the Bible does not say openly is that, for a couple of centuries, she might actually have been consort of Israelite god Yahweh (Hadley, 2000; Toorn, 1998: 88-89; Olyan, 1988). In addition, there is little doubt that, in the energetic popular religion of the time, people worshipped at least one and probably more goddesses. The Book of Jeremiah (7:17-18 and 44:15-19) describes cult activities devoted to "the Queen of Heaven," who clearly had some relationship to fertility and prosperity and who might have been Asherah.

Further evidence of this vigorous popular worship comes from the so-called "pillar" figures that first appeared in the area in the eighth century BCE and continued into the seventh century BCE (Kletter, 1996: 40-41). With naked torso and "pillar" or skirt covering the lower body, these figures have large breasts which they support with their hands. Excavations in Judah have produced so many of them that some consider them as "a characteristic expression of Judahite piety" (Keel and Uelinger, 1998: 327). According to a number of interpreters, the "pillar" figurines depict Asherah (Kletter, 1996: 81; Holladay, 1987: 278). None so far published depicts a pregnant woman, nor does any hold a child.

When we turn from the Levant to Greece, our thoughts immediately go to the great goddess Demeter, who was the archetypal mother goddess. Indeed, especially in the iconography of the Eleusinian Mysteries (Foley, 1994: figs.1-7; Gadon, 1989:160, 162, 163) and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Foley, 1994: 1-27), her main role was as devoted mother of a beloved daughter. Demeter's roots go back into the pre-history of Greece (Voyatsis, 1998: 142), as does her principal Greek shrine at Eleusis, the site of the great mystery religion centred on Demeter and her daughter Persephone (Voyatsis, 1998:,146).

Though the name Demeter does not appear in the earliest of Greek writings,[4] an unnamed "Grain Mistress" does occur there, and this goddess may be Demeter or ancestral to her (Burkert 1985:44). In a few early cults, the goddess had a close connection with nature (Voyatsis 1998:142,143), and, in them, wearing a horse's head (Motz 1997:126), she was associated with the sea god Poseidon, not with Zeus, as she was in myths centred on Eleusis.

The usual explanations of Demeter's name point out that *meter* is the Greek word for "mother," but are unclear what *de* means (Motz, 1997: 125; Burkert, 1985: 159, 411 note 3). Nonetheless, it is certain from her name and from her myths that Demeter was a mother goddess with close connections to the earth, but not actually the earth (Burkert, 1985: 159). Her "power and favour" centred on grain, and human food was called "the groats of Demeter."

Enthroned Demeter holding staff and stalks of wheat and Persephone with torches. Greece. Marble. Fifth Century BCE. (S. Beaulieu, after Gadon, 1989: 162).

She was one of two deities to whom people prayed when seeding the fields, and, as her harvest festival made clear, it was she "who fill[ed] the barn" with ripe grain (Burkert, 1985: 159). As Demeter Chthonia "she of the earth," she also had close connections with the underworld, and Athenians referred to the dead as *demetreioi*, "Demeter's people" (Motz, 1997: 131).

Demeter's various titles point up her diverse powers. A number of them relate to her role as grain goddess: Karpophoros "bringer of fruit," Eualosia "filler of the threshing barn," Himalia "she who sates with abundance of food," and Megalartos "she of the large loaf" (Motz, 1997: 129). As Melaina, wearing a horse head and mane, she was mistress of animals, particularly horses. As Kalligenia "bringer of beautiful offspring," Paidophile or Paidoteknos "cherisher

of children," and Kourotrophos "nurturer of children," she was a women's goddess (Motz, 1997: 129,143). All these epithets relate her to the natural, but she was also a culture bearer. As Demeter Thesmophoria "law bringer," to whom the Athenians devoted an important women-only festival, she was celebrated as cultural innovator. Demeter endowed humans with agriculture and settled existence, marriage, and, above all, the Eleusinian Mysteries (Motz, 1997: 132-133,138).

At Eleusis, the yearly celebration of the Mysteries, rites of initiation and salvation, honoured Demeter and her daughter Kore "Maiden," also named Persephone. So closely associated were mother and daughter that they usually are mirror images in visual material. The Greeks often referred to them as "the Two Goddesses, or even the *Demeteres*" (Burkert, 1985: 159). This identification may be a hint that originally Demeter herself was the disappearing and returning deity, goddess of the cycle of life.

Queen of the gods Hera, spouse of Zeus and female archetype of royal power, might seem an odd choice for inclusion here, for she was not known in ancient times for her motherly characteristics. However, her union with Zeus, which Homer describes so beautifully (*Iliad* 14.153-353), was celebrated in many parts of Greece with rituals, possibly to promote fertility (Burkert, 1985: 108-109). In the male-dominated Olympian pantheon, Hera's primary concern was indeed marriage, and her presence was invoked at weddings (Burkert, 1989: 132-133). In this respect, her epithets include Nympheuomene, "she led as bride," and Teleia, "the one fulfilled [in marriage]" (Motz, 1997: 145). Despite her involvement in marriage, motherhood was not one of Hera's attributes, though she was sometimes worshipped as Eilytheia, "the birth helper" (Motz, 1997: 145; Burkert, 1989: 170-171). "Never is Hera invoked as mother, and never is she represented as a mother with child." It seems that, in marriage to the ruler of a male-dominated pantheon, "[Hera's] womanhood [was] confined to her relationship to her husband" (Burkert, 1989: 133), a sobering comparison to feisty Demeter, an unmarried mother.

Nonetheless, it is likely that Hera was an important deity in pre-historic times, perhaps even a pre-patriarchal ruling deity in her own right. By the time of Homer's portrayal of her as a jealous and nagging wife, Hera seems to have undergone a loss of status, even though her cult was still highly esteemed. Her temples were some of the earliest known and the most important, the one at Olympia having been in existence long before that of Zeus (Burkert, 1989: 131). Indeed, it is before the temple of Hera that priestesses lit—and still light—the Olympic torch every four years. At Olympia every four years, women gathered in a festival for Hera, at which young women ran foot races in her honour (Motz, 1997: 145).

In mythic accounts of the birth of the gods, Hera comes into being before her brother Zeus, a fact that indicates "her unique equality of birth" (Burkert, 1989: 132). It is not surprising, then, that her name occurs in the oldest Greek tablets (Voyatsis, 1998: 145). What is surprising is that she should be so

circumscribed by her wifely role.

When we turn from male-dominated historic societies to those of prehistoric times, do we find any mother goddesses? Certainly Stone Age prehistory has provided us with many images of females. From the Late Stone Age (ca.35,000 – 15,000 BCE) come a variety of images of naked, standing females both carved as figurines and occasionally etched on cave walls; in addition, a few images of males were painted and also etched on cave walls (Tringham and Conkey, 1998: fig.1; Marshack, 1991: chap. XIII; Gadon, 1989: chap.1, figs.3-5,9,10). These earliest female figurines from Europe were often fat and had pendulous breasts, but they were not all obese (Marshack, 1991: 300, fig.173 a,b). The usual explanation of these "Stone Age Venuses" was that they were fertility "fetishes" (Gadon, 1989: 8), magical objects to ensure birth. For the most part, however, they do not seem to be pregnant, although they are almost all naked, one of the reasons, I assume, why nineteenth-century scholars dubbed them "Venuses."

Further, although they bear no clear markers of divinity, it seems to me that they were images of goddesses, probably local deities, rather a universal goddess. It is of course possible that they were mother goddesses, though no image from the Late Stone Age shows a female giving birth or holding a child. As a result, one scholar has argued that they are more likely to stand for womanhood than motherhood. Another has asked whether motherhood would have meant the same 20,000 years ago as it does today (Tringham and Conkey, 1998: 25).

In the New Stone Age or Neolithic, the period of the discovery of farming, this situation changes dramatically.[5] Many Neolithic female figures are fat, they sometimes hold a child or seem pregnant, and from this period scenes of birth also occur (Gimbutas, 1991: 224; Gadon, 1989: chaps. 3, 4). In addition, an appreciable number of Neolithic figurines are male, probably deities as well (Gimbutas, 1991: 249-251). Sometimes they come in couples. These facts, among others, lead me to conclude that it was in the Neolithic that male dominance began. What is more, to extrapolate from the new concern with mothering and birthing that the artefacts show, goddesses were venerated more and more for their biological functions.

To generalise from a very early deity like Inanna, goddesses probably retained much of their power as their societies became male dominated. Starting from a position of considerable strength in early male-dominated Sumeria, Inanna slowly lost power and suffered increasing diminishment, until she finally disappeared all together assimilated by Ishtar, personal goddess of belligerent empire-builders of patriarchal Babylon (Stuckey, 2000).

It is, then, to the era of the first farmers, I think, that we can trace the origins of both male dominance and goddesses who were primarily mothers. Given that western society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has shown scant respect for the earth and for mothers, the male-promoted concepts of an earth-related mother goddess and of a fertility cult appear to have served to

complete the demotion of these goddesses and the spirituality of which they were the focus.

[1]My points of view are those of religious studies, with emphasis on comparative religion and comparative mythology, and of women's studies.

[2]Sumerian Inanna's bridegroom Dumuzi is the central figure in the best known Mesopotamian fertility cult; Ishtar's lover is Tammuz, also the focus of such a cult.

[3]The poems date from the Late Bronze Age, ca. 1550–1200 BCE.

[4]Found on Crete and the Mainland, the Linear B tablets, dating to the fourteenth century BCE, preserve an early form of Greek (Burkert, 1985: 16).

[5]The Neolithic—it is a stage of human development which began in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean around 8500 BCE and gradually spread to Europe reaching the northern tip of Scotland around 3000 BCE. Hence, the dating of this stage will vary depending on locale. Farming was developed independently in Asia and the Americas.

References

Bachofen, J.J. 1973 (1861). *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right.* Trans. R. Mannheim. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, Bollingen.

Bienkowski, Piotr and Alan Millard, eds. 2000. *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Bowker, John, ed. 1997. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions.* Oxford: Oxford University.

Briffault, Robert. 1927. *The Mothers: A Study of the Origins of Sentiments and Institutions.* 3 Volumes. New York: Macmillan.

Burkert, Walter. 1985 (1977). *Greek Religion.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Campbell, Joseph. 1965 (1964). *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology.* New York: Viking.

Campbell, Joseph. 1964 (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* New York: World, Meridian.

Coogan, Michael D., trans. 1978. *Stories from Ancient Canaan.* Louisville, KY: Westminster.

Day, Peggy L. 1992. "Anat: Ugarit's 'Mistress of the Animals.'" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 51: 181-190.

Day, Peggy L. 1991. "Why is Anat a Warrior and Hunter?" in D. Jobling, ed. *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis.* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim. 141-146.

Eliade, Mircea. 1981 (1978). *A History of Religious Ideas. Volume I: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries.* Chicago: University of Chicago.

Eller, Cynthia. 1993. *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America.* New York: Crossroad.

Fleming, Andrew. 1969. "The Myth of the Mother Goddess." *World Archaeology* I: 247-261.

Foley, Helene P., ed. 1994. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.

Fontaine, Carole R. 1999. "A Heifer from Thy Stable: Goddesses and the Status of Women in the Ancient Near East," in Alice Bach, ed. *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader.* New York: Routledge. 159-178.

Frazer, J.G. 1960 (1927). *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. Abridged Edition in One Volume.* London: Macmillan

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. 1992. *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women. Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth.* New York: Free.

Gadon, Elinor. 1989. *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time.* San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Gimbutas, Marija. 1991. *The Civilization of the Goddess: the World of Old Europe.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Goodison, Lucy and Christine Morris, eds. 1998. *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

Hackett, Jo Anne. 1989. "Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern 'Fertility' Goddesses." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5: 65-76.

Hadley, Judith M. 2000. *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah.* Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Holladay, John S., Jr. 1987. "Religion in Israel and Judah under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach," in P.D. Miller, Jr., P.D. Hanson, and S.D. McBride, eds. *Ancient Israelite Religion*, Philadelphia: Fortress. 249-299.

Jacobsen, Thorkild. 1976. *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion.* New Haven: Yale University.

James, E.O. 1994 (1959). *The Cult of the Mother Goddess.* New York: Barnes and Noble.

Jung, C.G. 1968 (1935). *Analytical Psychology, Its Theory and Practice: The Tavistock Lectures.* New York: Random House, Pantheon.

Jung, C.G., ed. 1964. *Man and His Symbols.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Keel, Othmar and Christoph Uelinger. 1998. *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

Kletter, Raz. 1996. *The Judean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah.* London: Tempus Reparatum, *British Archaeology Reports International Series* 636.

Lapinkivi, Pirjo. 2004. *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage in the Light of Comparative Evidence.* Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Marshack, Alexander. 1991. *The Roots of Civilization: The Cognitive Beginnings of Man's First Art, Symbol and Notation. Revised and Expanded.* Mount Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell.

Mellaart, James. 1967 *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Motz, Lotte. 1997. *The Faces of the Goddess.* New York: Oxford University.

Neumann, E. 1970 (1955). *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. R. Mannheim. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, Bollingen.

Olyan, Saul. 1988. *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh.* Atlanta, GA: Scholars.

Pope, Marvin H. 1977. *Songs of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* New York: Doubleday, Anchor Bible.

Stuckey, Johanna H. 2002. "The Great Goddesses of the Levant." *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 37: 27-48.

Stuckey, Johanna H. 2001. "'Inanna and the *Huluppu* Tree': Ancient Mesopotamian Narrative of Goddess Demotion," in F. Devlin-Glass and L. McCredden, eds. *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred: Creative Suspicions.* New York: Oxford University. 91-105.

Stuckey, Johanna H. 1998. *Feminist Spirituality: An Introduction to Feminist Theology in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Feminist Goddess Worship.* Toronto: Centre for Feminist Research, York University.

Toorn, Karel van. 1998. "Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion," in Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, eds. *Ancient Goddesses.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin. 83-97.

Tringham, Ruth and Margaret Conkey. 1998. "Rethinking Figurines: A Critical View from Archaeology of Gimbutas, the 'Goddess,' and Popular Culture'," in Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, eds. *Ancient Goddesses.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin. 22-45.

Voyatsis, Mary E. 1998. "From Athena to Zeus: An A-Z Guide to the Origins of Greek Goddesses," in Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, eds. *Ancient Goddesses.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin. 132-147.

Walls, Neal H., Jr. 1992. *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth.* Atlanta, GA: Scholars.

Westenholz, Joan 1998. "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East 3000-1000 BC," in Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, eds. *Ancient Goddesses.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin. 62-82.

Williams-Forte, Elizabeth. 1983. "Annotations of the Art," in Diane Wolkstein and Samuel N. Kramer, eds. *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer.* New York: Harper and Row.

Wolkstein, Diane and Samuel N. Kramer, eds./trans. 1983. *Inanna, Queen of Heaven: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer.* New York: Harper and Row.

Chris Klassen

The Infertile Goddess
A Challenge to Maternal Imagery in Feminist Witchcraft

This paper explores the imagery of Mother Goddess and the resultant romanticisation of mothering found in feminist Witchcraft. I approach the topic from a personal perspective as a feminist Witch dealing with infertility. I argue that while Mother Goddess imagery is not, in and of itself, bad, rather it is limited to one type of female experience. If feminist Witchcraft is to be relevant to a large range of women and their varied experiences, multiple Goddess images must be developed and utilized, including the infertile Goddess.

Let me begin by telling a story: There once was a young Mennonite girl who dreamed of having 12 children. She spent hours during church services thinking up baby names rather than listen to the preacher. These names often included conventional names with odd spellings. Like Mychael with a Y. What can I say? It was the '80s. When she got a bit older this still young Mennonite girl decided 12 kids was a bit much, giving birth might be a bit painful, and there were millions of parentless children in the world; she was going to adopt—maybe only four. She grew a bit older, got married, left the church, became a Witch—you know, typical things to transition from young Mennonite girlhood to young Mennonite womanhood. Or, maybe not so typical.

It does seem a bit of a jump from being Mennonite—of the relatively fundamentalist variety—to being a Witch. Why Witchcraft, you ask? Well, conservative as her Mennonite community was, this young woman was always concerned with women's roles in the church and feminist theology. Long before she left the church she refused male language and imagery for God, though wondered what to call God, if God wasn't male, since 'God' seemed to be a masculine term. In Witchcraft, that is feminist Witchcraft, she discovered Goddess. (And she discovered Witchcraft by reading an essay by Starhawk who

sounded so Mennonite in her peace theology. When she found out Starhawk was a Witch this young Mennonite woman needed to rethink some of her assumptions.) What was so appealing in the imagery of Goddess was the potential for multiplicity. If the Goddess is in all women (and possibly men though feminist Witches can't seem to agree on that) and all women represent Goddess, then clearly there must be many, many images of Goddess–perhaps even many, many Goddesses. How exciting. How seemingly revolutionary.

Feminist Witches have constructed religious imagery and ritual in opposition to mainstream patriarchal religion, particularly Christianity. As such they have spent some effort in rethinking deity and how imagery and language about deity affects human self-understanding. A significant aspect of this rethinking is the speculative construction of Goddess imagery. It is important to note that when feminist Witches talk about Goddess(es) they are aware of the constructed nature of their reliance on this imagery. For Starhawk, the Goddess is a "symbol for 'That-Which-Cannot-Be-Told'" (Starhawk, 1999: 32) and "a name for power-from-within" (Starhawk, 1997: 4). For Barbara Walker, the Goddess is a "symbol of [women's] self-empowerment" (1990: 4) and a "spiritual construct" (2000: 28). Sheila Ruth (1994), in her feminist Pagan philosophical treatise, *Take Back the Light*, calls the Goddess a metaphor and warns that "People tend to fall in love with their symbols, to reify them, and thus to idolize them. Frequently they forget or choose not to acknowledge the fictive nature of the symbols they themselves have created"(77). The admittedly constructed nature of Goddess imagery is significant. Feminist Witches are opposing patriarchal religion through their speculations. But what are they opposing and how creative are their speculations? Is a Goddess, particularly a Mother Goddess in direct opposition to a Father God, the most useful speculation in creating a feminist religion? I have come to believe that the reliance on Mother Goddess imagery, and the related romanticism of the female reproductive process, while speculating a new kind of deity, does not do much to speculate a new kind of religion or a new way to conceive of femaleness.

The defining of femaleness by reproduction, which often happens in the production of Mother Goddess imagery, is not unusual in the larger corpus of literature on Goddess religion. The prehistoric Goddess is seen by most feminist Witches as primarily a Mother Goddess largely due to the way archaeological artifacts are interpreted. Though archaeologist Marija Gimbutas does not insist that every Goddess figure is a Mother Goddess, the majority are given some association with fertility. "As a supreme Creator who creates from her own substance," says Marija Gimbutas (1982), the Great Goddess of life, death and regeneration "is the primary goddess of the Old European pantheon. In this she contrasts with the Indo-European Earth-Mother, who is the impalpable sacred earth-spirit and is not in herself a creative principle; only through the interaction of the male sky-god does she become pregnant" (196). This opposition of the "true" parthenogenetic Mother Goddess versus the

male-reliant non-creative Mother Goddess is important for feminist Witches who prefer a separatist existence. If the Goddess does not *need* a God, neither do they need men. It is ironic, however, that in the same book that Gimbutas points out the parthenogenetic nature of the Great Goddess and highlights the fertility imagery found in Old Europe she also maintains the egalitarian nature of Old European mythology. She insists, though, that even if the God was given power in Old European society, *creative* power was the domain of the Goddess, and creative power means fertility.

The association of the Goddess and women with fertility is highly problematic for many feminist thinkers beyond myself. Archaeologists Margaret Conkey and Ruth Tringham are "quite sceptical about endorsing these 'positive' values [of fertility], since they are clearly entangled with many current debates about the state of 'family values' in contemporary North America. These debates, in turn, are obviously situated within the political manoeuvrings of conservative and right-wing politics that are very much at odds with many of the goals of feminist politics" (233-234, note 13). Emily Culpepper (1987) suggests that the importance of fertility in feminist Goddess religions is wrapped up in the importance of creativity. She writes in her essay, "Contemporary Goddess Theology: A Sympathetic Critique," that, "The Goddess is seen as giving birth to the universe. Birth becomes here the paradigm of creativity. Goddess as 'Mother of the Cosmos' thus carries an ontologically prior weight, and acquires a *generic* function. 'The Mother' is therefore a sort of first name, a name that uniquely stands for the whole of the Triple Goddess" (56). Thus, though feminist Witches call the Goddess, Maiden, Mother and Crone, the Mother is primary. Instead of seeing motherhood in its association with fertility as one example of creativity, it is taken as the prime model of creativity.

The high value given to creativity (imaged as fertility) entrenches the image of the Mother Goddess in feminist Witchcraft over any other Goddess image. What often ends up happening, however, is a reinforcement of the idealization of the nurturing mother. Adrienne Rich, in *Of Woman Born* (1976), has shown how patriarchal systems have already sacralized motherhood while creating an archetype which reduces real women to failures. This archetype constructs,

> the Mother, source of angelic love and forgiveness in a world increasingly ruthless and impersonal; the feminine, leavening, emotional element in a society ruled by male logic and male claims to 'objective,' 'rational' judgment; the symbol and residue of moral values and tenderness in a world of war, brutal competition, and contempt for human weakness. (52)

The image of this patriarchal archetypal Mother is not that different from the idealized Mother Goddess promoted by some feminist Witches.

Cynthia Eller (2000), in her recent critique of pre-historic matriarchy theory, complains of the maintenance of the Eternal Feminine in feminist Goddess worship. She writes,

> Women are defined quite narrowly as those who give birth and nurture, who identify themselves in terms of their relationships, and who are closely allied with the body, nature and sex—usually for unavoidable reasons of their biological makeup. This image of woman is drastically revalued in feminist matriarchal myth, such that it is not a mark of shame or subordination, but of pride and power. But this image is nevertheless quite conventional and, at least up until now, it has done an excellent job of serving patriarchal interests. (6-7).

Because of this reliance on archetypal feminine imagery, says Eller, women, by trying to live up to the Goddess, begin to lose their humanity. "Feminist matriarchalists gaze in at themselves," says Eller, "in the wonder of self-discovery, but what looks back at them is not their individual self, but the eternal feminine" (2000: 67).

In *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, Eller expresses her frustration that for many feminists who appeal to the Goddess, particularly a prehistoric, matriarchal Goddess, "Sexism is certainly said to be a historical construct, but femininity—however it is understood—is usually taken to be timeless" (2000: 63). Because of this timelessness of femininity women are denied individuality–they can only become a reflection of the archetypal Eternal Feminine which is a static identity. It is odd, remarks Eller,

> that the same people who are most devoted to the "naturalness" of sex differences—from fundamentalist Christians to feminist matriarchalists–also seem to be afraid that these "natural" sex differences will disappear if we don't constantly reinforce them, sometimes by outright coercion. What nightmare do they imagine awaits us if we stop obsessively labeling characteristics as feminine and masculine? Will we fail to recognize who we need to have sex with to make babies and the entire race will come to an end? (I say this with tongue in cheek, but I also believe that our addiction to labeling everything as masculine or feminine is part and parcel of our heterosexism.) (74)

Emily Culpepper (1987), too, sees the use of archetypal theory in feminist constructions of the Goddess as uncomfortably familiar. The Goddess, as an archetype of the Feminine creates what Culpepper calls "generic erasure." She laments,

> It is easy for the Goddess as generic to become not just a catalyst for

> insight but also a veil that covers up, erases or insufficiently differentiates important issues. When this happens, Goddess thealogy can have a flattening-out or dulling influence, giving us too pallid a picture of the richness of multiple female realities. This insight explained to me why I often found that poetry, art and ritual that focused on this generic goddess was *boring*! The archetype was receiving more attention than real women were. (61-62)

That Goddess-centred societies of the past are seen as also matriarchal, or woman-centred, reinforces the notion that there is something naturally "good" (as opposed to the natural "evil" of male-centred societies) about femaleness. Zsuzsanna Budapest (1989), when talking about the various Goddess imagery of Dianic Witchcraft, claims "We believe that Aradia, Goddess incarnate, is all women who come to a female-identified consciousness, to a social consciousness of the oppression of everything female, and who dare to fight for their own rights and the rights of their children" (160). Because the Goddess is essentially female, femaleness is romanticised as naturally and purely good. Because the Goddess is internal to all women as well as external, human women *are* the Goddess. This further reinforces the notions of purity and goodness as natural to femaleness. The association of "women" as a "good" group denies any differences between women. This, of course, is problematic in so many ways. As Laura Donaldson (1992) points out, "one effect of forging feminism from such univocal terms as 'sexual difference' and 'sisterhood' [with the implied goodness of all women in these categories] is the reduction of the Other to the same–an impulse at the heart of the colonialist project" (11). Furthermore, as Jane Flax (1990) points out in *Thinking Fragments*, the grouping of all women together as 'good' denies any recognition of the power some women hold over others, "e.g., the differential privileges of race, class, sexual preference, age, and location in the world system" (182).

Let's get back to our story: Skip ahead a few more years. The still youngish Mennonite woman has now lived almost 30 years in a society which judges women's worth by their fertility. She still thinks adoption is a good idea but figures she should try the whole "natural childbirth" thing first. After all, its now okay to be a feminist mother, isn't it? And giving birth is supposedly this wonderful spiritual experience, isn't it? And, frankly, she's curious to see what a child born of her and her Japanese Mennonite partner would look like. So, toss out the birth control, increase the sex, limit the alcohol and kitty litter changing and presto—she's hit with the most pain she's every encountered. Ovarian cysts, she's told. We'll have to operate, she's told. One of your ovaries will need to be removed, she's told, but the other one should be good. God gives us two for a reason ... she's told. The "E" word is not mentioned.

The day of surgery arrives—a month earlier than planned because the pain got too bad and morphine no longer worked to keep it bearable. Two "cysts" are removed. The one from the left side is seven cm in diameter. The one on

the right side is 20 cm in diameter. Along with the removal of the cysts was a removal of one and a half ovaries and both fallopian tubes.Now comes the "E" word. "You have endometriosis," the youngish Mennonite Witch is told. Endometriosis is a cronic disease in which endometrial tissue (tissue which builds up in a woman's uterus to be sluffed off during menstruation) builds up in odd and inconvenient places forming masses of tissue which may or may not cause horrible pain. About five percent of women in North America have endometriosis.

Okay, so here I am, and I'll now switch to first person to be clear to those who may not have guessed the identity of my protagonist, a youngish Mennonite woman and a Witch, infertile and angry. I am angry because I truly believed in the right of women to choose their reproductive options. I am angry because my choice was taken away. I am angry because my choice was taken away by my own body, not by "the Patriarchy." And I'm angry because, even though I know better, my infertility makes me feel like a failed woman. Everywhere I look I see pregnant woman and women with young children. And then there's the Goddess—the Mother Goddess. As I am struggling with my feelings of inadequacy as a female and anger at myself for feeling inadequate as a female, I see the Mother Goddess as another symbol showing me how I have failed, not met up to the norms of femalehood. I once became a Witch so I could relate to deity within myself. But in a tradition which highlights the Mother Goddess I felt I no longer existed. Its one thing to be a potential birth giver and choose not to give birth. It's an entirely different thing to not have the potential, or the choice, at all.

My challenge to feminist Witches, and others who find Goddess imagery empowering and useful, is to diversify the imagery. When Mother Goddess imagery becomes primary, as I see that it has, women who are infertile are alienated and constantly reminded of their insufficiency as females. Giving birth is *not* the epitome of creativity. It is one form, and an important one, I'm not denying that. But I want to see an infertile creative Goddess given as much attention as a fertile one. I want to see myself in Goddess imagery in more than just my own personal rantings. I want to see a recognition that femaleness is *not* a synonym for birth giving. And please don't give me the crap about mothering being metaphoric for all sorts of nurturing and creating. When mothering is equated to birth giving to the extent that it is in feminist Witchcraft, a side comment allowing women not to be biological mothers doesn't carry much convincing weight. Let's make creativity itself the model of the Goddess and spiritual growth and formulate mothering as one example amongst many. Let's proliferate Goddess images so that "the Mother" is not absent, but not predominant either. Feminist Witchcraft is about creating religious expressions to fit women's experiences. It has not adequately addressed women's experiences of infertility. My challenge to feminist Witches and Goddess worshippers in general is to make this a priority. The infertile Goddess is desperately needed.

References

Budapest, Zsuzsanna. 1989 [1980]. *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*. Oakland: Wingbow Press.

Conkey, Margaret W., and Ruth E. Tringham. 1995. "Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology." in D. C. Stanton and A. J. Stewart, eds. *Feminisms in the Academy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 199-247.

Culpepper, Emily. 1987. "Contemporary Goddess Thealogy: A Sympathetic Critique." in C. W. Atkinson, C. H. Buchanan and M. R. Miles, eds. *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research. 51-71.

Donaldson, Laura E. 1992. *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender and Empire-Building*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.

Eller, Cynthia. 2000. *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Flax, Jane. 1990. *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gimbutas, Marija. 1982. *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rich, Adrienne. 1976. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Ruth, Sheila. 1994. *Take Back the Light: A Feminist Reclamation of Spirituality and Religion*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Starhawk. 1997 [1982]. *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Starhawk. 1999 [1979]. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Walker, Barbara G. 1990. *Women's Rituals: A Sourcebook*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Walker, Barbara G. 2000. *Restoring the Goddess: Equal Rites for Modern Women*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

Barbara Bickel and Vanessa D. Fisher

Awakening the Divine Feminine

A Stepmother–Daughter Collaborative Journey Through Art-Making and Ritual

Within this performative article unfolds a dialogical journey with the Divine Feminine as lived between two women. This co-written and visual collage employs visual art, poetry, transcribed dialogue and reflective writing to tell the story of a stepmother and daughter who found themselves within the stepmother-daughter roles and labels, with little guidance as to how to relate intimately to one another within such a framework. Collaborative art making and ritual became the medium from which to overcome such limiting boundaries, becoming the basis for nurturing their relationship with each other through the dark and rich process of mothering and daughtering, resulting in a collaborative transformation, and spiritual awakening that transcended all such roles. The role of priestess that emerged provided a link to another reality that was not limited by personal pain and unfulfilled expectations. Shifting the relationship from the bounds of personal roles to a transpersonal understanding that was larger than both became key to continuing the journey together.

> The Mysteries [schools] ... fostered ... unity ... a kind of combination art institute, church and school. For what they offered was not a one-sided sole dependence upon language. The words uttered by the initiate as both cognition and spiritual revelation were supported and illustrated by the sacred rituals unfolding, before listening spectators, in mighty pictures.
>
> —Rudolf Steiner (1964: 83)

> Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine.
>
> —Luce Irigaray (2005)

Art opens a door to spaces that cannot be seen or felt with the senses, a space that cannot be structured or understood by the mind, an unseen embrace that can never be grasped by the form. If you try to find this space, you will forever be chasing you own shadow, if you try to grasp its illusiveness you will be continually left empty handed. Only by surrendering into its embrace does invisible wisdom and transformative power penetrate into the open and vulnerable heart.

We have become so separated and fragmented in our language and communication. We have become constricted and disconnected because of the labels and roles we identify with and let structure our relationships with others. How do we find meaning and connection that is not restricted by the world of labels and roles? This co-written[1] and visual collage performs a dialogical journey with the Divine Feminine as lived between two women, who found themselves within the step-mother-daughter roles and labels, with little guidance as to how to relate intimately to one another within such a framework. Collaborative art-making and ritual became the medium from which to overcome such limiting boundaries, nurturing their relationship with each other through the dark and rich process of mothering and daughtering, becoming the basis for collaborative transformation, and spiritual awakening that transcended all such roles.

I met Vanessa 14 years ago in an art room at a community center. She was seven years old and hiding behind the legs of her father, my new lover. She was suspicious of me, a new woman brought into her life, not by her own choice. On that first day of meeting, despite the distance between us, we made art together.

Just after Vanessa's eighth birthday I became stepmother to her and her older sister, Leah. Vanessa and I struggled quite painfully at times to connect in this step-riddled relationship for the next nine years. She was a tomboy whose mind was always ahead of her body, falling, stumbling and crashing through her environment. I was the too perfect and organized keeper of the home environment.

Our relationship held a historical base of betrayal that had come from neither of us yet was always present between us. An underlying sense of rejection permeated our relationship, one or the other feeling rejected by the other it seemed at all times. During her short and broken periods of living with her father and I over those early years, art remained a place of connection for us. When she was eleven she and her sister were part of a larger art project[2] that I carried out with 29 women exploring the idea of "sisters." Vanessa and I co-created an art piece, collaging the ground of the piece together. The drawing that I did came from a photo shoot where she wrapped herself in my scarves. She and her sister were part of the larger performance ritual[3] that opened the art exhibition. This was the last time that I saw Vanessa dance and move freely in a public environment.

Jan Sheppard, a collaborator-poet and friend, wrote "Quiet uprisings" based on the finished art piece, with the same title.

Barbara Bickel, "Quiet Uprising," 1995, 48" x 24", mixed media collage and drawing on wood. Photo: Barbara Bickel.

Quiet Uprisings

Purring softly
In sleepytown
lives the voices
of daughters unborn
Moving stealthily
In a sunbeam
carrying the saga of stories untold

Rise up young ones
hear the call
of your leaders voices
Eat the bread of danger
Carry your rebellious knives
Run with your
Fearless feet to each other
To freedom.

—Jan Sheppard (1995)

Barbara's first piece of me was a good representation of the state of mind I was in at eleven years old. Asleep and innocent, unknowing, full of potential and possibility not yet seen. Asleep to the fire in my heart and belly, still structured by the forces imposed on young girls and women to remain unconscious and asleep to their own deepest potential, to remain frightened and falsely in need of safety. And yet there was a profound beauty to this time in my life. I was not yet awake to see what was happening, not yet trusting enough to see what my stepmother was drawing out of me. It wouldn't be until years later that I would begin to understand....

The following year when Vanessa was 12 I created another art piece inspired by a photo that I had taken of her during the Christmas holiday. The mystery that Vanessa's reflection alludes to is very present in this piece.

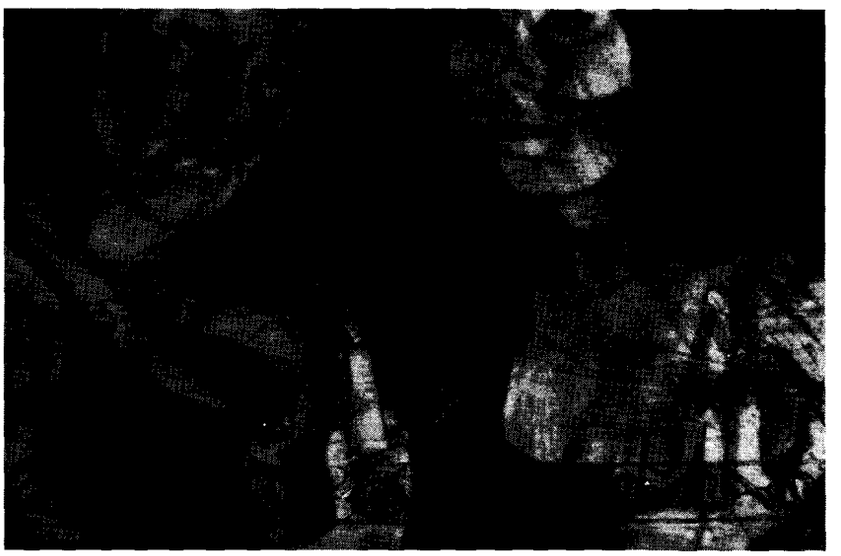
Barbara Bickel, "Hidden Shadows," 1996, 23" x 19", mixed media drawing and collage on board. Photo: Barbara Bickel.

In the summer of 1998 Vanessa and Leah asked to stay with me for part of the summer although their dad was not in town. This was the first time that I felt that my relationship with them as a stepmother was valued in itself. During that visit I asked them if they wanted to pose for a photo shoot, expressing what they wanted to say to the world. *Immortal* is the art piece that

came from that. They each choose to give the photographer/the world the finger. Vanessa at fifteen had become a young woman with something to say to the world.

Waking up to cracks in time,
where darkness dares to dance in delight
fragile body yearns for comforts,
fear lifts the heart out of stagnant resting,
In search of its beloved.

To You, I surrender knowing and understanding
—Vanessa's 2004 performance ritual poem #1[4]



Barbara Bickel, "Immortal," 1998, 14" x 21", mixed media drawing on wood. Photo: Barbara Bickel.

Prior to the girls becoming adolescents I had offered to create a ritual for each of them to celebrate their first bleeding when the time came. Vanessa had participated in Leah's ritual four years prior. On a visit a few months after her 16th birthday I offered to have a blood ritual[5] to honour her entrance into womanhood with a few women friends as witnesses. We were living in different cities and saw each other only twice a year so the timing of this ritual was off and she very reluctantly agreed. During the ritual Vanessa opened up and shared the trauma of her first sexual experience. After my two women friends left, Vanessa lay in my arms until the small hours of the morning, her body releasing, shaking and trembling, struggling to reclaim the part of herself that

she had lost, until exhaustion brought her (and me) sleep. The outcome of it was profound, in that it opened a container of trust between us that had been absent throughout our relationship to that point.

Two months after this event, Vanessa called us from her home in Saskatoon and told us that she wanted to change her life. She was struggling with what was becoming a scary addiction to drugs, an unhealthy lifestyle of partying accompanied by hating and failing school. She wanted to move to Vancouver and live with us. Two months before her 17th birthday she moved in with us. For the next four years we shared our lives full time and came to accept our limitations with each other. It was a very intense time. During one particular difficult period in our relationship I came to fully admit to myself and to Vanessa that I could never be the mother that she desired. It was painful for both of us living with my "failure" that felt like our "failure." At the same time it freed both of us to live with a new honesty with each other. I stopped trying to fix the relationship, yet did not give up on the relationship. I continued my own spiritual journey and practice of coming to know the divine feminine and came to recognize that my role and relationship with Vanessa was more importantly as a priestess. Shifting our relationship from the bounds of personal roles to a transpersonal understanding that was larger than both of us was key to our continuing journey together. The role of priestess, was a role that flowed from my art practice and gave us a link to another reality that was not limited by personal pain and unfulfilled expectations.

Each birthday that Vanessa had during those years was a celebration mixed with pain. On Vanessa's 20th birthday I wrote this poem for her.

Living Awake

For Vanessa

The day
nineteen becomes twenty
amplification
awake in lies
television her respite

The day
grief consumes existential love
birth cord severs
awake in lies
psychology text her respite

The day
despair in desperation
appreciates her self

awakes in lies
her own Self her respite

The year
stretched deep
extends her further
awakens in lies
un/embraced she caresses truth

Six months after this 20th birthday, Vanessa was preparing to move out on her own. She had begun to read books on Eastern spirituality and was meditating, but she still struggled and suffered with her relationship to her female body. Despite the fact that Vanessa is a beautiful, healthy and fit young woman, she was continually obsessed with her health, weight, and complexion. Her menstrual cycle, which was never normal, had become more erratic. She would have weeks of premenstrual symptoms but no shedding bleeding cycle. Conversations laden with despair, pain, and shame for her body consumed our conversations. After one of these conversations I offered to co-create an art piece with her for her 21st. It would mark the end of a third seven-year cycle.[6] I suggested that she might also want create a performance ritual to accompany the unveiling of her art piece and see it as a rite of passage that she could begin preparing for. The rite would honour her life journey thus far and welcome the next phase of her life. She had connected with a spiritual community and was planning to live communally with other young people (six young men) committed to practicing and living a spiritual life. It was not until two months prior to her birthday that she made the commitment to model naked for me and to prepare for a performance ritual.

We set the date for her photo shoot and met at her sister's home for the photo shoot. Vanessa was a different person that evening after the photo shoot. She was light and free. We spent that day together at her sister's house; three women, laughing and talking freely. To my delight and honour, by the end of the evening Vanessa was dancing without inhibition, her body moving fluidly, erotically, joyfully, without shame. This was a part of Vanessa that I had never seen. What follows is an excerpt from the conversation we had immediately following her photo shoot in August 2004.

Barbara (B): You seemed pretty comfortable.

Vanessa (V): Once I was in the actual process of it, it seemed fine. I didn't feel uncomfortable so much. It was helpful having you being naked[7] with me because it felt less like I was the center of attention. I found the meditation before was helpful as that was the time all the thoughts could come up, my fears, and I could consciously practice just not relating to them and choosing to see through the absurdity of the thoughts themselves, and that they are actually very inaccurate. And really just getting to a space

Barbara and Vanessa, 2004, photograph by Michael Fisher

where I see you as an artist and not my stepmother, is an important part too. Then I just let go of more. It definitely felt comfortable and felt like something my body has wanted to do for a long time. And the thought that's come to me for the last while feels like I have been slowly stripping down myself, that's what it feels like, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. I just see it as a marking point for just being naked, vulnerable and seeing in the face of that nakedness that there's actually nothing to be afraid of. And that was really important for me to do—metaphorically, physically, you know it's the same as what I am going through in the rest of my life.

B: It's a good thing to do, rather than just in your nightmares.

V: Yeah, it was a big part to see my body as something that could be beautiful, and something to share with others as well. [starts crying] I've felt really caged for a long time. And feeling like my body was for other people and not for myself. And not having to feel ashamed for any imperfection. Yeah, it's like to truly love the vessel as spirit has chosen to have it. It's not even mine to feel ashamed of, in that way, you know. It feels like I've been doing it violence. It feels like I am rediscovering my relationship to my body, and what that means, as I get more spiritual insights into myself, to the soul, the non-material and try to figure out how to integrate the physical as well. And yeah, that's not all that I am but it's a huge part in this world, the relative world. It has to be part of my spiritual practice as well. So, it feels like I am slowly just trying to not hide all parts of myself, which is really hard to do. It feels really terrifying going into it. There's so many levels, it's so unreal. That fear is such an illusion that I've created. So, it felt like I was really present in the experience. I didn't feel like I just sort of dissociated from it, from what's happening.

And so it was just sort of like this presence. I've been working with this idea of presence. I realize that consciousness being conscious of itself is actually when you are completely just present and there's no thought and no feeling going on at some level, there's just an openness, an expansive embrace, you're completely absorbed. Yeah. It is a sense of dis-identifying with the body in the sense of, it's realizing that I am not just my body, and that's important I think when you are displaying yourself, to see your body as not yours to keep and hold onto and be ashamed of or displaced in some possessive egocentric way. Your body is not yours to own. I often just look in the mirror and it's not what I feel inside, it's like my image feels like a limit on what I can be. It seems I need to trust that if I can actually embody the essence of beauty I will no longer have a need to possess it. And beauty will come through physically when it is embodied by the soul. It's not about fixing the physical to reflect that inner beauty. It seems really obvious but it has been really hard for me to trust that and believe that. And know that this layer of skin, this boundary is not actually my limit. It's hard to trust that. It's a huge step for feminine energy itself. And I want to put this up [the art piece] in a house with a bunch of males in it, you know, have it be honored and its bigger than me, a mirror to reflect the inner beauty of all ... of the One.

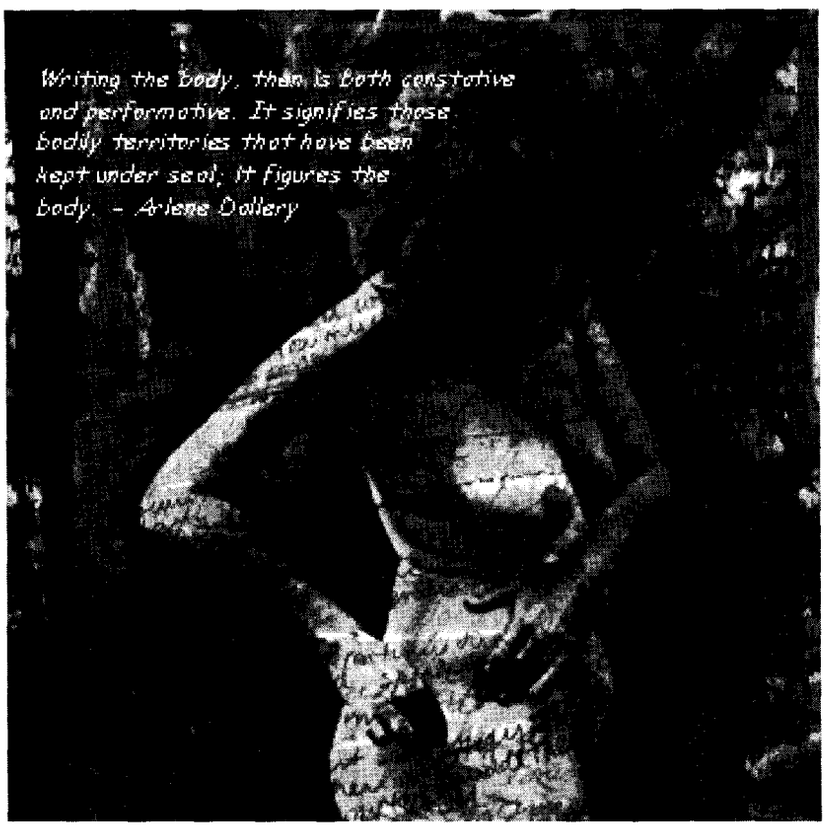
B: The experience that you just brought to mind for me when you were talking about being spirit, that you are actually showing spirit and choosing to let spirit come out through your body. In my experience, the word that comes out for me is goddess, because that is that female energy spirit, and for me it is like feeling every cell in my body, just there, every cell of your body is just radiating out and wants to embrace the world and wants to touch everything, that energy just going out. I don't know if that's ...

V: It's totally the same. I tend to have a masculine view of it, when I reference back, because the stuff that I read is very masculine. But it's the same experience of this complete outward embrace ... you're there because you're always going to be there, but you're just so unaware of yourself in the moment, and yeah, it's like just wanting to touch everything and eat everything, and there's no sense of what you want to touch that's good or bad, in fact you are not even aware of the distinction, you just don't even care, at some level. But it is such a simple experience, and I don't think people can even imagine, even if they had those experiences, that it could be so simple. And maybe we as women especially, we tend to undervalue, because we think it has to be this really big intellectual thing, and its totally just Ground of Nothingness.

Pieces fall away,
Caught in the flow of your current,
Lights burn out in silent waves,
Pushing and Pulling,
The body embraced remembers its harmony,
Invisible eyes bring new vision,
Silent hands weave garments of majestic beauty.

To You, I surrender all doubt and disbelief.
—Vanessa's 2004 performance ritual poem #2

Two weeks after this photo experience I defended my Masters' thesis entitled, *From Artist to A/r/tographer*[8]*: An Autoethnographic*[9] *Ritual Inquiry into Writing on the Body* (Bickel 2004). After thirteen years as a practicing collaborative visual and performance ritual artist I entered into an arts-based inquiry of my own work and self. The guiding question of my research was: *What does it mean to me to have an ethical and aesthetic feminist art practice?* Ritual is central to my art practice, as is the (re)presentation of the body. The purpose of my return to university and graduate studies was to integrate text and language with art and the body. To do this I responded literally to the numerous feminists (Helene Cixous [1997]; Adrienne Rich [2001]; Susan Bordo [1997]; Arlene B. Dallery [1992]; Luce Irigaray [1994]; Audrey Lorde [1984]; and Trinh Minh-ha [1999] amongst others) who compellingly summon women to write from



Barbara Bickel, "Testimony," 2003, 12" x 12", mixed media collage on wood. Photo: Barbara Bickel.

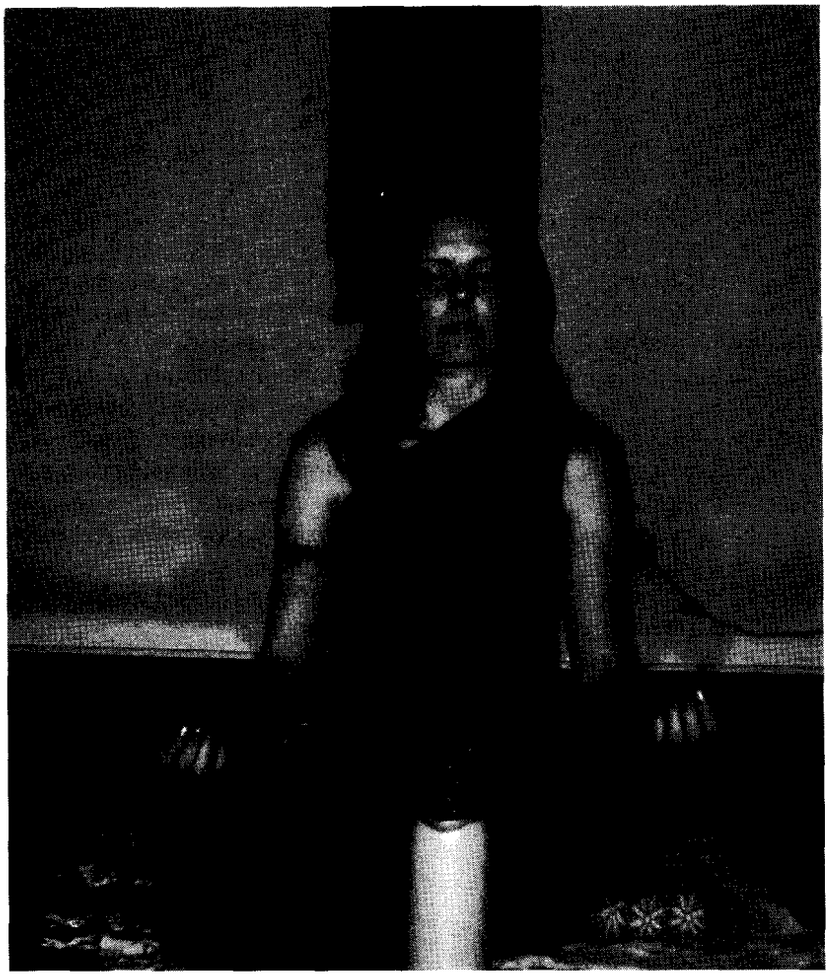
and with their bodies as a form of resistance. I began the art making research with a ritual of writing on my entire body.

Within the third space of ritual, my resistances were engaged and my body, art and writing re-forged as interconnected language. I posit in my thesis that art making, as ritual provides the means by which the a-rational[10] or the mystical can emerge and expand our ways of learning and knowing in this world.

Vanessa attended my defense. Although she had at this point been part of art-making experiences with me she continued to struggle to understand my way of being in the world. Listening to the thesis presentation and the dialogue afterwards helped her find clarity and to achieve a new understanding. She emerged from that day with a desire to help me articulate the feminine spirit that she now clearly recognized in my art and performance rituals. The experience also changed her perspective on the new experience she was having as the only female in a house of males. She now felt to a greater degree the responsibility and importance of keeping the feminine spirit present in her home and the larger world. It was at this point that we decided to write together to bring the Feminine Ground of Being into greater visibility. As the artist of writing in this piece I leave her to write further about my art and her experience of our collaboration.

If I used one word to describe my stepmother's artwork it would be *reclaiming.* Reclaiming not only the female body which has long been oppressed and repressed within culture and throughout history but also a deeper reclaiming of forgotten depth and repressed darkness; the very darkness that is the source of all light and visible beauty. She unearths the longtime ignored Ground of Being; the dark womb within which all potentials that ever were and ever will be are contained. The Divine Feminine, the formless which gave birth to all form, this is the gift of remembering she offers, if only we reach out to that which is beyond what our normal senses can perceive.

Collaborative unfolding seems to be a strong aspect of the feminine path; the desire to share and learn and transform together rather than pursuing purely solitary paths to unearthing spirit. My stepmother works with the invisible side of reality, intuitively kneading and massaging unconscious energies and urging them forth into spaces where they can be illuminated. With love and respect Barbara journeys with me into the darkness, we venture together through the unseen, unknown, aspects of ourselves. The spontaneity in movements is the embodiment of this unmanifest beauty. Barbara is teaching me a reclaiming of this lost art of connecting beyond words. And then also reclaiming the beautiful expression of words and writing but with transformative power because the words no longer are presented to merely describe an experience, rather as we rest in this timeless ground of potential, the words arise fully formed from the experience, the words are an expression of the ground, of the divine feminine, rather than a detached tool in which to structure and make sense of the Mystery of the Universe.



Vanessa in meditation with veiled art piece behind her, prior to performance ritual 2004. Photo: Barbara Bickel

On October 17th, Vanessa's 21st birthday, her rite of passage was shared with friends, family and her male housemates. She had been reluctant, still needing encouragement and guidance, yet committed to creating a performance ritual. She began by sitting in meditation and asking those that came to join with her. The lighting of candles and sharing of poetry marked each phase of her life. Music combined with mediation created the space for unveiling and dwelling with her art piece. She became priestess for the evening, dressed in black with coloured veils (my scarves) flowing from her waist, holding the Ground of Being for those that came to witness the unveiling of the art. The memories of the years of co-labour that led to this return to nakedness drifted away as I witnessed this daughter of the divine reclaim her birthright.

Moonlight dances on unseen bodies,
graced by warmth,
between the shadows,
kisses of darkness fill spaces of unknown mystery,
Infusions of bitter sweet delight cut through fear,
Wisps of sacred breath slip through finger tips,
shimmering cloaks of sparkling black beauty
wrap around timid souls,
in embracing love,
Every cell breathes the bliss,
All is revealed,
raw and unashamed,
I surrender to You, my need to know the way.

—Vanessa's 2004 performance ritual poem #3

Barbara Bickel, "Spirit's Vessel," 2004, 24" x 48", mixed media drawing on wood. Photo: Barbara Bickel.

After years of being bounded by an invisible barrier, I had broken through and reclaimed my identity with the Divine Feminine. The goddess had been closer to me than I could have ever imagined, and through my own journey into darkness and death I had been resurrected and reborn as an embodiment of the Divine Feminine herself. In making the journey back to my Self the greatest gift revealed to me was the transcendence of all such distinctions as masculine and feminine, and roles such as mother and daughter. The struggles Barbara and I had faced in our relationship as stepmother and daughter were illuminated as illusory baggage that did not belong to us, and had no place in the Divine Feminine space. The answers we searched for would

never be found by fighting to figure out our relationship within relative existence, but by transcending to a space where such relative distinctions had no place and fell away as empty and hollow appearances. Through the art making and ritual process we had entered and remembered our bodies, our shared femininity and our true connection in the immovable power of our Source. We can now continue to build a relationship as stepmother and daughter within the relative world of existence based on our shared connection within the Ground which we can never loose or forget.

[1]Different fonts distinguish the voices of Barbara and Vanessa throughout the piece of writing

[2]*Sisters* was a collaborative exhibition where I worked with 29 women and a poet Jan Sheppard (Bickel and Sheppard 1995). Jan's poetry was fed by meeting with the co-creator and myself with the finished art piece. It was my first art exhibition that included a performance ritual with the model/co-creators.

[3]Public performance ritual as I have come to call it is the ritual letting go of the art by the women and myself at the opening of art exhibitions. This seemed essential in the Sisters project and I have continued this as an ethical, spiritual, community-based educational part of my art practice.

[4]Vanessa's 2004 performance ritual poems are interspersed throughout the writing as a reflection of the crossing of time boundaries.

[5]I was introduced to blood rituals through my women circles where some of the women chose to reclaim and ritually celebrate there first menstrual cycles as adults. I later read about it as part of N.A indigenous traditions and as developed by spiritual feminists. With my own renewed understanding of female blood rituals I then offered it to Vanessa and Leah. For more literature on blood ritual's look at Judy Grahn's 1999 book, *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World* and Kisma K. Stepanich's 1992 book, *Sister Moon Lodge: The Power & Mystery of Menstruation.*

[6]With the help of her sister, Vanessa took the theme of the three seven-year-cycles and found the story of Inanna to describe it further (Crain, 2004):

Inanna
We go down as She goes down
We follow Her underground
Hail to Inanna
Who dies to become whole
And deep calls to deep

The veils drop by on our way
As we pass through the gates
With Inanna as our guide
We find truth in deepest night
And deep calls to deep.

The theme of decent to the underworld and deep letting go has been the central challenge of this past year. This is why I've added a poem on the goddess Inanna. Inanna was a female ruler who descended to the underworld where she faced seven gateways, each gateway could only be passed by the surrender of some aspect of her power until the last gate where she was stripped naked and then killed. After three days of being dead she was rescued and became goddess of heaven and earth. I've found this myth powerful in illustrating the struggles of my own spiritual path of deep release and letting go.

[7]In an effort to acknowledge the power differentiation that is in place with the artist and the model, I at times offer to be naked when photographing women naked. I have also invited the women to photograph me first so that they can have the experience of being on the other side of the lens first.

[8]A/r/tography draws upon the skills of the artist, researcher and teacher in an alternative and evolving form of inquiry. Educator, researcher and artist, Rita Irwin (2003), explains a/r/tography as the act of the "artist/researcher/teacher art making and writing offer[ing] complementary yet resistant forms of recursive inquiry." She goes on to describe "A/r/tography [a]s a fluid orientation creating its rigor through continuous reflexivity, discourse analysis, and hermeneutic inquiry" (8).

[9]Autoethnography, according to Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000), "is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal and the cultural". They further explain it as collaging "concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness" into stories that are related to human and institutional relationships that are "affected by history, social structure, and culture" (739).

[10]Accessing and honouring the a-rational as texts of the body and the subconscious through altered states within ritual is an important counterbalance to the dominance and privileging of the rational mind in our society. The a-rational allows the ignored ghosts and forgotten/hidden knowledges to emerge.

References

Bickel, Barbara and Jan Sheppard. 1995. *The Art and Poetry of Sisters*. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

Bickel, Barbara. 2004. *From Artist to A/r/tographer: An Autoethnographic Ritual Inquiry into Writing on the Body*. Unpublished masters thesis. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia.

Bordo, Susan. 1997. "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity." in K. Conboy, N. Medina & S. Stanbury, eds. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press. 90-105.

Cixous, Helene. 1997. "The Laugh of the Medusa." in R. R. Warhol & D. P. Herndl, eds. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 347-362.

Crain, Maevyn. 2004. Inanna Chant. Online: http://members.shaw.ca/crazycurlz/MaevynChants_HTML/Chants_Tape2.htm. Date accessed: September 8, 2004.

Dallery, Arlene. 1992. "The Politics of Writing (the) Body." in A. Jaggar & S. Bordo, eds. *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing.* New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press. 52-67.

Ellis, Carolyn and Arthur P. Bochner. 2000. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Research as Subject." in N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 733-768.

Grahn, Judy. 1999. *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Irigaray, Luce. 1994. *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution.* Trans. Karin Montin. NY: Routledge.

Irigaray, Luce. 2005. "Women and the Divine: Conference Call for the Institute of Feminist Theory and Research." Online: http://www.ITFR.org.uk. Date accessed: January 18, 2005.

Irwin, Rita. 2003. "Introduction: A/r/tography as Metonymic Metissage." in R. Irwin & A. de Cosson, eds. *A/r/tography as Living Inquiry: An Introduction to Arts-Based Research in Education.* Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press. 27-38.

Lorde, Audrey. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* Freedom CA: The Crossing Press.

Minh-ha, Trinh. 1999. "Write Your Body and the Body in Theory." in J. Price & M. Shildrick, eds. *Feminist Theory and the Body.* NY: Routledge. 258-266.

Rich, Adrienne. 2001. *Arts of the Possible.* NY: W.W. Norton & Co.

Stepanich, Kisma K. 1992. *Sister Moon Lodge: The Power & Mystery of Menstruation* . St. Paul, MN: Llewllyn.

Steiner, Rudolf. 1964. *The Arts and Their Mission.* Spring Valley, NY: The Anthroposophic Press.

Karen Villanueva

Mother Love in Buddhism

Buddhism defines the ideal mother as an example of universal love, the middle way, and bodhisattva path. In patriarchal dominant cultures, this ideal has limited women to the role of self-sacrificing mother, especially the mother of sons. Traditional China is examined as the model of this oppression. Within Buddhist philosophy, everyone is innately capable of transformation and awakening. Although there is no concept of guilt, there is a concept of regret or remorse. Yet in western cultures most people are taught that they are guilty of sin from birth. For women in Christian society, this sin has been passed down through the first mother, Eve, who dared to seek knowledge. However, in Buddhist thought, there is no such taint against women. Nevertheless, patriarchal dominant cultures also adapted Buddhist philosophy to suit their mores. Yet, in spite of these patriarchal constructs of what it is to be a mother, what we learn from our mother, her love and nurturance to us as children, is what makes peace possible. This peace may be achieved through the bodhisattva ideal. In the same way that a mother loves her only child, a bodhisattva loves all beings. She knows the suffering that life promises, the pain and sorrow at the loss of loved ones, the ravages of old age, disease and death. A bodhisattva, whether male or female, returns to reach out from his/her rung on the ladder of life and help others.

> Even as a mother protects with her life
> Her child, her only child,
> So with a boundless heart
> Should one cherish all living beings
>
> —*Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata 143-151*

Buddhism is filled with rich imagery and metaphor of the ultimate love being like the ideal love of a mother for her child. In Buddhist philosophy, there is no

greater love than that of a mother for her child, nor almost any greater sacrifice than a woman giving her body for the birth of a child. Motherhood is thus revered for its lessons of love and sacrifice. Yet, motherhood is also disparaged for its attachment to the child because it is through attachment that one experiences suffering. This essay examines the love of a mother idealized in the many Buddhist *suttas* and writings as an example of universal love, the middle way, and *bodhisattva* path. Also discussed are the roles of motherhood in patriarchal dominant, Buddhist cultures, particularly in traditional China.

Within Buddhist philosophy, everyone is innately capable of transformation and awakening. Although there is no concept of guilt, there is a concept of regret or remorse. In western cultures, however, most people are taught that they are sinners from birth. For women in Christian society, this sin has been passed down through the first mother, Eve, who dared to seek knowledge. However, in Buddhist thought, there is no such taint against women. Nevertheless, patriarchal dominant cultures of the East also adapted Buddhist philosophy to suit their mores. Yet, in spite of these patriarchal constructs, motherhood and what we learn from our mother, her love and nurturance to us as children, the *bodhisattva* ideal, is an avenue to peace.

Universal love

The state of universal, unconditional love for all beings is known as *metta*, loving-kindness. The goal of *metta* is the desire for people to be happy. It is unconditional. Yet, before offering love to another, one must love oneself. The Buddha teaches that if you can sustain a loving mind for as long as a finger snap, you can achieve *nirvana*, ultimate truth (Dharmasiri, n.d.: 43).

Developing a mind that dwells in loving-kindness delivers you from the suffering of self-concern and attachment. To accomplish this, the Buddha encourages his followers to strive for a mind that is one-quarter loving-kindness, one-quarter compassion, one-quarter appreciative joy, and one-quarter equanimity (Bodhi, 1995: 43:1). These four qualities are known as the *Brahma-viharas*, the Divine Abodes or Four Immeasurables (Harderwijk), of which the first is *metta*, loving-kindness.

The second Immeasurable, compassion or *karuna*, is the desire to end the suffering of others. The idealized mother of Buddhism incarnates this paragon of self-less devotion and compassion toward her children. According to Buddhist practitioner and author, Sharon Salzberg (1995) :

> It is compassion that removes the heavy bar, opens the door to freedom, [and] makes the narrow heart as wide as the world. Compassion takes away from the heart the inert weight, the paralyzing heaviness; it gives wings to those who cling to the lowlands of self. (frontispiece)

We can envision *karuna* embodied as a loving mother who's every thought

and action carries the intention to heal her sick child. It is the dying mother who with compassion tells her young children that life is like waves on the ocean, unique yet part of the whole. Each wave crests then returns to the ocean from which it came.

Compassion is also understanding and acceptance. It breaks down the barriers of duality that have been created by patriarchal culture. Compassion is the wish that all beings be free from suffering. This understanding and acceptance characterize a mother's unconditional love for her child. If we can love each other as a mother loves her child then we shall know compassion.

Happiness at the good fortune of others defines *mudita*, appreciative or sympathetic joy, the third Immeasurable. It is an unselfish state requiring the complete absence of envy or jealousy. *Mudita* is a foreign concept in our competitive, western societies. *Mudita* insists that we not consider beneficial resources as finite quantities. Just as a mother always has enough love for all of her children, there is enough joy to celebrate the successes of others.

The fourth Immeasurable, equanimity or *upekkha*, is a state of love, compassion, and joy for the happiness and well-being of others. Equanimity is not indifference. As a mother, equanimity is the realization that although you love all of your children equally, their temperaments dictate that you treat them differently. For example, one child may be sickly and requires more attention to her health, while another does well in school and requires more freedom to explore on her own, while the third may need more stroking to allay her insecurities. A mother loves all her children while recognizing their individual needs.

In our relations with one another, equanimity is recognizing that our relationships are often built upon the arbitrary: a compliment or praise can make a friend, while an unkind word or criticism makes an enemy. Equanimity is the ability to see beyond the arbitrary and superficial, and recognize that we all want the same thing in our lives, ultimately that we and our loved ones achieve happiness. Once we come to this understanding we can regard all beings in the same way.

Equanimity, *upekkha*, means balance. The goal of this Immeasurable is to equate our love and compassion toward all beings and balance emotions such as elation and depression, joy and sorrow. It is letting go of the anxiety and fear of living, of dying, giving in to the void of uncertainty, and trusting in the law of cause and effect, *karma*.

Treating all living beings equally is significant in light of the Buddhist belief in rebirth. The Buddha taught that it would be difficult to find a being that had not been your mother, father, brother, sister, son or daughter in a former life (Dharmasiri, n.d.: 45). Salzberg contends that in the endless round of rebirths, we have done it all: loved, hated, feared, killed, maimed, raped, saved, and served (1995: 185). In Buddhist philosophy, there is no separation from any living being because we have been everything and done everything before; no one is inferior or superior to anyone else. Each and every life is

interrelated and interconnected. The great master of Buddhist philosophy, Nagarjuna, reasoned:

> If we divided this earth into pieces the size of Juniper Berries, the number of these would not be as great as the number of times that each sentient being has been our mother.

The middle way

Buddhism is the way of the Middle Path, or Middle Way. Before and since the birth of the Buddha known as "*Ûâkyamuni,*" many spiritual seekers have looked to either asceticism or hedonism as a way to enlightenment. Having followed both roads and finding no fruit himself, the Buddha urged us to discover for ourselves the path of no extremes. As the Theravadin monk, Narada, emphasizes:

> Like a mother who makes no difference between herself and her only child and protects it even at the risk of her own life, even so does the spiritual pilgrim who follows this middle path radiate his thoughts of loving-kindness identifying himself with all. (1988: 326)

Buddhism teaches that by following this middle path we may end suffering and *samsara*, the endless cycle of birth and death, or the persistence of existence, and find enlightenment.

The middle way consists of eight rules to live by, the Noble Eight-fold Path: right understanding, thoughts, speech, actions, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Thoughts of love and understanding given to all beings are right thoughts. The Buddha instructs us that love and understanding has the potential to ease the suffering of all beings (Nhat Hahn, 1991: 33). Understanding that in life there is suffering and pain, that the cause of this suffering and pain is thirst, craving and desire, and that the way to end this suffering is the middle way, the Noble Eight-fold Path, is the nature of wisdom and right understanding (Rahula, 1978: 49). This deep understanding constitutes the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

The role of motherhood

In some predominantly Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, women are often called *matugama*, a Pâli word that means "mother folk" or "society of mothers" (Narada, 1988: 311). In such patriarchal dominant cultures, one of the few ways a woman can achieve a place of honour is as a mother. During the time of *Ûâkyamuni* Buddha, it was expected that a woman become a mother and bear sons, ten sons being the ideal number (Murcott, 1991: 75). Motherhood was regarded as "a convenient ladder to ascend to heaven"; by fulfilling her maternal role a woman earned her place in the higher realms (Narada, 1988: 311).

Moreover, a woman could achieve high regard in becoming a mother. In *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentaries on the Therigatha*, Susan Murcott quotes the Brahman Vaisista as he asserts:

> The teacher is ten times more venerable than the assistant teacher, the father a hundred times more than the teacher, and the mother a thousand times more than the father. (1991: 77).

Lama Tsering Everest teaches that in the Mahayana tradition, there is no more venerated and exalted action than bearing the pain that allows another living being to have a precious human birth and a chance to attain enlightenment (Mandell, 1995: 57).

A mother thus embodies wisdom, self-respect, self-esteem, strength, pride, compassion, honor, caring, listening, kindness, logic, forgiveness, and love. Idealized motherly love may be considered a prototype for all love:

> If we contemplate on our own mother's kindness towards us, our fondness for her will grow. Before our birth we were protected and preciously carried in her womb.... Our presence there was not only a great physical burden to her, but was also a responsibility curtailing her freedom of action.... At birth, we gave great suffering to our mother, yet she forgot this at once and rejoiced as though she had found a precious gem. We had no control over our physical functions, yet she felt no revulsion towards our vomit or excretions and cared for us gently.... Without her constant attention we would not be alive now. (Murcott, 1991: 77)

As virtuous as a mother's love is, not just any woman can birth a Buddha. She must be the Right Mother. A woman who gives birth to a Buddha must be "exceptional in every way" (Paul, 1985: 63). In preparation for the birth of the Buddha *Úâkyamuni*, Maya, his mother, vowed to her husband, King Suddhodana that she would bring no harm to any living thing neither by theft, intoxication, frivolous speech, slander, falsehood, envy, nor false views. Instead, she would live a life of chastity, "amity to all," and "practice in the eleven moralities" (Paul, 1985: 63). Queen Maya died a few days after the birth and was reborn as a *deva* in the Tusita Heaven.

Additionally, the very earth on which we live is our mother. She bears witness to our disrespect in the form of environmental degradation and weapons of war and suffers in silence. Yet, thus far, she is unfailing in her forgiveness of all that has been done to her. Indeed, in Buddhist thought, sacrifice is integral to motherhood.

The *Sutra about the Deep Kindness of Parents and the Difficulty in Repaying It* enumerates the ten kindnesses, or sacrifices, that are bestowed by the mother on her child:

> The first is the kindness of protection and care while the child is in the womb.
> The second is the kindness of bearing suffering during the birth.
> The third is the kindness of forgetting all the pain once the child has been born.
> The fourth is the kindness of eating the bitter herself and saving the sweet for the child.
> The fifth is the kindness of moving the child to a dry place and lying in the wet herself.
> The sixth is the kindness of suckling the child at her breast and nourishing and bringing up the child.
> The seventh is the kindness of washing away the unclean.
> The eighth is the kindness of always thinking of the child when it has traveled far.
> The ninth is the kindness of deep care and devotion.
> The tenth is the kindness of ultimate pity and sympathy.
> (cited in Nicholson, n.d.)

Diana Paul critiques the feminine image in Mahayana Buddhism, arguing that "motherhood represents suffering, pain, bondage and dependency" (1985: 61). For Paul, within Mahayana Buddhism, "Motherhood falls into the realm of secular, not sacred" and the goal is to be liberated from the suffering and other fetters of motherhood (61). Accordingly, Paul insists, "The mother cannot be free from suffering or from the attachments to existence because of her attachment to her children" (66). Moreover, as further exemplified in the *Sutra of the Child and His Five Mothers*, a woman may be bound and severely limited by the role of mother and her relationship to her child (cited in Paul, 1985: 65).

Motherhood in traditional Chinese Buddhism

As Buddhism spread and flourished in other countries, it was coloured by the differing cultural contexts in which it found itself. China serves as a perfect example because of its pre-existing philosophy of Confucianism and the emphasis it places on honouring parents. Author and historian of Asian religions, Alan Cole (1998) notes that in traditional China, filial piety was demonstrated through the relationship of father and son (2). Buddhism in China also recognizes the special emphasis on the relationship between mother and son but the kindnesses of a mother to her child are a debt to be repaid. This "Repaying the Kindness," *bao en*, involves making donations to the local Buddhist monastery for frequent services and recitations of the Buddhist texts, a practice, which produces merit while it counteracts sin (Cole, 1998: 3). The cycle of debt and repayment is conceived as: "(1) the son's sense of indebtedness to the mother, which needs to be repaid by (2) the son patronizing a Buddhist establishment, which claims to have (3) the means to save mothers from and resolve the 'debt-crisis' in the family" (Cole, 1998: 2). The underlying threat is

the ill fate of sons and daughters who fail their mothers (Cole, 1998: 207).

Central to the practice of traditional Chinese Buddhism is the belief that woman is intrinsically tainted while man is less tainted. Any goodness garnered by a woman comes through mothering a son (Cole, 1998: 10). Consequently, a son's wife is viewed as a threat to the filial piety of the son as she may derail him from his duty and seek his love as her own (Cole, 1998: 76). In the *Sutra on the Filial Son*, "mother love" is sanctioned as safe and family-promoting while the love of the "other woman," including a wife, is seen as dangerously against the family and society (Cole, 1998: 132).

Purity and taint are also played out in the mother's anatomy. The upper half of the mother, which includes face and breasts, is considered good, as they are sources of nourishment. The lower half of the mother is reviled for its reproductive power and uterine blood, considered the vilest substance in the cosmos (Cole, 1998: 230). Cole points out that the mother "has made a double blood sacrifice": milk was a sacrifice of "white blood," a kindness given by the mother compounding the debts to be repaid, just as the blood from the mother's vagina is the sin that must be counteracted (Cole, 1998: 231).

Yet, the mother is known as "the loving parent" (Cole, 1998: 29) and, accordingly, there is no stronger love than a mother for her son (Cole, 1998: 139). In the *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents*, the son is thus encouraged to return this love and fall in love with his mother not as she is, but with a younger, idealized version of her (Cole, 1998: 149).

Whereas in other Buddhist traditions a mother is exemplified for traits such as her wisdom, compassion, and clear-sightedness, in China, with the exceptionof Kwan-Yin, she has no elevated cosmic stature (Cole, 1998: 227). Nevertheless, a child is encouraged to follow a mother's instructions to gain the protection of the gods and win good fortune (Cole, 1998: 269, n. 37). As exemplified in the *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Kwan-Yin*, the conditions to be born in Pure Land are explained as being like a mother on her deathbed who instructs her sons to awaken to the thought of enlightenment and repay the kindness of parents by embarking on a career as a *bodhisattva* (Paul, 1985: 265).

The Bodhisattva path

A *bodhisattva* desires the welfare and happiness of the world. In the same way that a mother loves her only child, a *bodhisattva* loves all beings. A *bodhisattva* so loves the world that she is willing to give her life again and again for the benefit of others. She knows the suffering that life promises, the pain and sorrow at the loss of loved ones, the ravages of old age, disease and death. Whether male or female, a *bodhisattva* returns to reach down from his/her rung on the ladder of life and pull up those he/she is able to help. It takes tremendous courage to pledge the vow of the *bodhisattva*:

> May I attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and may I not enter final nirvana until I have helped the last blade of grass to attain

nirvana. (Dharmasiri, n.d.: 92)

In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha exhorts that no one should follow him at his word but should make every effort to attain his/her own perfection. This is the guiding principle of the *bodhisattva*. Before the Buddha attained enlightenment, he perfected himself through many lifetimes as a *bodhisattva*. Perfecting himself is to say that the Buddha recalled our interrelatedness and interconnection with all life. This path consists of three main stages: preliminary devotional practices; generation of the thought of enlightenment; and practice of moral perfections, paramitas (Dharmasiri, n.d.: 89). The greatest of these perfections is the *Prajnaparamita, the Perfection of Wisdom*, and "Mother of All the Buddhas." The supreme excellences, or paramitas, are the energy of Mother *Prajnaparamit*a manifesting spontaneously through the sincere practitioner (Boucher, 1997: 61).

The Great 25,000 Verse Prajnaparamita Sutra is considered the founding text of the Mahayana school of Buddhism and the second turning of the wheel of the *dharma*. The text celebrates the matrix of existence and perfection of wisdom, *Prajnaparamita* (Boucher, 1997: 64). The "Mother of All the Buddhas" gives birth through her wisdom to the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. Buddhist scholar, Joanna Macy (1991), calls her: "Mother of the *Tathagatas*," "Mother of the *Sugatas*," "Mother of the *Bodhisattvas*," "instructress of the *Tathagata*s in this world," and "genetrix and nurse of the six perfections" (109). Thus, wisdom is honored as the image of the mother. The Buddha's disciple, Shariputra, sings beautifully about her in the *Mystic Hymn to the Wisdom Mother*:

> She is worthy of infinite praise. She is utterly unstained, because nothing in this insubstantial world can possibly stain her. She is an ever-flowing fountain of incomparable light, and from every conscious being on every plane of being, she removes the faintest trace of illusory darkness (cited Hixon, 1993: 17).

Prajnaparamita, Mother of the Buddhas, is wisdom teacher. The feminine character of this wisdom has been conveyed in the vivid imagery of the eager *bodhisattva* being called "a pregnant woman on the verge of birth," "a mother ministering to her only child," and "a man who has a date with a good-looking woman" (Macy, 1991: 109). Lex Hixon, in *Mother of the Buddhas: Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra* writes that to the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, *Prajnaparamita* "is their true nature, matrix, guide, power and bliss" (1993:116)

Prajnaparamita compassionately reveals the world to us, as it truly is, *yathabutham*, not by cradling, cuddling or clasping us to her bosom but through her wisdom and clear-eyed vision (Macy, 1991: 111). The Buddha teaches that all beings suffer and therefore inspire in us and need our compassion. *Bodhisattvas* spring forth from this terrible dream of suffering to liberate us as mothers. Like

mothers, they love us as their children, especially a newborn baby. With natural love and compassion, asking nothing in return, *Bodhisattvas* sacrifice their lives to end human suffering. This love is the heart of compassion. Hixon claims, "*Bodhisattvas* ... become [the] Goddess *Prajnaparamita's* fully conscious expression" (1993: 40).

Mother *Prajnaparamita* gives "birthless birth" to awakened enlightenment and *bodhisattvas*, their spiritual daughters and sons, through the "radiant blackness of her womb" (Hixon, 1993: 96). They drink of her "mother's milk" to sustain their "courage and compassion" (Hixon, 1993: 4). She is endless, *ananta*, like space (Macy, 1991: 110). She is the circle with no beginning and no end. She calls us to be born from her womb as *bodhisattvas*, ready to reach out and improvise through her wisdom, the *upaya*, skillful means (Macy, 1991: 113). Faith in her means letting go of all illusions, accepting the void, and freeing yourself from fear. Her mantra contains the entirety of Perfect Wisdom: *Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi, Svaha!* (Gone, gone, everyone gone, gone to the other shore, to enlightenment, Rejoice!)

The *bodhisattva* ideal is expressed through the examples of compassion of Kwan-Yin, Amitabha and Tara. Kwan-Yin is known as a mother figure for those who have need of a mother and is the "maternal aspect of the Mahayana Buddhist ideal" to some (Paul, 1985: 266). Amitaba, Buddha of the Pure Land, in this instance depicted as a woman, was her compassionate, dying mother who advised and inspired her daughter, Kwan-Yin, to pursue the *bodhisattva* path (Paul, 1985: 266). Tara's name means "One Who Saves." So great is her compassion for all living beings and desire to prevent their suffering, that Tara's love is said to be stronger than a mother's for her children. In the *Tara Tantra*, she is known as the "Mother of the Buddha of All Three Times" and the compassionate savior of all beings.

Conclusion

As the Theravadin Buddhist monk and historian, Walpola Rahula observes, "The love of a mother for her child is neither Buddhist nor Christian: it is mother love" (1978: 6). Mother love is not unique to Buddhism. The image of a mother breastfeeding her baby is one of the most potent images of human love (Davidson and Harrington, 2002: 71). True peace lies within each of us, whether Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Jew, or any of the other numerous spiritual practices and religions of the world, and it can be found by reconnecting with the power of our mother's love, not the martyred motherhood of patriarchy but the guilt-free affection that nurtured us when we were children. Sharing this love with the world as a mother shares her love with her children is one avenue toward peace and may be our greatest gift to another.

References

Bodhi, Bhikku. (Trans). 1995. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A*

New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya. Orig. trans. Bhikku Nanamoli. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Boucher, Sandy. 1997. *Opening the Lotus: A Woman's Guide to Buddhism*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Cole, Alan. 1998. *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Davidson, Richard J. and Anne Harrington. 2002. *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dharmasiri, Gunapala. n.d. *Fundamentals of Buddhist Ethics*. USA: Golden Leaves.

Harderwijk, Rudy. "The Four Immeasurables." Online: www.vajaguru.com/fourimmeasurables.htm.

Hixon, Lex. 1993. *Mother of the Buddhas: Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Wheaton: Quest Books.

Macy, Joanna. 1991. *World as Lover, World as Self*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Mandell, J. 1995. "Buddhism and Mothering." in K. L. Tsomo, ed. *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

Murcott, Susan. 1991. *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentaries on the Therigatha*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Nagarjuna. n.d. "A Mother's Love." Quotation on Internet Address: pub88.ezboard.com/fjediacademyfrm34.showMessage?topicID=31.topic.

Narada. 1988. *The Buddha and His Teachings*. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.

Nhat Hahn, Thich. 1991. *Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Old Path, White Clouds*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Nicholson, Upasika Terri (Trans.). n.d. "The Buddha Speaks the Sutra about the Deep Kindness of Parents and the Difficulty in Repaying It." Chinese Trans. Master Kumarajiva. Internet Address: web.singnet.com.sg/~alankhoo/Parents.htm.

Paul, Diana Y. 1985. *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition*. London: University of California Press.

Rahula, Walpola. 1978. *What the Buddha Taught*. Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.

Salzberg, Sharon. 1997. *A Heart as Wide as the World: Living with Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Compassion*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Salzberg, Sharon. 1995. *Loving-kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Ruby K. Newman

The Book of Ruth and the "Grandmother Hypothesis"

The biblical Book of Ruth contains a birth narrative and a template for a mother and daughter-in-law relationship. It also provides a fascinating example of surrogacy, grandmothering and/or othermothering. Naomi, the mother-in-law and grandmother in the book, is the agent effecting the birth of Ruth's child, a child who will become an ancestor of King David out of whose lineage the messiah is said to come. "The grandmother hypothesis" described in the scientific journal Nature *(March 11, 2004), which suggests that grandmothers have wielded enormous power over human evolution, is exemplified in this biblical text. The "grandmother hypothesis" shows that older women traditionally remained an important, indirect reproductive force long after they stopped having children of their own. Older women enabled their own children to breed earlier, more successfully and more frequently. The longer older women lived, the more grandchildren were born. The family assistance provided by grandmothers is a central determinant of our longevity. Naomi is beyond her own childbearing years and her two sons have died so she directs Ruth to build a relationship with Boaz in order to produce progeny. Ruth follows her mother-in-law's instructions, marries Boaz and delivers a child, Obed, who is named by a community of women. The birth narrative in the Book of Ruth offers a window into the biblical experience of mothering and of the "grandmother hypothesis."*

There are many birth narratives in the Hebrew Bible, the most familiar of which are connected with the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Leah. There are also narratives in the *Tanakh* that deal with the births of "special children" who are then dedicated to the service of God, including, in a broad sense, Moses (Exodus 1:8-2:10), Samuel (I Samuel 1:11-2:11), and Samson (Judges 13:1-25). The narratives of these "special children" and the son born to Tamar after her liaison with her father-in-law Judah describe the often

dramatic events leading to the birth of some prominent figures in the Torah, Prophets and Writings. Mothering in the Hebrew Bible is not limited, however, to giving birth in the literal sense of the words. In the Book of Judges Deborah, a prophet, judge and military leader, is called a "mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7) although there is no biblical record of her giving birth to children.

The Book of Ruth provides us with an extraordinary birth narrative and template for a mother and daughter-in-law relationship. It also offers a fascinating example of surrogacy, grandmothering and/or "othermothering." To borrow a concept from the African experience,

> within African communities, mothering is not necessarily based on biological ties. Established African philosophy suggests that children do not solely belong to their biological parents, but to the community at large. This philosophy and tradition inform what we refer to as "other-mothering" and "community mothering." (Wane, 2000: 112).

Ethiopian Jews, the *Beta Israel* as they called themselves, followed biblical laws strictly, and because they were isolated from other Jewish communities since the eighth century B.C.E. their form of religious practice might offer insight into the experience of much earlier times. Ethiopian-Israeli women practised othermothering in Africa and perhaps reflect a form of biblical mothering embedded in the birth narrative recounted in the Book of Ruth. In the Book of Ruth we see a community of women coming together to celebrate the birth of a baby; this baby is an ancestor of King David out of whose lineage will come the Messiah. It is the loving relationship between the mother-in-law Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth as well as the devotion of the community of women in caring for the child, Obed, that makes redemption a possibility.

In the biblical text Naomi and her husband Elimelech and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion leave Bethlehem for Moab because of a devastating famine. During their ten-year sojourn in Moab Elimelech dies, Mahlon and Chilion marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, and then both sons die. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem and tells her two daughters-in-law to return to their mothers' households and get on with their lives. Tikva Frymer-Kensky notes that Naomi is speaking as the head of their household by releasing them from their obligations to her,

> and as a mother in setting them on this path to new marriage, and her repetition of the phrase "my daughters" [*benotay*, rather than "daughters-in-law," *kalotay*] emphasizes the spirit in which she sends them off. Naomi is bitter that she will have to lose them too, but they can have lives to lead. (2002: 240).

Orpah tearfully heeds Naomi's advice and returns to her home. Ruth, however, clings to her mother-in-law, *"veRut davka bah"* (Ruth 1:14),[1] reciting

lines that are among the most eloquent and moving in the Bible, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you" (Ruth 1:16-17). Ruth's clinging to her mother-in-law depicts female bonding within a text where "clinging between women determines the movement of the plot" (Pardes, 1992: 102).

Ruth returns with Naomi to Bethlehem and they arrive in time for the barley harvest. The crops have flourished, especially in the fields of Boaz, a kinsman of Elimelech, where Ruth gleans in order to bring food home to her mother-in-law. Boaz notices her and tells his men to treat her kindly and not to molest her. The fact that he needs to caution his men to treat Ruth with respect offers insight into the social conditions of young women gleaning in the fields and the dangers that they encountered because of their gender and position. Boaz makes it clear that because of Ruth's relationship with her mother-in-law she will be protected from harm. At the end of the season, Naomi tells Ruth to go to the threshing floor, where Boaz and his men are spending the night. Frymer-Kensky notes that

> Naomi is sending Ruth to do something which is totally inappropriate behavior for a woman, and which can lead to scandal and even abuse. Prostitutes might come to the threshing floor in the middle of the night, but not proper women, and if Ruth were to be seen, the gossips would be busy. Moreover, if Boaz took advantage of her, what recourse would she have? Who would believe that a woman who came to the threshing floor was raped? Naomi's plan presumes that Boaz will prove trustworthy and will continue to act in the spirit of benevolent *hesed* that he has shown so far. And her plan demands enormous trust from Ruth, who must truly believe that Naomi wants only good for her, and is not using her for prostitution; and she must also share Naomi's faith in Boaz. But Ruth agrees to do whatever Naomi suggests. (2002: 251)

Ruth finds Boaz sleeping and lies down beside him. When Boaz awakes she informs him that he is her next of kin, referring to the law of levirate marriage between a widow whose husband died without offspring and the brother of the deceased.[2] He replies that there is actually a closer kinsman and promises to discuss the matter with him in the morning. If the other man is prepared to redeem Ruth and the land his claim takes precedence but if not Boaz will do so. In the meantime he suggests that Ruth spend the night with him, leaving before dawn, presumably to preserve her reputation. Before she leaves he gives her extra grain to take to Naomi. Ruth returns home and the women wait to see how the situation will resolve itself. The close relative, who

remains unnamed, declines to redeem Ruth, conceding his right to Boaz. Amid praise and rejoicing, Boaz marries Ruth. A child is born to them, although the child is said to be born to Naomi, rather than to Boaz or Elimelech. The women name him Obed and Naomi nurses him. The book ends with a geneaology growing out of this union, concluding with the birth of King David.

The Book of Ruth is a woman-centred text. Naomi is a wise elder, and she guides Ruth whose youth makes it possible for her to renew her life through a relationship both with Naomi and with Boaz, the *go'el* or redeemer. There is a great deal of dialogue in the Book of Ruth: 55 out of 85 verses. This is the highest ratio of dialogue to narrative in any biblical book (Sasson, 1987: 320) and the voices heard are primarily women's voices in conversation with one another. Both of the major protagonists in the text are women and their speech reflects the experiences of their journey and return to Judah and their integration into the community of Bethlehem. The book was included in the Hebrew Bible because of the geneaology leading to the birth of King David, out of whose house would come the Messiah.

It is a text that is concerned with redemption and in this beautiful story the relationship between two women, a mother and daughter-in-law, effects redemption. The story of Ruth opens on the road; the women are situated in liminal space where they are temporarily beyond the reach of patriarchy. There they cement their friendship and commitment or love for one another. Once they return to Bethlehem, however, they will have to search for a male "redeemer." Ruth and Naomi live in a patriarchal society and require a son to carry on their husbands' names. Within these parameters they demonstrate considerable agency. Naomi and Ruth's mutual motherhood is a model for the kind of behaviour that will lead to a world embodying the values of a messianic age: love, generosity, loyalty and courage. The love of God in this text is manifested as a love between two women of different countries of origin, different backgrounds and different ages. Their journey is a quest for redemption through the birth of a child to both of them as well as to the community at large as reflected in the naming of the baby by the community of women.

Naomi and Ruth are among the most marginalized members of society—women, widows, childless, and in the case of Ruth, a stranger and convert to Judaism. But they take the destiny of the Jewish people into their hands and succeed in effecting redemption on a personal level, on a national level, as the ancestors of King David, and on the religious level, as purveyors of *hesed*—benevolence, loyalty, fidelity or trustworthiness. The drama in this text is a profoundly religious one. The choice made by Ruth to cast her lot with her mother-in-law Naomi, is a supreme act of *hesed,* a term often used to describe the intimate relationship between God and the children of Israel. The *hesed* shown by the youthful Ruth in her relationship with her mother-in-law is then matched by the behavior of Naomi and Boaz. Naomi is beyond childbearing age, as she tells Ruth and Orpah when she encourages them to return to their mothers' houses: "Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have

I any more sons in my body, who might be husbands for you? Turn back, my daughters for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage (Ruth 1:11-13)? Ruth becomes her surrogate in order to ensure the continuity of Naomi's family, the line that has been severed by the deaths of Naomi's sons, one of whom was Ruth's husband. Ruth takes Naomi's place in a relationship with Boaz in order to provide the progeny that will rescue the two women from poverty, restore Naomi to her former position in the community and help Ruth, a convert, be accepted as a member of the Jewish people.

These women are articulate and active. They transform our vision of what is possible and offer new paradigms regarding relationships between in-laws, especially the most demonized dyad of all, the mother and daughter-in law. As Marianne Hirsch writes: "Nowadays, mothers-in-law bear the brunt of the pervasive fear of and contempt for mothers—and therefore of women—that define our culture. The mother-in-law is the adult version of the evil step-mother in the fairy tales of our childhoods. Our culture projects onto her all its discomfort with maternal power and powerlessness. She is a comic figure, the subject of sitcom humor" (Hirsch, 1994: 309). In traditional societies mothers-in-law are often resented by their daughters-in-law because they socialize the younger women to be docile, passive and silent. The mothers are only doing what they believe will ensure the respect of their family as they wield some power within the domestic sphere yet they are ultimately powerless to effect change. In the Book of Ruth, however, Naomi counsels her daughter-in-law to go out into the fields at night to Boaz's bed, to take chances, and Ruth follows her directions and takes them a step further by suggesting to Boaz that he is a redeeming kinsman (Ruth 3:9). Ruth is an assertive woman who has learned well from her mother-in-law. The Book of Ruth permits us to view the mother and daughter-in-law relationship with new eyes and also reconsiders the status of the surrogate mother in the Hebrew Bible.

The stories of Sarah and Hagar and of Rachel and Leah and their handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah are earlier instances of surrogate motherhood. But there is an innovation in the case of Ruth and Naomi because there is a difference between these instances of surrogacy where a woman gives her handmaid to her husband in order to produce a child, in her name, and the model of Ruth who provides a grandchild for her mother-in-law. In the former cases, especially in the Sarah-Hagar story, there was resentment and competition between the women and struggles around ownership and legitimacy of the child to inherit his father's legacy. This time, however, the experience is a cooperative venture. "Naomi took the child and held him to her bosom and she became his nurse. The women neighbors give him a name, saying, 'A son is born to Naomi'" (Ruth 4:16-17). Ruth may not be the first surrogate mother, literally, but she provides us with a new vision of what surrogacy might evoke and describes a loving mother and daughter-in-law bond. The relationship

between the two women makes a transformative fertility possible. Naomi is determined to become a grandmother by helping Ruth find a mate so that she can give birth to a child. Her behaviour in this regard is presented as an act of supreme *hesed.*

Unlike the troubled relationship between Sarah and Hagar, friendship between women is the key to the *hesed* at the core of the Book of Ruth. By accepting Naomi's God, Ruth is also affirming the importance of the very legacy over which Sarah fought Hagar. The Book of Ruth revises the Hagar story and reconsiders the issue of old age. Not only is Naomi fulfilled once more, but she becomes the baby's nurse. There is a precedent for an old woman nursing a baby in the birth narrative of Isaac. The biblical text makes note of Isaac's weaning party when Sarah stopped nursing him (Genesis 21:8) although we know that Sarah was over 90 when he was born. In the Book of Ruth we see Naomi, too, as a nurse, *omenet,* as well as a mother-in-law, grandmother, mentor and friend. Old age is presented as a time of fullness and plenty if there are children. Abraham, for example, enjoyed good, old age, *seva tovah* (Genesis 25:8), and Naomi, too, is now more whole thanks to her role as grandmother to Obed.

The importance of the grandmother in this text may indeed reflect the importance of this role in ancient Israel. Evidence for the central role of grandmothers in traditional societies has been corroborated in the scientific journal *Nature.* A recent study (March 11, 2004) suggests that grandmothers have wielded enormous power over human evolution. The study shows that older women traditionally remained an important, indirect reproductive force long after they stopped having children of their own. Quebec and Finnish grandmothers were studied and the results revealed that the women were such crucial contributors to the family unit that the longer they lived, the more grandchildren were born. The discovery indicates that grandmothers were key drivers of the evolutionary process that led to humans' long life spans.

Most animals reproduce until they die, but human females typically live for decades after they stop having children. The new findings, researchers say, provide the strongest support yet for the "grandmother hypothesis"; that older women enabled their own children to breed earlier, more successfully and more frequently. This, in turn, favored the evolution of women who lived long, productive lives after menopause. The family assistance provided by grandmothers is a central determinant of our longevity. We see a clear and forceful example of the "grandmother hypothesis" in the Book of Ruth where Naomi's machinations—in tandem with her daughter-in-law, Ruth—make possible the Davidic line that will lead to redemption.

We have moved a great distance from the earliest surrogate motherhood recorded in Genesis, that of Hagar and Sarah, where jealousy prevailed and where in order to fulfill God's prophecy that Isaac would inherit Abraham's religious legacy, Hagar and her son were cast out into the desert. From there the text takes us to the next dyad, Rachel and Leah, not enemies but sisters,

whose rivalry over their shared husband and children or lack thereof gave way to cooperation and fertility for both, individually and with the participation of their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah. Finally, however, The Book of Ruth reimagines for us the paradigm of surrogate motherhood and grandmothering by the inclusion of the *hesed* effected by Ruth, Naomi and Boaz which extends to the entire community who share the pleasure, the celebration, and the naming of the baby conceived by Ruth, and nursed or cared for, by Naomi. The word *omenet*, can be translated as nursemaid, governess or caregiver. One becomes a mother not only through biology but by behavior. Caring for a child whether it is adopted, biological, or a grandchild, makes one a mother. The birth is one component, but the caregiving is here recognized as equally relevant and the concept of othermothering is evident in this scene.

There is a midrash on Ruth 4:16-17: "Naomi took the child and held him to her bosom and became his nurse. The women neighbors named him, saying, 'A son is born to Naomi'" suggesting that one might rewrite the conclusion of the verse to read "and a grandson is born to Naomi" (Sohn, 1994: 27).[3] There is also a midrash that addresses the issue of what constitutes motherhood and mothering. It says that Ruth did not die until she sat by the side of her great grandson, King Solomon, during the judgment of the two women who were claiming the same child. Ruth taught her great grandson how to distinguish a real mother: the real mother is one who loves the child and wants what is best for it. In the famous judgment rendered by King Solomon of the two women each of whom claimed to be the real mother where he suggested cutting the baby in two, evoking the real mother's plea not to harm her child, he showed his wisdom in determining maternity (*Ruth Rabba, bet, bet*). He had a good model in his great grandmother Ruth, who shared her baby with Naomi. The birth narrative of Obed offers a window into the biblical experience of mothering and expands the term "mother in Israel" to include mothers-in-law, grandmothers and othermothers within a community of women celebrating the birth of a child together.

A version of this paper was published as "Mothering in the Book of Ruth" in Centre for Jewish Studies Annual *"Biblical Studies in the Twenty-First Century," 5 (2003): 3-12 (Centre for Jewish Studies, York University).*

[1]The Hebrew text is in the past: "Ruth clung to her." The translation and translations from the Book of Ruth that follow are taken from *The Five Megilloth and Jonah.*

[2]The law of levirate marriage is found in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 (cf. *Encyclopedia Judaica* 11: 122-131). Ruth also alludes to some land belonging to the family which would also be redeemed through their marriage. For a discussion of this see Frymer-Kensky (2002: 250-252).

[3]Sohn quotes the Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 620b: 27.

References

Ginsberg, H. L. Ed. 1969. *The Five Megilloth and Jonah.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. 2002. *Reading the Women of the Bible.* New York: Schocken Books.

Hirsch, Marianne. 1994. "Reading Ruth With Naomi." in Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer, eds. *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story.* New York: Ballantine Books. 309-316.

Pardes, Ilana. 1992. *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Sasson, Jack M. 1987. "Ruth." in Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds. *The Literary Guide to the Bible.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 320.

Sohn, Ruth. 1994. "Verse By Verse: A Modern Commentary." in Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer, eds. *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story.* New York: Ballantine Books. 14-27.

Wane, Njoki Nathani. 2000. "Reflections on the Mutuality of Mothering: Women, Children and Othermothering." *Journal for the Association for Research on Mothering: Mothering in the African Diaspora* 2 (2) (Fall/Winter 2000): 105-116.

Hinna Mirza Upal

A Celebration of Mothering in the Qur'an

In this article I focus on the rights, responsibilities and the complexity behind the mother in the Qur'an. I show that the Qur'anic mother is not limited to biological function; but, includes the quality of leading humankind, showing exemplary dedication and compassion, and caring for the overall well-being of others. By analyzing the role of the Muslim mother through the text of the Qur'an and by celebrating the key maternal figures within the text, I show the Qur'an as a source of empowerment and strength for Muslim mothers. I hope to contribute to a wider understanding of being a mother and motherhood in Islam, bringing this celebration of mothers full circle, to an appreciation of the dedication, passion and resistance of Muslim mothers in the New World.

The historical male monopoly over religious meaning in the Qur'an, its interpretation, and in later years its translation has been used to maintain control and concentrate power in Muslim communities. A growing number of women are engaging in a debate of whether the true nature of Islam is fundamentally patriarchal. These women are engaged in a struggle to reclaim the Qur'an as a living and vibrant text. Asma Barlas (2002) argues:

> Islam does not sanction a clergy, or invest anyone with the right to monopolize religious meaning. To accept the authority of any group and then to resign oneself to its misreadings of Islam not only makes one complicit in the continued abuse of Islam and the abuse of women in the name of Islam, but it also means losing the battle over meaning without even fighting it. (xi)

In this article I begin by discussing diversity among Muslims and the

Qur'an as the necessary starting point of reference. I then analyze the Qur'anic mother by uncovering her attributes from within the Qur'an and in the context of her family and her community. I will then look at some famous examples of mothers from the Qur'an who received direct revelation, including the mother of Mary, Mary herself, Hagar, and the mother of Moses. I will further illustrate the ideal Qur'anic mother, and particularly her complexity, by drawing upon historical examples of Muslim women. By focusing on her rights, responsibilities and the complexity of her character, I will show that the Qur'anic mother cannot be limited to biological function; but, includes the quality of leading humankind, showing exemplary dedication and compassion, and caring for the overall well-being of others. It is my goal that by focusing on the key maternal figures in the Qur'an I will contribute to a wider understanding of being a mother and motherhood in Islam. By tracing these steps, I hope to bring this celebration of mothers full circle, to an appreciation of the dedication, passion and resistance of mothers in the New World.

Qur'anic exegesis and the Muslim woman

In order "to complicate the term Muslim" (Khan, 2000) beyond the misrepresentations and stereotypical images found in the media and popular culture, Muslims need to be understood at a global level. As the worldwide population of Muslims stretches above one billion, it becomes more obvious that Muslims have a vast array of ethnic backgrounds, skin tones, languages, social classes, education levels, and sects. As these factors vary so do their fundamental conceptions of what it means to be Muslim. Leila Ahmed argues this is because "Qur'anic precepts consist mainly of broad, general prepositions chiefly of an ethical nature ... [making] the specific content of the laws derivable from the Qur'an depend[ant] on the interpretation that legists chose to bring to it" (1992: 88). This allows for the diversity among Muslims to be matched by a diversity of conceptions about the Qur'an.

However, the purpose of this article is not to provide general information *about* women in Islam that is limited to particular case studies, or a report that is looking for a trend in the Muslim world. (Wadud, 1999). Instead, like Amina Wadud in *Qur'an and Woman* I am seeking to expand an intellectual legacy by analyzing the role of the Muslim mother through the text of the Qur'an and by celebrating the mother within the text, to show the Qur'an as a source of empowerment and strength for Muslim mothers. Where I do refer to the *sunnah* (the oral traditions of Muhammad) it is to further illustrate ideas that are already established in the Qur'an.

The *rahm* and *Ar-Rahmaan*: Attributes of the Creator and the mother

In the Qur'an the mother has a strong presence, which is linked to her relationship with God. In the Qur'an, God is defined by different gender neutral "names" or attributes that branch from four principle attributes: Lord

of all the Worlds (*Rabbul-'Aalameen*), the Gracious (*Ar-Rahmaan*), the Merciful (*Ar-Raheem*) and Master of the Day of Judgement (*Maaliki-yaumiddeen*). Asma Barlas (2002, quoting Yusuf Abdullah Ali) translates Chapter 4, Verse 1 in the Qur'an:

> O humankind! Your [God] who created you from a single person, created of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women: – [show awe for] God, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and [show awe for] the wombs (that bore you): for God ever watches over you. (177-178)

The theme of creation connects God's attribute as the Creator of humankind with the wombs that are the site for the creation of human life. The direct order to be in awe of the "wombs that bore you" becomes second to the awe we are required to feel toward God.

The word for "womb" in Arabic is *rahm*, which can be derived from *Ar-Rahmaan*, one of the four principle attributes of God. *Ar-Rahmaan* is translated as the Gracious and describes God as the One who gives without being asked. Muslims believe humans can understand and conceptualize God through the different attributes. Here, the divine attribute of Grace is embodied in the wombs of our mothers, who possess some of, albeit a tiny fragment, of God's creative energy. The significance of the womb is that as the site for creation it is where Muslims believe souls are developed, characters fashioned, and life is decreed.

In the *sunnah* any woman that is not the biological mother and who nurses another's child is considered their foster mother. The relationship of the foster mother is such that no two children nursed by the same woman are allowed to wed. On whether it is required for the mother to nurse her child the Qur'an states,

> If they both (mother and father) decide upon weaning the child by mutual consent and consultation, there shall be no blame on them. And if you desire to engage a wet nurse for your children, there shall be no blame on you, provided you pay what you have agreed to pay in a fair manner. (2:234)

The Qur'an also specifically identifies mothers as those who gave us birth (58:3), protecting the specificity of motherhood by forbidding an Arabic custom of divorce where men would symbolically collapse their wives with their mothers. (Barlas, 2002)

Equalizing biology: Interdependency and societal obligation

The mother in the Qur'an cannot be understood in isolation, she is part of a web of interdependent relationships that need to be understood as well. It

seems an obvious biological fact that women carry more of the reproductive responsibilities than men. The Qur'an acknowledges these extra responsibilities in two ways. Firstly by demanding a high degree of respect for parents, a debt that children owe to those who cared for them. Secondly, the structure of the Qur'anic social system is developed in such a way to ensure that no mother suffers on account of having children.

In the first case, behind the debt one owes their parents, are the physical hardships of child carrying, bearing and nursing. The Qur'an states:

> And we have enjoined upon humans concerning their parents- your mother bears you in strain upon strain and your weaning takes two years. Give thanks to me and thy parents. Unto me is the final return. (31:15)

And also,

> We have enjoined on humans to be good to their parents. Your mother bears you with pain and brings you forth with pain. And the bearing of him and his weaning takes thirty months. (46:16)

This verse continues to demand thanks to both parents and to God, an injunction that is repeated on eight different occasions in the Qur'an (2:84, 2:216, 4:37, 6:152, 17:24, 29:9, 31:15, 46:16). The focus on the mother's physical reality is a significant recognition of her reproductive work. It renders her work visible and emphasizes its necessity and importance. The responsibility of motherhood as work, involving physical, emotional and mental strain is described as a benefit to the whole of society (as well as the individual child).

The acknowledgement of the mothers extra responsibilities provide the reasoning for the organization of the Qur'anic social system. It is a system that addresses the issue of equalizing biological responsibilities, enabling women to be full members of society. In order to achieve a balance in the responsibilities between men and women, it is enjoined on the father to provide for the mother and child.

> And the man to whom the child belongs shall be responsible for their (the mothers' and child's) food and clothing. According to usage. No soul is burdened beyond its capacity. The mother shall not make the father suffer on account of her child, nor shall he to whom the child belongs make the mother suffer on account of his child.... (2:234)

Chapter 4 verse 35 generalizes this financial responsibility onto all men for all women. The following translation is by Maysam al-Faruqi (2000), whose focus on the syntax and the Arabic word *bima* is the key to understanding the passage. This verse is considered controversial because male exegesis tends to

credit some form of favoritism, to explain why men are required to provide for women. The traditional inferences being that men have been provided with more intelligence or piety than women and therefore, men are superior to women. Despite the fact this has no basis within the Qur'an and it directly clashes with the Qur'anic principles of equality before God, it continues to prevail in the traditional interpretations of the Qur'an.

> Men are responsible for women using that which [literally the word *bima* here means with what] God has provided some [men] over [what he has provided] others [women] and that which [with what] they spend from their own means. (al-Faruqi, 2000: 86)

Traditional exegisis often relies on this passage to explain the unequal power structure between men and women. However, al-Faruqi (2000) focuses on the Arabic word *bima* to illustrate how it is not a "natural excellence" that man has been provided, but something else in the material sense. She analyzes the word *bima* as it has been used within the Qur'anic text, using the definition from within its own usage. Interestingly, it is only in this verse that the inference of being provided with something more from God is assumed to be a "natural excellence." When *bima* is used to describe the people of Israel, it refers to the original covenant and religion they had been provided with. It refers to something God had given in a material sense. The Israelites were not morally superior to other tribes and peoples, but they had received guidance from God. Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002) also argue that the language in this verse in no way gives the class of men superiority over women as a class.

Rather, the verse is embedded in the context of inheritance, where sons have twice the inheritance of their sisters. Because the Qur'an does not expect the women to be the breadwinner, the greater share of inheritance is necessarily tied to the rule that men are to be financially responsible for women. This does not mean that women cannot be financially independent, but only that they have a right to access a support system for when a time of need (i.e. pregnancy and childbirth) may arise.

Al-Faruqi (2000) continues to contend that the intention is not to limit what a woman can/should do (although the reality of Muslim women may suggest otherwise), but only to obligate the man to be always financially responsible for his female relatives. And "because such a time for such need cannot be foretold, it becomes a necessary and general law for men to always provide for women whether these are in immediate need or not. For behind every woman is the possibility of a child whose rights are absolute and must be met without question" (80).

If the father is unable to provide for the mother, then the financial responsibility should be on her extended family, and then onto society. One of the most repeated phrases in the Qur'an is "No soul is burdened beyond their capacity" (2:234). Under this banner the rights of the individual are protected

and each individual is given trials that they should be able to overcome, and use to come closer to their Creator. "And know that your possessions and your children are but a trial and it is Allah with whom is a great reward" (8:29). The philosophy being that no woman should be burdened about survival while discharging her duties as a mother.

Mothering as reality in the Qur'an

The Qur'anic Mary

The Qur'an acknowledges the differences between the sexes while reinforcing the fact that women have reached the level of spirituality to receive direct revelation and maintain ongoing dialogues with God, just as Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

> Verily for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves before God and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for all of them has God readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward. (33:36)

This passage identifies equality between the sexes in their ability to reach spiritual heights, and guarantees the same basis for judgment in terms of punishment and reward.

Perhaps the most famous mother in the Qur'an is Maryam or Mary, mother of Jesus. The story of Mary begins in Chapter 3 with her birth. Mary's mother pledges the child in her womb to the service of God. God accepts this gift and when her child is born, the mother proclaims surprise.

> My Lord, I am delivered of a female—and Allah knew best of what she was delivered and the male she desired to have was not like the female she was delivered of—and I have named her Mary and I commit her and her offspring to Thy protection from Satan the rejected. (3:37)

The assumption that only a male could be dedicated to the service of God is consistent with the thinking of her time period, as well as of now. The lesson that "Allah knew best of what she was delivered" shows her desire for a male was erroneous. From the time in her mother's womb, Mary was raised to have an "excellent growth" (3:38). Her connection with God was transparent and she inspired her guardian Zachariah to pray for offspring like her.

The direct and personal way Mary's story is related, where she is the central

character, is comparable to the life-stories of Moses and Abraham. Chapter 19 in the Qur'an is entitled "Maryam" and the focus is Mary's perspective of the events around her. Her revelation begins with a messenger angel who says, "I am only a messenger of thy Lord, that I may give thee glad tidings of a righteous son" (19:20). It is important to note that all prophets in the Qur'an receive guidance from God through angels. Mary is surprised, like her own mother was, and replies, "How can I have a son when no man has touched me, neither have I been unchaste?" (19:21).

In the Qur'an Mary is recognized for her piety first and foremost. The miracle of Jesus' conception is secondary and is likened to other miracles, including the birth of Abraham's son Isaac and Zachariah's son Yahya. Her importance as a human being is in her independent character, her love and faith. The birth of Jesus is a beautiful passage that shows the pains of childbirth from a very personal perspective. As a woman who reached the point of communion with God, we are at once reminded that she is only human.

> And the pains of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of a palm-tree. She said, "O, would that I had died before this and had become a thing quite forgotten!" (19:24)

Mary's birthing experience, "O, would that I had died before this and had become a thing quite forgotten!" emphasizes the burdens of motherhood on an entirely personal level. Her experience is validated, and for mothers reading this passage, the pains of childbirth become a reality that cannot be pushed from center. Her pain is emphasized as part of the creative process of life and she embodies Grace, something that the Qur'an seeks to force men and women alike to appreciate.

> Then the angel called from beneath her saying, "Grieve not. Thy Lord has placed a rivulet below thee: And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm tree: it will drop upon thee fresh ripe dates; So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if thou seest any man, say "I have vowed a fast to the Gracious God: I will therefore not speak this day to any human being" (19:25-27).

Imitating Hagar: Maternal strength in Islam

Another pivotal mother in Islam is Hagar; however, unlike Mary, there is no information directly about Hagar in the Qur'an. Yet she is pivotal because of her importance for the Arabic people, and the first Muslims generally. She is the mother of Ishmael and Abraham's second wife. Muhammad's lineage is traced through Hagar and Ishmael, as is the promise of a covenant given to Ishmael by God. As Abraham's first son, Ishmael was blessed by God to have many descendents and he was given a prophethood (19:55). In the Qur'an Abraham says "I have settled some of my progeny in an uncultivable barren

valley near Thy sacred House" (14:38). This valley is where Mecca now stands. One of the major responsibilities of every able Muslim is to pilgrimage to Mecca, once in their life. One of the major rites of this pilgrimage is the running between two foothills seven times, back and forth. This is called the *Sa'y* or the Running, described as:

> The story of Hagar and this rite express the effort required in a person's search for salvation. The sudden appearance of a well in this desert landscape is the core of a miracle that Muslims believe saved Hagar and saved a branch of Abraham's family in Mecca. Not accidentally, this rite places a mother's story at the heart of the Hajj. (PBS, 2002)

All Muslim pilgrims imitate Hagar's search and struggle to find water for her and her child. The story of Hagar can be found in the sunnah. Hagar agrees to be left in the desert because her faith assures her that her and her son would be looked after. When she is alone and she sees her child dying of thirst she does not give up. She is remembered and admired for her strength and perseverance, as she physically runs in search of water and help, and the angel Gabriel eventually guides her to a spring.

Limiting love: Sacrificing the child

There is a consistent theme in the Qur'an that tests the hearts of parents in regards to their children. The common mythological figure of the sacrificial mother, who does anything for her child, is circumvented. The Qur'an denies the priority of children above all else to ensure the primacy of one's relationship with God over all earthly relations. In the Qur'an children are seen as "trial" for this life and secondary to one's submission to God. The revelation given to the mother of Moses illustrates this point.

> And We directed the mother of Moses by revelation, "Suckle him; and when thou fearest for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve; for We shall restore him to thee, and shall make him one of the Messengers." (28:8) And "When We revealed to thy mother what was an important revelation, to wit: Put him in the ark, and place in into the river, then the river will cast it on to the shore." (20:39-41)

While it is apparent that her maternal instinct told her not to leave him, her motivations to do what God demanded made her bypass these feelings.

> And the heart of the mother of Moses became free from anxiety.... We had strengthened her heart so that she might be of the firm believers. And We had already decreed that he shall refuse the wet-nurse; ...Thus We restored him to his mother that her eye might be

> gladdened and that she might not grieve, and that she might know that the promise of Allah is true. But most of people know not. (28:11, 13-14)

Who is *Ummah*? Beyond biological definitions

The Qur'an states that "The Prophet is nearer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are as mothers to them" (33:7). All of Muhammad's wives are still referred to as the "Mothers of the Faithful" [*Ummah ahtul Mumineen*] although not all of them bore children. Muhammad's youngest wife Aiyshah never bore any children but as a Mother of the Faithful she is remembered as a great teacher, a scholar of religion and law. Men and women from far and wide would come to listen to her speak. She contributed over two thousand of the oral traditions and she led a very active life. She lived for forty years after Muhammad and in this time she spent learning and acquiring knowledge and was actively involved in politics. She was also among the many women who were involved in wartime battles before and after the death of Muhammad and at one point led an army herself.

The qualities of Muhammad's wives are varied. His first wife was a widow named Khadija. As a wealthy independent businesswoman she proposed to Muhammad when she was forty and he twenty-five. When the revelations started to come she would be the first to stand by him. She would spend most of her wealth in order to help him, after which during a period of intense persecution and sanctions she would pass away. It is only through her youngest daughter Fatima that Muhammad's lineage can be traced.

The mothers in the life of Muhammad include a long list of women who raised and affected him throughout his life. He applied *ummah* or mother to a diverse group of women. He himself was raised at the hands of Halimah, a desert woman who raised him until five years, his biological mother Amina, and her servant Barakah. His use of the title of *ummah* was an honor that represented a close relationship. He didn't limit who was a mother by any particular biological function. Rather he honored a variety of women who mentally, emotionally and spiritually cared for others. Above all else, he applied this term to women who (regardless of having borne children or not) were exemplary spiritual leaders in society and set examples for both men and women to follow.

Completing the circle: The significance of reinterpreting the Qur'an

It is important to bring this celebration of mothers' back to the present. I am focusing on the mother whose everyday struggle is within her community and family. In North America the third wave of feminism has been coined the introduction of women of color into the mainstream feminist movement. Creating this assumption that before now, women of color have been silent and politically inactive. Enakshi Dua (1999) discusses the historic struggles of women of color beginning with the First Nations women and including slave

women, women laborers and immigrants in recent times. These women have been involved in challenging racial, gender and class oppression with issues such as negotiating treatises, leading rebellions against colonialism, challenging immigration, settlement and citizenship laws, fighting for universal suffrage, organizing unions and so forth (11-12).

As activists and resisters Muslim women are leading a return to understanding the Qur'an from the perspective of women and from within the context of modernity. Lois al-Faruqi (n.d.) states:

> The history and heritage of Muslim people has been radically different from that of Western Europe and America, [therefore] the feminism which would appeal to Muslim women and the society generally must be correspondingly different ... it must be an indigenous form of feminism ... which does not work chauvinistically for women's interest alone ... [but] in tandem with the wider struggle to benefit all members of society.

The first protest I ever attended was with my mother. We still have the newspaper clipping with a photo of my mother in full *burquaa*. She was wearing a long black baggy coat, a black scarf covering all of her hair and large dark sunglasses. In front of her in a stroller was my brother sleeping with his head to one side. In her hand was a large sign that said "Zia real bad guy." She was protesting against the military coup in Pakistan at the time, a military regime that strongly persecuted our community and was the reason for our own immigration to Canada.

Maysam al-Faruqi (2000) explains that the proclaimed Muslim woman sees her relationship with God as the ultimate point of reference and not an "additional" ideological superstructure. This is in direct contrast to traditional feminist approaches that define women first by their sexual identity. As an individual first, "no race (racism) or nation (nationalism) or gender (feminism) can constitute the starting point of the Muslim's source of identity" (74). It is the system of beliefs that is rationally chosen (i.e. Islam) that comes before any gendered reality.

In traditional schools of theology Mohja Kahf (2000) found that

> women's words are woven into a whole range of... text... [but] instead of [a] multiplicitous presence, we have inherited an erased page of women's discourses in the early Islamic era. (147-148)

Although women were active participators in all aspects of public life, including contributing to the early exegesis of the Qur'an and fighting in battles, their stories were rarely central, and never the point of reference in understanding the Qur'an. This erasure of women's presence has contributed to a false understanding of what the role of women is and can be in Muslim societies. Because

her stories were woven into other (male) discourses, this original marginalization has created a hostile atmosphere where any attempt to reclaim center is seen as subversive and non-Islamic (read westernized).

Conclusion

Although I originally stated that I was not talking *about* women in Islam and my analysis was limited to mothers in the Qur'an, there is a real connection between what is in the Qur'an and the reality facing Muslim mothers. There is a potential for feminine interpretations of the Qur'an to have a significant impact on the lives of women. While I have not attempted to cover the problems facing Muslim mothers in their respective societies, I do believe the solutions may be in resisting male interpretations of the Qur'an and seeking to understand for ourselves, what it is that controls our lives.

In this article I have reread the passages of the Qur'an pertaining to mothers. The mother in the Qur'an is a complex character, she is defined by her relationship with God and is judged not only in respect to the children she has borne but to her whole community. She carries with her divine attributes of Grace and creativity. The mother is a leader and at the same time an interdependent part of her community. Within the family her rights are protected and the extra reproductive responsibilities she has are compensated by a social system that provides for her needs. Through the examples of Mary and the other mothers in the Qur'an we see her as an active and full member of society. Her reproductive work is visible and valuable and she is an example for her entire community. By celebrating mothering in the Qur'an I am taking those erased pages that Muslim women have inherited and filling them. While my interpretation of the mother in the Qur'an may seem a far cry from the reality some Muslim women actually face, this only lends support to the importance of rereading the text from a feminine perspective. Believing mothers, and all Muslim women whose lives are controlled by the Qur'an, have the ability to join in the battle over meaning by breathing new life into the sacred text and inciting positive change.

References

al-Faruqi, Lois. n.d. "Islamic Traditions and the Feminist Movement: Confrontation or Cooperation." Online http://www.crescentlife.com/thisthat/feminist%20muslims/islam_and_feminist_movement.htm. Date accessed: March 17, 2005.

al-Faruqi, Maysam. 2000. "Women's Self-Identity in the Qur'an and Islamic Law." in Gisela Webb, ed. *Windows of Faith.* Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press. 72-101.

Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Barlas, A. 2002. *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Dua, Enakshi. 1999. "Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought: Scratching the Surface of Racism." in Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson, eds. *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought.* Toronto, ON, Women's Press. 7-31.

Kahf, Mohja. 2000. "Braiding the Stories: Women's eloquence in the Early Islamic Era." in Gisela Webb, ed. *Windows of Faith.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. 147-171.

Khan, Shanaz. 2000. *Muslim Women: Crafting a North American Identity.* Gainesville, University of Florida Press.

PBS online. 2002. "Virtual Hajj." Online http://www.pbs.org/muhammad/virtualhajj/shtml

Qur'an. 1969. Arabic Text with English Translation and Short Commentary. Ed. Malik Ghulam Farid. Online http://www.alislam.org/quran/tafseer/ Date accessed: December 01, 2003.

Wadud, Amina. 1999 *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective.* New York, New York, Oxford University Press.

Justyna Sempruch

The Sacred Mothers, the Evil Witches and the Politics of Household in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

Central to this paper is the concept of subversive household as a locus of spirituality and political power of mothering. I explore how this household (home of women drifters and cultural transgressors) counters the traditional exclusion of women from the socio-political structures of power, and reinscribes the phallocentric authority with spiritual values of the maternal. In particular, I address Morrison's figure of Consolata in her spectacular transition from a depressed woman to a healing and spiritual authority in charge of a convent. I posit this transition as a specifically maternal resistance against the oppressive conservative power of the Black community that is set to exterminate Consolata's household. Out of this maternal resistance, the newly established power of the household negotiates between the sacred and the heretic spaces of culture which I discuss in reference to the theories of Julia Kristeva and Catherine Clément. Finally, I address the political effectiveness of Morrison's proposal of the maternal sacredness that succeeds in reinvesting the displaced women with spiritual integrity but in the end has to take refuge in the transcendental.

In her article "Some Call it Fiction: On the Politics of Domesticity," Nancy Armstrong suggests that political power is closely associated with the modern household, rather than with the clinic which Foucault believed provided "the proto-institutional setting" (1997: 918).[1] "Home," overseen by a woman, actually precedes the formation of other social institutions, and as a locus of female authority and creativity it challenges the phallocentric sphere of the public. As Mary Tew Douglas (1969) and Simone de Beauvoir (1993) argued, a housewife is a transformer of natural products into cultural ones. Being responsible for preserving the boundaries between natural and cultural life, she shifts matter out of place into matter in place (Douglas 1969: 40).[2]

> With her fire going, woman becomes sorceress; by a simple movement, as in beating eggs, or through the magic of fire, she effects the transmutation of substances: matter becomes food. There is enchantment in these alchemies, there is poetry in making preserves; the housewife has caught duration in the snare of sugar, she has enclosed life in jars. (de Beauvoir, 1993: 476)

However, when this process is disrupted by some culturally abject or illegal activity such as witchcraft, "the authority and identity of the housewife are put in question; she can no longer predict or control the processes of transformation required" (Purkiss 1996: 97). She becomes a witch, the symbolic anti-housewife figure, responsible for disorder, hysteria and other processes of contamination. Simultaneously, "witchcraft depositions reveal that the boundaries of the home were always being crossed," while "the notion of the house as a closed container" appears "at odds with the identity of the housewife as a member of the community" (Purkiss, 1996: 98). According to Armstrong, once the household "changes into an impenetrable place of magic forces, escaping control of the authorities, every attempt will be made to destroy it" (1997: 918). Similarly, Diane Purkiss writes that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century moralist literature of domestic conduct chains the "virtuous" wife to "house" where she stays and does housework. "The physical boundaries of property" are thus "identified with the social boundaries of propriety. As well as remaining within the boundaries of the household and ordering its contents, woman was represented as guarding its resources from overflowing or escaping into the general economy" (1996: 98). In order to preserve its access and relation to power and knowledge, the dominant cultural discourse (community, clique) will persecute everything that disturbs and shifts the boundaries of that relation.

This is precisely the case in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998), in which the conservative Afro-American community called Ruby cannot cope with the "newcomers" who inhabit an abandoned convent at the edge of their settlement: "If they stayed to themselves, that'd be something. But they don't. They meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families" (1998: 276). For Morrison, the concept of a subversive household (different from the models carefully designed in the interests of patriarchy) counters the traditional exclusion of women from the socio-political structures of power. This power, understood so far as a multiplicity of discourses produced by mechanisms operating in different (but all male-dominated) institutions, is undercut in Morrison's narrative with a discourse of depression, hysteria and distress. These emerge in the narrative as subversive forms of sub-cultural expression of race and gender. The surfacing of the witch figure as a container for these forms is at once empowering and incompatible with the dominant discourse:

> Something's going on out there, and I don't like any of it. No men. Kissing on themselves. Babies hid away. Jesus! No telling what else... I hear they drink like fish too... Bitches. More like witches... Before those heifers came to town this was a peaceable kingdom. The others before them at least had some religion. These here are sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church and I bet you a dollar to a fat nickel they ain't thinking about one either. (Morrison, 1998: 276)

The suspicious and polluting convent "in some desolate part of the American West" (1998: 224) was always already "entitled to special treatment" (1998: 233), since it was previously inhabited by "Catholic women with no male mission to control them." Those who have come now to inhabit the abandoned mission are "obviously not nuns, real or even pretend, but members, it was thought, of some other cult" (1998: 11). In fact, the newly arrived women are homeless, exploited, and hysterical daughters, or mothers (to be). In finding a "temporary" lodging in the convent (where they "stop by to recover"), they cross a borderline between "what is out there where they come from" (the oppressive paternal structures) and what is "inside." The unknown inside of the convent reverses the patriarchal norm by expelling it to the "outside," excluding it from its "center." The "inside" promises shelter and rest, it speaks a different language, neither inviting nor rejecting but strategically ignoring and thereby coping with the "outside."

> Over the past eight years they had come. The first one, Mavis, during Mother's long illness; the second right after she died. Then two more. Each one asking permission to linger a few days but never actually leaving. Now and then one or another packed a scruffy little bag, said goodbye and seemed to disappear for a while—but only for a while. They always come back to stay on, living like mice in a house no one, not even the tax collector, wanted, with a woman in love with cemetery. Consolata looked at them through her bronze or gray or blue of her various sunglasses and saw broken girls, frightened girls, weak and lying. (Morrison, 1998: 222)

Consolata, the last "legitimate" resident of the convent, is depicted by Morrison as a "confused" woman who suffers from depression and extensive consumption of alcohol. As a nine-year-old, and already no longer a virgin, she was "rescued" by the Mother, an ambitious missionary, from the severe conditions of her life in Mexico, and brought to the convent. There, in the environment of another phallocentric structure, she has been taught to reject the ordinary female condition as impure. For 30 years "she offered her body and her soul to God's Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself" (Morrison, 1998: 225). As a "typical Christian conundrum, oppressive

and liberating at once," (Warner, 1990: 77) the convent becomes her home, her element, and a structure that she is never to abandon but rather to transform. Defined by a cultural transgression quite incompatible with the proper order, Consolata represents an intermediary figure, introducing from the very beginning her strangeness, her irony, and her latent atheism into the paternal religion. She is a foreign national, a dutiful nun, a passionate lover, a depressed woman, and finally a "witch" at odds with the notion of a housewife who resolutely maintains the boundaries of home. On the contrary, she opens up her household to the chaotic and disorganized "outside": the lesbian, the bad mother, the hysteric, all types of women stigmatized as "out of control." Suspending the sublime model of the virginal life, Consolata "runs" the convent in a permanent erasure of the nun in herself, in a disabling state of being non-mother, no-body. If she seems strange, it is because of her alienation, her acknowledgment of the unbridgeable gap between self and the other, self and the "outside." Separated from the two people she loved, first from her lover and then from the Mother, Consolata gradually succumbs to melancholy and drinking. Repelled by her own "sluglike existence" (that of a menopausal crone), she seems to tolerate the other women's "resignation, self-pity, mute rage, disgust and shame" (Morrison, 1998: 250). Their experiences connect them, and blurring the border between them and her, they tell a common story of drift, deception and cultural displacement.

As drifters, all Morrison's women "oscillate" in an oppressive atmosphere between normality and the asylum. Silently breaking the rules and silently being condemned, they end up like Hélène Cixous' heretics "in confinement," in isolation, and eventually "in death" (Cixous and Clément, 1986: 8). The longer they dwell among themselves, the more intense their bodies become, and the less "coordinated" their physical behavior. These are anxious women, disillusioned and disinterested in "proper" housekeeping:

> Not only did they nothing except the absolutely necessary, they had no plans to do anything. Instead of plans they had wishes... They spoke of men who came to caress them in their sleep; of men waiting for them in the desert or by cool water; of men who once had desperately loved them, or men who should have loved them, might have loved, would have. (Morrison, 1998: 222-223)

The women's "dwelling" and their bisexuality expand thus into an unbalanced, hysterical condition, and increasingly threaten to break out beyond control; the women are the "go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings" (Morrison, 1998: 156). While for them the gradually collapsing convent symbolizes security, for the town nearby it is a haunted house, horrifying precisely because it contains secrets in disruptive excess. The convent's "kitchen is bigger than the house in which either man [from the town] was born" (1998: 5). In the cell-

rooms there is no "proper" furniture, hammocks replace beds, and "strange things [are] nailed or taped to the walls or propped in a corner":

> A 1968 calendar ... a letter written in blood so smeary its satanic message cannot be deciphered; an astrology chart; a fedora tilted on the plastic neck of a female torso... the series of infant booties and shoes ribboned to a cord hanging from a crib in the last bedroom they enter. A teething ring, cracked and stiff, dangles among the tiny shoes. (Morrison, 1998: 7)

Viewed from Ruby's phallocentric perspective, the convent goes astray, transgresses and transforms into a coven, a den of non-structure, and "a carefully planned disguise for what [is] really going on" (Morrison, 1998: 11). It is a place at the edge of culture, a locus of subversive intention, with no "cross of Jesus," no men, no language (1998: 7). Both the co(n)ven(t) and its inhabitants are culturally formless, symbolically embracing the boundless body of the witch, her ability to transform into other bodies, or to change shape and disappear. It frightens by invoking uncertainty about the witch's "true" identity, her intention and her course of action: "Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside" (1998: 39). As a metaphor for unspoken female *jouissance*, the convent's "inside" epitomizes an impenetrable maternal womb. The sphere is ambiguously polluted, seductive, suspending "the notion of the house as a closed container" (Purkiss, 1996: 98). Its self-contained, maternal character echoes the earlier days of the convent, when self-sufficient nuns

> made sauces and jellies and European bread. Sold eggs, peppers, hot relish and angry barbecue sauce, which they advertised on a square of cardboard covering the faded blue and white name of the school... Pecan saplings planted in the forties were strong in 1960. The Convent sold the nuts, and when pies from the harvest were made, they went as soon as posted. They made rhubarb pie so delicious it made customers babble, and the barbecue sauce got a heavenly reputation based on the hellfire peppers. (Morrison, 1998: 242)

The luring, transformative capacity of the convent increases after the collapse of the missionaries, and in offering shelter to the exploited it threatens to seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their "proper" gender roles ("women whose identity rested on the men they married" [Morrison, 1998: 187]). And it is above all the independent status of the convent that endangers the carefully re-enacted center-edge hierarchy of the conservative Afro-American community. The road connecting the town with the convent represents an umbilical cord connecting the phallic children with the maternal space of filth; it has an explicitly female character since "it was women who walked this road. Never men" (1998: 270).

> For more than twenty years Lone had watched them. Back and forth, back and forth; crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost. ... out here where the wind handles you like a man, women dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians. (Morrison, 1998: 270)

Moreover, the unpredictable inside of the convent connects all the culturally suspicious activities: the stillborn babies, abortions, alcohol, wickedness and filthy music: "And in the Convent were those women" (Morrison, 1998: 11). Morrison goes on to narrate the story of their extermination, which happens as a result of the community's fear of losing its masterfully attained racial/cultural identity. Perhaps, "somewhere else they could have been accepted ... But not here. Not in Ruby" (1998: 157). Ruby is where nine

> handsome, utterly black men murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock [pure black race]); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at least, abortionists at most); and (c) because they could—which was what being an 8-rock meant to them and was also what the "deal" required. (1998: 297)

In the meantime, however, unaware of this conspiracy, Consolata, along with her the entire convent, undergoes a spiritual metamorphosis. Discovered by Lone, the "practicing" woman from Ruby, she is introduced into the practice of "stepping into" people's souls since Consolata is a gifted healer, as Lone expected "from the start" (1998, 245). Though finding it "repugnant" at first, Consolata soon discovers the usefulness and necessity of utilizing her healing powers. Thus, while transgressing and transforming the paternal cult, she finally succeeds in finding "another sacred space" (Kristeva and Clément, 2001: 64) and another cultural, or rather subcultural, possibility within the paternal. Nostalgia and depression, as Kristeva believes, "are indispensable" in this process, since it is "only in mourning the old seductions and beliefs of our ancestors, in exhausting their artificial spark in the accounting of a sober meditation, that we can move in the direction of new truths" (2001: 142). Consolata's extensive mourning in the cellar indeed leads her out of depression and into the "discovery" of spirituality that has specifically maternal character. It rests on the assumption of a symbiosis and meditative interconnectedness of all cohabitants of the household and requires a substantial change of their behaviour. What Consolata manages then is a completion of two parallel tasks: that of a mother (a household figure) who introduced order into the scattered home structure and that of a healer who provides that structure with a spiritual support. "I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for" (Morrison, 1989: 262). Although scared by such

an unexpected transformation of the woman they learned to ignore, none of the inhabitants leaves the convent. Their quest seems to be ending at its collapsing doors, while the convent itself with its persistently re-occurring maternal quality becomes a metaphor for the "omphalos": the navel as the scar of dependence on the mother. Favoring the "omphalic" as a source of effective subversion, Morrison's "mother" (Consolata) negotiates as such between the "phallic" and the (om-phalic) spaces of religion. The latter, composed of cultural splits and fissures, remains unarticulated in the paternal cult. Consolata can be thus seen as a spiritual negotiator, mediating between the "symbolic castration" that denies her the ability or right to speak the symbolic language and the "real incision" that draws/lures her back to unspoken semiotic pleasures. Therein, confined to her household, Consolata transforms the place from within, and these (magic) transformations connect her with one of the most interesting aspects of the historical witch, the healer figure who "belongs to the private sphere, from which the rite stems, even if it is collective. Initiation, ritual, healing, love itself have to do with individuals" (Kristeva and Clément, 2001: 176). In a "mixed" language difficult to follow, a meditative trance rather than an organized grammar, she manages to formulate her spiritual message to the half-frightened, half-amused listeners:

> My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him. When he fell away the woman rescue me from my body again. Twice she saves it. When her body sickens I care for it in every way flesh works. I hold it in my arms and between my legs. Clean it, rock it, enter it to keep it breath. After she is dead I can not get past that. My bones on hers the only good thing. Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true, like bones. It is good, like bones. One sweet, one bitter. Where is it lost? Hear me, listen. Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve. (Morrison, 1998: 263)

In consolidating all the "abominable" conditions of a neglected, dark and moist household, the cellar, where the wine is kept, becomes the central place of their meetings. It evokes the remoteness of the womb, as a windowless room, closed container or a sealed, her(m)etic space. As the locus of Consolata's erotic desires from the past, it is a secret crossroads, a place of coming together of the broken, depressive, hysterical and the inarticulate, sublime, semiotic.

> First they had to scrub the cellar floor until its stones were as clean as rocks on a shore. Then they ringed the place with candles. Consolata told each to undress and lie down. In flattering light under Consolata's

> soft vision they did as they were told. How should we lie? However you feel... When each found a position she could tolerate on the cold, uncompromising floor, Consolata walked around her and painted the body's silhouette. Once the outlines were complete, each was instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight. (Morrison, 1998: 263)

The "predisposition for the sacred," as referred to by Clément, "better accommodates itself to naked rebellion, insurrectional heroism, the enthusiasm of the moment, in short, to the gaps in social time" (Kristeva and Clément, 2001: 55) which tie in with the carnivalesque structure as a cultural practice of suspending the order. However, this suspension, associated with momentary "gaps in social time," has a different resonance in Morrison's text since it refuses to be momentary, casual or orgasmic, and functions as a newly established order for the secret/sacred practices in the cellar. It also challenges the association of carnival with the overexcited body of a hysteric, since the sacred experience comes as a result of a cure (treatment) of the young women's pathological symptoms. Their desires, pains and sorrows intermingle with their newly established spiritual household, and the reversed "system of classification" (Kristeva and Clément, 2001: 92) in which all are taken care of now. "In loud dreaming, monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. So, exhausted and enraged, they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again but knowing full well they will. And they do" (Morrison, 1998: 264). The carnivalesque carelessness of their orgasmic freedom is gone, but rather than returning to the phallocentric order, the household prevails as a politically and strategically independent structure in which

> the women sleep, wake and sleep again with images of parrots, crystal seashells and a singing woman who never spoke. At four in the morning they wake to prepare for the day. One mixes dough while another lights the stove. Others gather vegetables for the noon meal, then set out the breakfast things. The bread, kneaded into mounds, is placed in baking tins to rise. (Morrison, 1998: 285)

As initiated by Consolata, household tasks and desire intermingle, connect and disconnect, in a trance, becoming a spiritual practice of renewal, a subculture within the symbolic system of restrictions. Evoking images of the culturally abject and "an implacable enemy of the symbolic order" (Kristeva, 1982: 70), Consolata interferes with patriarchal discourse, as does Cixous' "newly born woman" who "finds ways out—*sorties*":

> Like many other women's, her imaginative journeys across the frontier of prohibition are utopian, voyages out into a no place that must

> be a no man's and no woman's land... the newborn woman, transcending the heresies of history and the history of hysteria, must fly/ flee into a new heaven and a new earth of her own invention. (Clément and Cixous, 1986: xiv)

After all, it is the physical absence of *her* mother (her unknown identity), which contributes to the dream of presence ("a new earth of her own invention"), a dream that in fact should be taken literally, since its fulfillment lies within the "newly established" limits of culture.

Female desire, intensified by the spiritual and bodily transformation of the convent's women, transcends here the stereotypes of race, but not necessarily gender. As in Morrison's earlier work ("Recitatif"), the reader is never given any final opportunity to distinguish the women's skin color: the racial identifications are ambiguous, exchangeable, releasing "the operations of race in the feminine" from obligatory references to skin color and its subsequent cultural connotations (Abel, Christian and Moglen, 1997: 102). By "replacing the conventional signifiers of (racial) difference" and "by substituting for the racialized body a series of disaggregated cultural parts," Morrison "exposes the unarticulated (racial) codes that operate at the boundaries of consciousness" (Abel, Christian and Moglen, 1997: 102).

> They shoot white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out there. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun. (Morrison, 1998: 3)

Apart from Consolata's stated Indian origin, the indications as to which of the women is the white one, or what is the skin color of the others, are few and confusing, almost absent. Their absence directly challenges the Black community's obsession with their racial purity that is no longer "the sign ...they had taken for granted" but "a stain" (Morrison, 1998: 194), a historical repetition but "in reverse." The convent's "impurity" is projected both as female and as not (entirely) black; it reopens and pollutes their grandfathers" wounds. The situation on the outside of the convent (in Ruby) is entirely controlled by a racially "pure" phallic structure, however, it is also threatened by the impure elements emanating from the "inside." As in Barbara Creed's analysis of the horror set-up, "the house that offered a solace ultimately becomes a trap, the place where the monster is destroyed and/or the victim murdered" (1993: 56). For the nine men on the mission, the place constitutes the ultimate danger of annihilation, of being engulfed by the witch's monstrous and invulnerable womb. Its invulnerability "works to license violence against her, violence tinged with the terror of the maternal. Her hard body is a pre-text for violence against her invasive magical power, itself an extension of her body" (Purkiss, 1996:

127). Inevitably, the subversive power of the convent has to be challenged by the centralized power of Ruby; it has to be believed to be wrong in order to be destroyed. "I know they got powers. Question is whose power is stronger... They don't need men and they don't need God. Can't say they haven't been warned" (Morrison, 1998: 276). The impenetrable "inside" threatens life, and must therefore be "radically excluded" (Kristeva, 1982: 2). In the brutal murder performed on the convent's women, the men thus expel their anxieties to the margin of the community, and project a deeply familiar contradiction to everything they believe they stand for. The convent in the end becomes for them a place of disconnection, of separation from anxiety, impenetrability, and vulnerability: from everything that mother comes as a reminder of.

Morrison's *Paradise* clearly deconstructs the traditional concept of household as a "stable" phallocentric structure and of the mother as a "traditional" housewife into political sites of cultural transgression. The subversive household, a condition that gradually supplements the absence of the phallocentric discourse, has the transitory and indefinite character of a trance that is healing. The ambiguous pleasures of paradise, which open for the convent's women after their death (as they become transcendental bodies), emerge from the fertile, reproductive spaces of the convent's garden. This paradise offers another transgression of symbolic restrictions in the form of the differently cultured (semiotic) realm of unspeaking Piedade, a transgression that calls to mind the Kristevan "sacred body of a woman, sacred because at the crossroads of love" (Kristeva and Clément, 2001: 105). The garden serves as a locus of the specifically female sacred trance that becomes "order," in direct contrast with the (dis/ordered) brutality of the men who leave the mission unconvinced of the results they have accomplished. Thus, as Morrison suggests, it is a spiritual path that comes from the healing maternal powers rather than institutionally sanctioned religious structure, that serves as a strategy for the women to cope with the phallogocentric culture.

However, as a space of refuge, Morrison's posthumous paradise fails to protect women within culture. In transgressing into a semiotic pleasure beyond culture (and in fact beyond the body), the paradise "simply" offers a return to the protective womb. As such it runs the risk of a "libidinal economy" appearing less as "a locus of cultural subversion" than as "a futile gesture" (Butler, 1990: 78-80), unable to solve the problem within the culture and its laws. The political power of the cellar/womb is left unarticulated, enclosed with other secrets kept behind the walls of the convent. It remains her(m)etic, sealed with a scar on the body, like the dark cellar/womb whose meaning they cannot decipher. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Morrison's sacred space (as a source of subversion) becomes politically problematic, since, to quote Judith Butler, it "cannot be maintained within the terms of culture" (1990: 80). Simultaneously, however, the after-life paradise originates from and maintains its firm connection with/in the convent, where the women, just before being shot, undergo their powerful spiritual metamorphosis. This form of connection, misunder-

stood or never taken into account by the self-victimized oppressors from Ruby, is posited by Morrison as an attempt to formulate the space of libidinal character within culture: the space of negotiation between spoken and unspoken territories of culture that so far has not been acknowledged as negotiable, and therefore neither strategic nor political.

[1]Foucault, according to Nancy Armstrong, "ignores the domestic domain in the development of the institutional culture," and "neglects to theorize the power of the modern household as a cultural prototype." Moreover, he "opens the category for political power extending the cultural discipline only so far as institutions came to be dominated by man (one could say, historically, because these institutions were dominated by male representatives)." To correct Foucault's category, Armstrong's article, "Some Call it Fiction: On the Politics of Domesticity," emphasizes the "continuities between home and state" (1997: 918).

[2]In Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, pollution (or uncleanliness) occurs as disorder, and the process of its elimination is understood as "a positive effort to organize the environment." Pollution is associated with matter that is *out of place*, and "must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained" (1969, 40). In consequence, a "polluting person is always in the wrong... developed some wrong condition or ...crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger" (1969, 113).

References

Abel, Elisabeth, Barbara Christian, and Helen Moglen. 1997. *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Armstrong, Nancy. 1997. "Some Call it Fiction: On the Politics of Domesticity" in R. Warhol and D. Price Herndl, eds. *Feminisms. An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1993. (*Le Deuxieme Sexe*. Paris: Gallimard, 1949). *The Second Sex*. Translated and edited by Howard Madison Parshley. New York: Alfred Knopf.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clément. 1986. (*La Jeune née*. Paris : Union Générale d'Editions, 1975). *The Newly Born Woman*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

Douglas, Mary Tew. 1969. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge (1966).

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (*Pouvoirs de l'Horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980). Translated by Léon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, Julia and Catherine Clément. 2001. *The Feminine and the Sacred* (*Le féminin et le sacré*. Éditions Stock: 1998). Translated by Jane Marie Todd. New York: Columbia University Press.

Morrison, Toni. 1998. *Paradise.* Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf.

Purkiss, Diane. 1996. *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations.* London: Routledge.

Warner, Marina. 1990. *Alone of All Her Sex.* London: Pan Books.

Laura Major

Anne Bradstreet
The Religious Poet as Mother

This paper examines how the axis of creativity, motherhood and religion play themselves out in the poetry of Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672), a Puritan American poet and mother of eight. Her work is so compelling for it resists her reduction, despite the attempts of critics, to either the category of pious Puritan or of early feminist. In Bradstreet's construction of motherhood, religious duty and belief on one hand, and the urge to creativity on the other, intersect and interact in interesting and often poignant ways. This paper examines examples from Bradstreet's personal poetry in order to demonstrate how this poetry exposes both piety and quiet rebellion. Interestingly, the source of this rebellion in the poems that deal with the question of motherhood was an intense devotion to her earthly roles of mother and poet. I show that Bradstreet struggled with the Puritan view of mortality chiefly in connection to her role as mother. I also show how, by use of the childbirth metaphor for creativity, Bradstreet's poetic merging of the act of writing poetry with the act of raising children allowed her create art within the restrictive and patriarchal religious context of Puritanism.

Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672) was a Puritan, poet, woman, wife, and mother. Yet critical discussions of Bradstreet's work have rarely taken these multiple markers of identity into account. Rather, critics have framed their arguments as if one has to choose whether religion or gender is the primary force in Bradstreet's poetry. Some passionately argue that Bradstreet was a pious Puritan while others paint her as an early feminist.[1] Although evidence for both positions certainly exists, to reduce Bradstreet to either one of these categories is to simplify a complex religious woman poet living in specific personal, cultural, religious, and historical circumstances. Indeed, *because* ample evidence for both positions exists, it seems likely that neither position is completely

accurate on its own. Therefore, I shall not make an argument for Bradstreet as a pious Puritan *or* an early feminist, but rather shall examine the way in which Bradstreet's construction of her experience of motherhood reveals sometimes conflicting facets of her roles as mother, poet, and Puritan.

Anne Dudley was born in 1612 in England where she enjoyed a privileged upbringing and a generous education. In 1630, already married, Anne Bradstreet arrived with her family on the *Arbella* in Massachusetts Bay. Here, and later in other New England colonies, the Bradstreet and Dudley families established themselves as mainstays of the Puritan community. Anne Bradstreet gave birth to and raised eight children, while writing poetry and prose. In 1650 her first book of poetry *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* was published, most likely without Bradstreet's knowledge. Bradstreet thus unwittingly became the first American poet to publish poetry.

One of the clearest ways to demonstrate Bradstreet's conception of the inextricability of her roles of mother, Puritan, and poet is by looking at Bradstreet's use of the childbirth metaphor. Ivy Schweitzer (1991) compellingly argues that metaphors of female experience such as marriage, childbirth and mothering were commonly used by Puritan *men* in sermons to describe spiritual processes, while actual women and their lived bodily experiences were marginalized (27). Childbirth as a Puritan metaphor has nothing to do with the actual bodily experience. On the contrary, says Schweitzer, "the spiritualization of feminine imagery had the effect of erasing the earthly and fleshy femaleness from it" (27). Childbirth, rebirth, or "sonship," (28) as a metaphor for the Puritan conversion narrative describes a marital process through which the spouse of Christ is adopted into the Divine family, to be nurtured by the autogenic, omnipotent father (27-28). While Christ becomes a "womb-substitute" (29) for the regenerate soul, the actual woman's womb is devalued as flesh, or as the vehicle through which one falls into original sin.

Bradstreet's use of the birth metaphor is different from that doctrinal rebirth metaphor in which the earthly mother is absent. In a confessional letter "To My Dear Children" (Baym *et al.*, 1989: 118-121) she describes the physical and spiritual pains of becoming and being a mother:

> It pleased God to keep me a long time without a child, which was a great grief to me and cost me many prayers and tears before I obtained one and after him gave me many more of whom I now take the care, that as I have brought you into the world, and with great pains, weakness, cares, and fears brought you to this, I now travail in birth again of you till Christ be formed in you. (Baym *et al.* 1989: 120)

This excerpt reveals Bradstreet's intense longing for children and the awesome physical and spiritual responsibility she experienced when she did become a mother. In the above confession, Bradstreet moves from the physical experi-

ence of childbearing to a metaphorical use of the concept where the mother is the agent of her children's spiritual rebirth. Bradstreet valorizes her maternal duty to nurture, educate and instruct her children in order to facilitate their spiritual success.

But Bradstreet's most famous use of the mothering metaphor appears in her poem: "From the Author to Her Book" (Hensley, 1981: 221), which Bradstreet wrote in reaction to the publication of her poetry. She opens with a self-deprecating description of her poetry and her mortified reaction to the fact of its publication:

> Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain
> Who after birth did'st by my side remain,
> Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,
> Who thee abroad exposed to public view,
> Made thee in rags, halting to the press to trudge,
> Where errors were not lessened (all may judge).
> At thy return my blushing was not small,
> My rambling brat (in print) should mother call.
> I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
> Thy Visage was so irksome in my sight.

This self-denigration can be read as revealing her awareness that writing poetry as a Puritan woman runs counter to social expectations. But her modesty is not only convention.[2] Her distress at the publication of her "errors" and "ill-formed" verse clothed in "rags" and "unfit for light," is evident not only throughout the poem, but also in the numerous revisions and improvements that Bradstreet made after *The Tenth Muse* was published. Paradoxically, beyond her sincerely modest disclaimer is a claim to poetic creativity. She is defining herself as nevertheless capable of producing offspring, albeit "ill-formed," from her mind, albeit "feeble," and not only her body.

In an illuminating 1989 essay on "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor," Susan Stanford Friedman describes the difference between the male and female appropriation of the childbirth metaphor. Friedman argues that for women "the vehicle of the metaphor (procreation) acts in opposition to the tenor it serves (creation) because it inevitably reminds the reader of the historical realities that contradict the comparison being made" (75). While Friedman's essay is somewhat dated, it remains true that maternity and creativity have historically been mutually exclusive categories for women writers. Male authors using the metaphor, argues Friedman, perpetuate the separation between word/flesh, mind/body, creativity/procreativity, male/female, while women authors try to transcend this binary structure of creativity (1989: 86).

The first line of Bradstreet's poem: "Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain" seems actually to maintain the division between body and mind

especially since Bradstreet denigrates the issue of her mind. Bradstreet also draws attention to the separation between her written "offspring" and actual children in her addition of the parentheses in the line: "My rambling brat (in print) should mother call." Here the poet seems to feel the need to remind the reader that she is referring to her poems and not to actual children.

The "ill-formed offspring" of the first line does not only modestly disclaim her poetry; it also subtly refers to the "monstrous births"—as so described by Puritan governor John Winthrop—of religious dissenters Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer (qtd. in Reid, 1998: 530). Anne Hutchinson, initiator of the antinomian controversy (1636-38), argued against the Puritan conception of the "elect," claiming that God's grace was given liberally and grasped personally. She was tried for heresy and eventually excommunicated. Hutchinson and her ally Dyer both gave birth to malformed children, and these "monsters" were considered the results of or punishments for their heretical opinions. Indeed the Puritan preachers connected the offspring of Hutchinson and Dyer's mind to the offspring of their body. Winthrop proclaimed after Hutchinson's miscarriage: "...as she had vented misshapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters" (qtd in Schweitzer, 1991: 1954).

Critics agree (Lutes, 1997; Reid, 1998; White, 1971) that Bradstreet had to have been aware of the antinomian controversy, the "monstrous births" and the reactions to them.[3] Bradstreet was certainly not a dissenter and is not comparing her poems to the heretical opinions and deformed babies of the antinomians; rather she is drawing attention to the vulnerability of women to the "public view" and censure of their ill-formed children and poems. By this subtle connection between the products of the mind and actual offspring of the womb, Bradstreet actually defies the separation between creativity and procreativity. She insists that the progeny comes from her mind and calls her name "in print," yet simultaneously connects the creative offspring to actual babies. Being a mother and a poet become coexisting and somehow allied parts of the poet's identity. As Friedman correctly points out, this is in defiance of history and cultural prescription that places literary creativity in opposition to domesticity (1989: 75).[4]

In the next part of the poem a change in the speaker's attitude, marked by "Yet," becomes apparent:

> Yet being mine own, at length affection would
> Thy blemishes amend, if so I could.
> I washed thy face, but more defects I saw,
> And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.
> I stretched thy joints to make thee even feet,
> Yet still thou runnest more hobbling than is meet.
> In better dress to trim thee was my mind.
> But nought save home-spun Cloth, in the house I find.
> In this array, amongst Vulgars mayest thou roam.

From this point on, Bradstreet's simple "Yet being mine own" becomes the pervading feeling of the poem. Despite the "defects" and "flaws" of her poems, they belong to her. She created them, she is responsible for them, and she will tend to them despite their faults. This feeling is created by the homely images of a loving mother gently washing her children's faces, cleaning their blemishes, helping them walk, and sewing their clothes. Her nurturance does not succeed: she washes the face "but more defects I saw;" she stretches the joints "to make thee even feet," but "still thou runnest more hobbling than is meet;" and she aims to "better dress" them, but finds only "home-spun cloth."

Indeed, these lines become a statement of motherly duty as well as creative effort. In combining these roles, the poem hints that the functions of mother and poet are complementary. What binds the roles is the basic conviction of the poems and the children "being mine own." Whether the womb or the brain yields the offspring, and whether the offspring is less than perfect or not, it is a part of its creator and as such cannot be disowned. The poet thus closes the poem by claiming her poems as her exclusive progeny:

> In Critics' hands, beware thou dost not come,
> And take thy way where yet thou art not known.
> If for thy Father asked, say, thou hadst none;
> And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,
> Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door.

By declaring that her poems have no father, Bradstreet makes several contrary statements at the same time. Alicia Ostriker (1986) calls this strategy—by which women poets simultaneously deny and affirm ideas that may be "forbidden to express, but impossible to repress"(41)—"duplicity." Duplicity, argues Ostriker, allows contradicting meanings to coexist in the poem since "they have equal force within the poet" (40-41).

On one hand, the fatherless poems are illegitimate. Here Bradstreet admits her precarious position: the publication of poetry by a woman was not a legitimate act in the Puritan context. By claiming sole parentage over the poems, though, Bradstreet simultaneously asserts her exclusive ownership and authorship of them. The poems were "snatched from thence by friends" to be "exposed to public view" without the author's knowledge. In reaction, Bradstreet is here reclaiming her authority over the book. However, although Bradstreet does this self-deprecatingly ("thy mother, she alas is poor"), the metaphor of motherhood re-legitimizes her in the context of Puritan society. Motherhood, after all was *the* legitimizing role for a Puritan woman. Yet paradoxically this metaphor, which connects the offspring of the womb to the offspring of the mind, also subverts the traditional separation between creativity and procreativity. In "The Author To Her Book" (Hensley, 1981: 221) the integration of the roles of mother and poet is not smooth; but—through negation and affirmation or, to adopt Ostriker's term, "duplicity"—it is achieved.

By the use of the childbirth metaphor in "The Author to Her Book," Bradstreet links the physical and the creative aspects of herself. Similarly, in the excerpted portion of "To My Dear Children" (Baym *et al.*, 1989: 118-121), through her use of the childbirth metaphor to describe the spiritual guidance of her children, Bradstreet recognizes the connection between the physical and the spiritual. We see this connection also in her private, intensely personal poems. Although these poems can be described as "domestic" rather than "religious," religious concerns, especially about mortality, are constantly played out.

In one of the most touching and powerful of these—"Before The Birth of One of Her Children" (Hensley, 1981: 224)—the poet addresses her beloved husband, bidding him farewell before what she feels is her imminent death. This poem primarily expresses Bradstreet's sincere love for her husband, but also provides insights regarding Bradstreet's conception of motherhood. For example, Bradstreet's linkage of childbirth and death strikes the reader immediately, for although the title of the poem invites the expectation of a description of the joyous event of childbirth, the first lines quickly dispel that anticipation: "All things within this fading world hath end,/ Adversity doth still our joys attend." She acknowledges the joys of life, but recognizes that misfortune threatens at every occasion. This was especially true of childbirth—a precarious situation for any woman at the time, but particularly so for a woman of Bradstreet's frail health. The poet struggles with the human vulnerability to death and our impotence in the face of the "most irrevocable" "sentence past." She accepts death, "a common thing," as "inevitable" but, "yet oh," clearly desires life.

Because Bradstreet is a Puritan poet confronting death, we expect some reference to God and the afterlife; but in this poem she takes no comfort in religion. It seems to me that this poem is an instance of Bradstreet's struggle with the issue of "weaned affections." The Puritan ideal was to wean oneself of one's love for the world, one's possessions and even one's family and, in the words of Robert Daly (1978), "to convince himself finally the world he loved was subordinate to its creator" (86). The language of weaning derives from the experience of motherhood: the child, having reached a certain age must cease to sustain him/herself from the mother's body. Weaning thus signifies a gradual break in the intense physical and emotional bond between a mother and her baby. Just as it is difficult for the baby to wean itself from its first natural source of sustenance, so is it for the Puritan to shed the affections of the world. Bradstreet describes this process, in her "Meditations Divine and Moral" (Hensley, 1981: 279) revealing her completely Orthodox attitude towards it:

> Some children are hardly weaned; although the teat be rubbed with wormwood or mustard, they will either wipe it off, or else suck down sweet and bitter together. So is it with some Christians: let God embitter all the sweets of this life, so that they might feed upon more

> substantial food, yet they are so childishly sottish that they are still hugging and sucking these empty breasts that God is forced to hedge up their way with thorns or lay affliction on their loins that so they might shake hands with the world, before it bid them farewell. (Hensely, 1981: 279)

Although this excerpt shows Bradstreet as wholeheartedly accepting the importance of weaned affections, many of her personal poems reveal a poignant struggle between her love of the world and her family and the higher spiritual order that requires a certain renunciation of that love. In "Before The Birth of One of Her Children" (Hensley, 1981: 224) Bradstreet seems so attached to her loved ones, so "unweaned" from her life and earthly connections—"still hugging and sucking these empty breasts"— that her emphasis lies in the search for immortality rather than in unification with God.

Bradstreet moves in the poem from general statements to the intensely personal, addressing her husband with heartfelt love.[5] The speaker knows that her husband might remarry after her death and bearing this in mind, she considers her children:

> And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains
> Look to my little babes, my dear remains
> And if thou love thyself, or loved'st me,
> These O protect from step-dame's injury.

She refers to her "little babes" with the greatest affection, conceiving of them as her "dear remains." On one hand "remains" refer to her corpse, but on the other, to what she has left behind, her legacy. By her use of the double meaning of the word, Bradstreet emphasizes that her children are a part of her in the most physical sense. They also become a replacement for her "oblivious grave." Instead of remembering her by revering her dead body, she wants her husband—"if thou love thyself, or loved'st me"—to direct his love of her, and of himself (for their children are a part of him too) onto the children. She thus implores her husband to shelter them "from step-dame's injury."

The final lines of the poem lead the reader to make a correlation between her children and her poetry:

> And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,
> With some sad sighs honour my absent hearse;
> And kiss this paper for thy love's dear sake,
> Who with salt tears this last farewell did take.

Unlike "The Author to Her Book," (Hensley, 1981: 221) no metaphor forges the connection here; rather the reader realizes that her children are not her only remains. As her children should cause their father to remember her, so her

poems will also provoke her memory. Like "The Author to the Book," this poem connects the products of the body and the mind, granting them similar value. The poems, like the children, stand in for her body. Because she can no longer physically "lay in thine arms," her husband should hold the poems and "kiss this paper for thy love's sake." Both her poems and her children grant her immortality. Paradoxically, however, the event of birthing children brings her into a painful awareness of her mortality.

The pull of her earthly attachment to her children against the vision of a higher spiritual order causes a tension in many of her personal poems. This tension is really what frees Anne Bradstreet's poem from the risk of didactic Puritan verse. The conflict is even more obvious in an elegy to her grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, who died at the age of one and a half. This poem reveals the centrality of the subject of mortality for Bradstreet as a poet, a mother and a Puritan. It also shows that with respect to her children and grandchildren she was unable to resolve her concerns.

The first three lines of the poem demonstrate the poet's difficulty in saying goodbye:

> Farewell dear babe, my hearts too much content,
> Farewell sweet babe, the pleasure of my eye,
> Farewell fair flower that for a space was lent

This repetition slows the poem down, making the farewell prolonged and painful. The pathos is compounded by the simple descriptions of affection—"dear babe," "sweet babe," "fair flower"—employed by the poet. The repetition of "my" in the first two lines also forges the connection that the poet felt to her grandchild. The fourth line of the poem abruptly announces her death: "Then taken away into Eternity." Because this line is shorter than the three lines preceding it, and because "eternity" does not quite rhyme as it should with "eye," the pain that the meaning of the line conveys is compounded by its form.

The poem then returns to three longer, slower, rhyming lines. But as line 4, the middle line of the stanza serves as an abrupt break with lines 1-3, it also undermines the resolution of lines 5-7, since eternity clearly denotes not only the eternal heavenly state, but also the child's eternal absence from the world:

> Blest babe why should I once bewail thy fate,
> Or sigh thy days so soon were terminate;
> Since thou are settled in an Everlasting state.

Bradstreet makes her questioning explicit by asking why she should mourn Elizabeth's fate if she knows that the child is in heaven. Yet although this question is meant to dispel her doubts by convincing herself that the heavenly life is "everlasting," it also calls attention to the fact that, despite her acceptance of the doctrine, she does indeed "bewail thy fate."

The second and last stanza of the poem draws a parallel between the fate of "buds new blown" and that of the child, the "fair flower" of the previous stanza. It seems that Bradstreet can reach the partial reconciliation of the end of the poem only by distancing herself from the direct discussion of her grandchild's death. She opens this stanza by demonstrating that "by nature," everything dies in its time:

> By nature Trees do rot when they are grown
> And Plumbs and Apples thoroughly ripe do fall
> And Corn and grass are in their season mown,
> And time brings down what is strong and tall.

Bradstreet is not troubled by nature running its normal course, yet for "plants new set to be eradicate,/ And buds new blown, to have so short a date," is, by contrast, unnatural. Thus the only conclusion at which Bradstreet can arrive regarding the buds and her baby grandchild is that it is "his hand alone that guides nature and fate." In the end the poet surrenders all her questioning to this belief that God has His reasons for sometimes overturning the rules of nature. There are events in this world, such as the death of a baby, which are beyond human logic and understanding. Only the acceptance of this can provide comfort. The final line—"his hand alone that guides nature and fate"—is a deep expression of faith and surrender of logic, and thus somewhat mitigates the doubts that Bradstreet expresses in the poem. Yet the poet's pain is not eradicated and the doubts, once expressed, remain vivid and real.

The poems written about her children and grandchildren encourage the conclusion that Bradstreet, when writing directly about her loved ones, could not completely surrender to Puritan doctrine, especially in matters of mortality.[6] She loved her family far too much to be sufficiently "weaned" from them into a complete dependence on God. All the poems examined in this paper reveal her love, her sacrificial devotion and her heartfelt concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of her children. Yet her faith and her piety remain, even in these personal domestic poems, a central axis in her life. Another axis was her poetry. In fact, she viewed her poems also as kinds of children—"offspring"—that she cared for, and that would provide her with the immortality that she sought. Thus I conclude by avoiding a reduction of Bradstreet to pious puritan or rebellious woman. Her poetry exposes both piety and quiet rebellion. But the source of this rebellion, at least in the poems that deal with the question of motherhood, was an intense devotion to her earthly roles of mother (and wife).

[1]Among those that argue that Bradstreet was a pious Puritan are Robert Daly (1978), Jeffrey Hammond (1991), Paula Kopacz (1988), while the feminist camp of critics consists, among others, of Wendy Martin (1984), Anne Stanford (1983), Pattie Cowell (1983) and Ivy Schweitzer (1988).

[2]In her 1988 essay "Bradstreet and the Renaissance," Ivy Schweitzer discusses Bradstreet's use of the "*topos* of affected humility" in her public poetry (292). She agrees with Eileen Margerum (1982) that the apologies should not be mistaken for Bradstreet's true feelings since "affected modesty" was a common poetic device employed by Rennaissance poets. Schweitzer complicates Margerum's argument, however, by commenting that as a woman, Bradstreet "was defined by injunctions not merely to affect modesty, but to be 'truly' humble and self-effacing in everything she did"(293). In "The Author to the Book," a poem about her poetry, these arguments need to be considered together with the evidence that she dedicated much effort at attempting to improve her work by making corrections to her earlier poems.

[3]Firstly, Bradstreet's own father and husband presided at Hutchinson's trial; secondly, Bradstreet's sister, Sarah Keayne was involved in the controversy; lastly, the births of Hutchinson and Dyer occurred at the same time as Bradstreet was childbearing, and would have been of interest to her. (Lutes, 1997: 29)

[4]An example of the Puritan attitude to woman poets can be found in John Winthrop's description of the fate of Anne Yale Hopkins, a Puritan woman who wrote poetry but subsequently went insane: "For if she had attended her household affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper to men, whose minds are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits, and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her" (qtd. in White, 1971: 172-173). Another example can be found in a letter of Thomas Parker written in 1650 to his sister, who had just published a book: " Your printing of a book beyond the custom of your sex doth rankly smell" (qtd. in Martin, 1984: 58)

[5]This is only one of many poems in which the poet's love for her husband is obvious. Other such poems include "To my Dear and Loving Husband" (Hensley, 1967: 225), "A Letter to her Husband, Absent upon Public Employment" (Hensley, 1967: 226), "In My Solitary Hours in My Dear Husband's Absence" (Hensley, 1967: 267), and "In Thankful Remembrance for My Dear Husband's Safe Arrival Sept 3, 1662" (Hensley, 1967: 270).

[6]Poems in which Bradstreet did not discuss her husband or children, such as "A Weary Pilgrim" (Hensley, 1967: 294) and "Meditation" (Hensley, 1967: 253), do come to full terms with mortality and long for the higher spiritual order of heaven.

References

Baym, Nina et al. Eds. 1989. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature Vol. 1*. New York: Norton.

Bradstreet, Anne. 1650. *The Tenth Muse*. London: Stephen Bowtell.

Cowell, Pattie. 1983. "Anne Bradstreet: 'In Criticks Hands.'" in Pattie Cowell and Anne Standford, eds. *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*. Boston: G. K.

Hall. 270-279.

Daly, Robert. 1978. *God's Altar: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. 1989. "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse." In Elaine Showalter, ed. *Speaking of Gender.* New York: Routledge. 73-100.

Hammond, Jeffrey. 1991. "The Puritan Elegaic Ritual: From Sinful Silence to Apostolic Voice." *Studies in Puritan American Spirituality* 2: 77-106.

Hensley, Jeannine. 1981. Ed. *The Works of Anne Bradstreet.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kopacz, Paula. 1988. "'To Finish What's Begun': Anne Bradstreet's Last Words." *Early American Literature* 23 (2): 175-187.

Lutes, Jean Marie. 1997. "Negotiating Theology and Gynecology: Anne Bradstreet's Representation of the Female Body." *Signs* 22 (2): 302-334.

Margerum, Eileen. 1982. "Anne Bradstreet's Public Poetry and the Tradition of Humility." *Early American Literature* 17 (2): 152-160.

Martin, Wendy. 1984. *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Ostriker, Alicia Suskin. 1986. *Stealing the Language; The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Reid, Bethany. 1998. "'Unfit for Light': Anne Bradstreet's Monstrous Birth." *New England Quarterly* 71 (4): 517-42.

Schweitzer, Ivy. 1988. "Anne Bradstreet Wrestles with the Renaissance." *Early American Literature* 23(3): 291-312.

Schweitzer, Ivy. 1991. *The Work of Self-Representation: Lyric Poetry in Colonial New England.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Stanford, Anne. 1983. "Anne Bradstreet: Dogmatist and Rebel." in Pattie Cowell and Anne Standford, eds. *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet.* Boston: G. K. Hall. 76-88.

White, Elizabeth. 1971. *Anne Bradstreet, The Tenth Muse.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Jill Scott

On Spiritual Homesickness
Mothering Peace in H.D.'s The Gift

H.D.'s (Hilda Doolittle 1886-1961) autobiographical memoir, The Gift, *navigates between the horrors of the London blitz during World War II and the childhood innocence of turn-of-the-century Bethlehem Pennsylvania. The adult narrator's struggle to maintain sanity amid the atrocities of war is paralleled by the young child Hilda's quest for knowledge of her Moravian religious and cultural heritage, schooled by her wise maternal grandmother. In this paper, I argue that through the recesses of memory and history, both the mature poet and the girl narrator are able to map together a spiritual geography of home. In her youthful passion for the purely secular forms of modernist poetry, H.D. had abandoned her sacred past and her religious heritage. The trauma of war and the disillusionment with the exclusionary culture of male modernism offer an impetus to seek refuge in a maternal spirituality, which is part fantasy and part family history. My argument is buttressed by an analysis of the semiotic strategies H.D. uses to refute the solidly secular and rationalist relationship between signifier and signified. In exploring the fleshy insides of language, the poet reveals the sacred spirit of the written word. In gathering the courage to weave together her own story with the partly historical and partly fictional version of a maternal and feminized Moravian spirituality, H.D. acts as both mother and midwife to a tiny window of peace in war-time London.*

> Mary, Maia, Miriam, Mut, Madre, Mère, Mother, pray for us.
> —H.D. *The Gift* (1998: 113)

In her autobiographical memoir, *The Gift* (1941/1943), the American modernist poet H.D. (1886-1961) quarries her past for remnants of the primal Mother, the female Holy Spirit at the root of her Moravian heritage.[1] Written against the backdrop of the nightmare of history, the terrifying screams of the London

blitz, *The Gift* reaches deep into the recesses of memory and history to piece together a spiritual geography of home. Guided by her maternal grandmother, whose stories stitch a rich quilt through family legend and senile dementia, H.D. succeeds in healing her war-wounded psyche by revisiting maternal spirituality through childhood fantasy.

Hilda Doolittle was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania into the mystical Moravian brotherhood, a protestant sect which originates in the Czech reformation movement led by Jan Hus. Known as *Unitas Fratrum*, the Moravian brotherhood was founded in 1467 and revived in 1727 by Count Zinzendorf of Halle, whose doctrine advocated the continuous discipline of prayer in devotion to Christ. The Moravians spawned missionary settlements from the West Indies to Africa and Asia, and August Gottlieb Spangenberg founded the American Moravian community of Bethlehem in 1740.

The young Hilda grew up in this tight knit religious community, but she also received an excellent education in the liberal arts. During her studies in Classics at Bryn Mawr College she began writing seriously, encouraged by Ezra Pound, to whom she became secretly engaged in 1905. Her environment changed radically when she went to London in 1911 to join Pound and a group of other poets involved in a new movement called Imagism. Now immersed in a heady world of intellectual exchange, H.D. soon established herself as an accomplished and celebrated writer. Only too quickly, this world would come crashing down—first when she was rejected by Pound both as partner and poet, and second through the experience of traumatic loss resulting from World War I. H.D. underwent a spiritual and intellectual crisis as her world was ripped apart by the heinous crimes of war and personal tragedy (she lost her brother in the war, her father died of shock, and she fell ill with the Spanish flu, threatening her life and that of her unborn child). It was not until decades later that H.D. began to regain her voice and confidence as a writer.

This renewal has often been attributed to her intellectual engagement with psychoanalysis and her subsequent analysis with Freud in 1933-34.[2] There can be no doubt as to the importance of the associative method in the renewal of H.D.'s creative energy, but I would like to propose here that it was equally the result of her re-acquaintance with the feminine and maternal spirit within Moravian Protestantism.[3] During her engagement with the strict modernist doctrines and chiselled poetic forms advocated by Pound, H.D. had bracketed out her Moravian beliefs. For those years, Imagism was her religion. But in her time of crisis following the Great War, H.D. found no solace in the unforgiving forms of modernist poetry that had fuelled her youthful spirit. It would take many years to fill this vacuum.

Motherhood functions in three ways in this search for newfound spiritual identity: first, H.D.'s own experience mothering her daughter Perdita (together with her lesbian partner Bryher) fostered a spiritual awakening; second, her return to her Moravian heritage is heralded by her maternal lineage, most especially by the memories of her childhood relationship with her maternal

grandmother, her Mamalie; third, H.D. resurrects the long-forgotten Spirit Mother or female Holy Ghost that was a part of the original doctrine of the eighteenth-century Moravian protestant sect. I will seek to illustrate this journey through spiritual maternity and maternal spirituality in the semiotic abysses of *The Gift*. My readings are influenced by Julia Kristeva's (1984) arguments for the revolutionary potential of poetic language (the semiotic), through which the pre-oedipal maternal body is recuperated in the polysemantic heterogeneity of language, with its pulsating rhythms, discontinuities, and its eruptions from within the symbolic order.[4] In both her prose and her poetry, H.D. is elliptical and at times hermetic, but always playful in her engagements with the otherness of writing. It is through this subtle but sustained play that we glimpse the awakening spirit.

Combining the genres of *Bildungsroman*, autobiographical memoir, and mystical meditation, *The Gift* documents the quest of the young Hilda to understand the nature of the world from the warm community that surrounds her to the stars her father studies. Hilda has an innocent curiosity and fascination with her grandmother's fantastic tales, which become an allegorical salve, healing the wounded spirit of the mature poet H.D. Gone are the hard edges, crystalline purity and radically terse style of her early Imagist poetry produced under Pound's influence. By contrast, *The Gift* is rambling, incoherent and repetitive. But the seeming confusion of the richly associative, dense and complex narrative yields another story, one to be read in the margins and between the lines.

Possibly the most important motif that threads its way through the narrative is in fact the Gift, typographically elevated by its capital "G." There is secrecy surrounding the nature of this Gift, and early on we sense the urgency to unlock the mystery "motivated by the primitive curiosity of the proverbial tiresome child," who is of course the young Hilda. We learn that "there is a Gift waiting, *someone must inherit the Gift* which passed us by. Someone must reveal secrets of thought which combine a new element; science and art must beget a new creative medium" (1998: 50, my emphasis). This new creative medium sounds quite a bit like psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the science and art of thought. But the "someone" who must unleash its powers is not necessarily Freud, for we come to understand that the Gift is passed down through the matriarchal lineage in Hilda's family. Hilda's mother went to a fortune-teller, a gypsy named Madame Rinaldo, who told of a "*black rose growing in your garden* [...]. The gypsy still poised her finger, she said 'a star'" (76). Later on, her mother considers the sorcery or witchcraft that forged the connection between the black rose and the star, suggesting the fortune-teller followed her own train of thought: "And the star—it might be that I was thinking of the veils and how Laura's had the moon sewn on it, lots of little silver crescents, and my gold trimmings looked like *stars*" (76, my emphasis). The narrator remembers the rest of the story, but adds it as a mere corollary to this long first chapter: "The Gift would come to a child who would be born under a Star" (79). But this pearl

of wisdom is immediately called into question again by our child narrator:

> A child born under a star? But that didn't mean anything. Why, every child was born under a star. Hadn't Bishop Leibert said at little Fred's christening—she could remember as if it were yesterday—that every child was born under the Star of our Redemption. (1998: 79)

Like the child, who struggles to make sense of the adult world of words and symbols, the reader is also left to wonder what to make of the many puzzling and often contradictory statements about the Gift. What is important for the narrative and for my reading is that a strong associative connection has been established between the *Gift*, *Mother* and *Star*.

There is doubt in the child's mind that the Gift would actually be inherited, and she expresses her fears that it "had passed us by" (1998: 50). The young Hilda's terror of being forgotten and having no access to the powers of the Gift parallels the interjections of the mature H.D., who has endured a Persephone-like descent through the hell of the London air raids and struggles just to keep her sanity. Hilda's faith in the powers of the Gift is renewed, however, through the stories of the Great Spirit of the Moravian Indians. The Native Americans tribes in the areas surrounding the settlement of Bethlehem developed a rapport with the Moravians, who sought to protect them against the massacres during the French and Indian wars of the 1750s. Though many were baptized into the Moravian protestant sect, they were not forced to abandon their own beliefs. The narrative suggests that there was mutual respect among the two groups and that the missionaries saw convergences between the Indian Great Spirit and the Christian Holy Ghost. H.D. was involved with the spiritualist tradition, which regarded Native Americans as a "psychic race with higher spiritual consciousness" (Augustine 1998: 17), and she transposed this belief in the symbiotic spirituality onto the child narrator's explanation of the relationship between Moravians and Indians as she understands it: "This is all in a book, there were books with old pictures and drawings and photographs of our town. The Indians said, 'it is the Voice of the Great Spirit,' so the Great Spirit who was the Indians' God, was part of our God too" (1998: 112).

The synchronicity of belief systems among the Indians and Moravians presented here is just one example of the fluidity of cultural and spiritual images throughout the narrative. Christian, Native American, Hellenic and Egyptian symbols are allowed to mingle freely and resonate in the child's mind, where there are no limits or barriers between traditions. We witness this phenomenon in its extreme when Hilda calls out to the mother spirit for help in response to her fear of being burned alive like the little girl, whose crinoline caught fire at the Christmas celebrations one year. She summons mother figures in every form:

> Mary, Maia, Miriam, Mut, Madre, Mère, Mother, pray for us. Pray

> for us, dark Mary, Mary, Mère, mer; this is the nightmare, this is the dark horse, this is Mary, Maia, Mut, Mutter. This is Gaia, this is the beginning. This is the end. Under every shrine to Zeus, to Jupiter, to Zeu-pater or Theus-pater or God-the-father, along the western coast of the Peloponnesus, there is an earlier altar. There is, beneath the carved super-structure of every temple to God-the-father, the dark cave or grotto or inner hall or cella to Mary, mere, Mut, Mutter, pray for us. (1998: 113-114)

While introduced through the fears of the child, we hear the clear voice of the poet H.D., who gathers her intellectual powers to fight her psychic demons. The list of mother-names initiates subtle semiotic shifts but also encourages a shift in the narrator's consciousness. The layers of mother images heaped upon each other without explanation provide a dense lexical shield from the horrors of being burned alive in a Christmas fire or in the fires from the German bombs H.D. calls "shooting stars."

The magic of these mother-names functions in two ways: first, the soothing alliteration and onomatopoeia of the rhythmic "m" concocts a sonic tonic, aurally massaging the weary soul; second, the semiotic slippages offer multiple messages of feminine inspiration. *Mary* is the central and driving force here, representing the cornerstone of the maternal spirit, but the sequence of non-ecclesiastic monikers that follows extends Mary's aura well beyond the realm of the Catholic faith. Next in line is *Maia*, the beautiful eldest of the Pleiades—Zeus seduces her in her cave and she gives birth to Hermes. *Miriam* is a prophetess who leads dancing women to freedom with her timbrel; she is known as a sea goddess too. *Mut* is a powerful Egyptian goddess but also, and perhaps not so coincidentally, the German word for courage.[5] The interstices of culture are present in the conjunction of *Madre*, *Mère*, and *Mother*, uniting women of European nations, but later the German *Mutter* is also added in a gesture of solidarity, inviting mothers of the enemy's tongue into the fold. And last but not least is *mer*, the gushing, frothing, quenching embryonic waters of life.[6] These primal maternal forces are conjured up to counter the apocalyptic experiences of war, but also to confirm feminine courage and capacity at the root of all male enterprises. The war is gendered masculine, but beneath it (as beneath Zeus's temple) is the unnameable matriarchal power of the womb cave.

The healing qualities of the poetic language in this passage (the semiotic in Kristeva's terms) also take the form of syntactic slippages. Directly following the many mother names is the first mention of the evil they seek to snuff: "this is the *nightmare*, this is the *dark horse*." But the inclusion of "this is *Mary, Maia, Mut, Mutter*" (1998: 113, my emphasis) forms an equation with but also a palimpsestic negation of the earlier threats. Mary and her mother sisters are called to displace the nightmare. A further subversion of syntax is found in the last sentence: "There is, beneath the carved super-structure of every temple to God-the-father, the dark cave or grotto or inner hall or cella *to Mary, mere, Mut,*

Mutter, pray for us" (114, my emphasis). Here, the mother words are both the *object* of the preposition "to" and the *subject* of the verb "pray," placing them in grammatical limbo. The conflation, if only in syntax, of subject and object, renders the mother symbols powerful in their fluid flexibility. The mother cannot be subjected to the dominance of the male (Zeus, Jupiter, theus, God) because she is object to herself. The very grammar of maternity here functions as a protective shield or cave.[7]

Names and naming occupy a special place in H.D.'s poetics. She plays incessantly with her own name, with her initials and the proliferation of extensions it invites.[8] Directly following the above-mentioned passage richly dense with onomastic play, is a further link to the spiritual powers of mothers, this time connecting H.D.'s mother's name, Helen, to the bright light of ancient Greece. The following associations flow from the innocent mention of the name of the maid-servant doing laundry:

> "Can I help you wash clothes, Ida?" This is Ida, this is that mountain, this is Greece, this is Greek, this is Ida; Helen? Helen, Hellas, Helle, Helios, you are too bright, too far, you are sitting in the darkened parlour, because you "feel the heat," you who are rival to Helios, to Helle, to Phoebus, the sun. You are the sun and the sun is too hot for Mama. (1998: 114)

Here again, it is impossible to saturate fully the meanings inherent in the word play. *Ida* is the mountain from which Apollo descends, but it is also a term in yoga meaning the awakened kundalini energy. The steadfast and true *Helen* of Troy and *Helle*, who courageously escaped sacrifice by fleeing on the back of a ram, are blanched in the white light of the sun god, Phoebus *Apollo*. They figuratively usurp his power and harness it for their own means. The narrator's voice now fluidly oscillates between Hilda and H.D., just as the solemnity and ethereal quality of Greek mythological characters is abruptly broken by the mention of Hilda's "Mama," whose mortality make her subject to the physical discomfort of heat. Once again, the mature narrator steps in and demands still more than Helen could give: "We must go further than Helen, than Helle, than Helios, than light, we must go to the darkness, out of which the monster has been born" (114). While it is possible to harness the masculine power of light, the real test of strength is to embrace the darkness of the womb with all its unknown dangers.

Freud was the first to make the connection between Helen and home. H.D. writes a letter to Bryher during her analysis with Freud, saying: "I got stuck at the earliest pre-OE [pre-oedipal] stage, and 'back to the womb' seems to be my only solution. Hence islands, sea, Greek primitives and so on" (qtd. in Augustine, 1998: 6). The Greek Helen is intent on getting home and H.D. uses her fascination with the Hellenic world as a medium to find her mother and her newfound spiritual home. As part of this quest, she must "go to the

darkness," the darkness of blackout London and the figurative darkness of her fears, going on blind faith that in the visual obscurity she will nonetheless be nourished by the stillness of the womb.

In her notes on *The Gift,* H.D. is explicit about her intentions to allow the text to emerge with as little intervention as possible:

> In assembling these chapters of *The Gift* during, before, and after the worst days of the 1941 London Blitz, *I let the story tell itself* or the child tell it for me [...]. I tried to keep "myself" out of this, and if the subconscious bubbled up with some unexpected findings from the depth, I accepted this finding as part of the texture of the narrative. (1998: 257, my emphasis)

Nevertheless, we find ourselves wondering to what extent the fluid notions of maternal spirituality are a recuperation of H.D.'s actual childhood experiences of Moravian Protestantism and to what extent the feminization of this spirituality is her invention. Although H.D. tries to stay out of the associative process of writing, she does attempt to document the veracity of the Moravian history related in her grandmother's stories. In her notes, she acknowledges her sources, admitting: "Actually, I have been greatly indebted throughout to J.M. Levering's *History of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1741-1892*" (1998: 257), which she had with her in London. H.D. goes on to say that she did not delve very deeply into the complicated history of the Moravian Brethren in the actual text but saved much of the explanations for her notes.

Within the body of the text it is impossible to distinguish any difference between the religious beliefs of the child and the spiritual quest of the mature poet. But Jane Augustine (1998) confirms from Levering's history that "Count Zinzendorf advocated an unorthodox trinity that replaced the traditional creedal formulation 'Father, Son, and Holy Ghost' with an hierogamy" (9). As such, the "Mutter" (Mother) is the Holy Spirit, equal to the Father and the Bride of God, and the child of this union is Jesus Christ. Jesus unites with the soul as a husband with his wife, and the child of this union is the Christian soul. For Zinzendorf, the union between husband and wife was a sacred re-enactment of the original union of the Christ and the soul. Zinzendorf was highly criticised for his elevation of the feminine principle, and although this doctrine was abandoned after Zinzendorf's death in 1760, it was precisely this point—that the Holy Spirit was a mother and all souls feminine—that inspired H.D.

Perhaps the most significant scene in the text, the one that begins to tie together the web of associations—North American and Moravian spirituality, femininity and the Holy Spirit, shooting stars with fiery bombs – involves a ceremonial exchange of names that takes place between Anna von Pahlen (the wife of John Christopher Friedrich Cammerhof, one of the advocates of the female Holy Ghost) and Morning Star (the wife of the Indian Chief Paxnous):

"There was something important about exchanging names because the inner band of Indians believed the name a person had, was somehow another part of him, like a ghost or shadow" (1998: 163). Anna gave Paxnous' wife her second name, Angelica, and she would in turn be called by the special inner-name, Morning Star. Exchanging names was a symbolic gesture for a much larger exchange, that of the Indians' Great Spirit and the Moravian Holy Ghost, creating a spiritual pact between the two groups:

> They were exchanging hostages, like in war but it was a different kind of war. It was a war of the Spirit or for the Spirit, the Spirit was the Indian's Great Spirit and the Spirit was (for this inner band of United Brethren) a Spirit like the Holy Ghost, which nobody seemed really to understand but which they understood. (1998: 163)

Significantly, this exchange does not take place between two men, but between two women. The symbolism here reaches in many directions. First, we might surmise that H.D.'s highlighting of this ceremony places women as the natural transmitters of the sacred values and traditions of the community. The fact that war is mentioned serves to juxtapose the horrors of man-made world wars to this exchange as an act of peace making. The narrative function of this scene is to free the Gift and ensure its inheritance by the "child born under the star of Redemption," whom we heard about much earlier, but whose fate was uncertain. The narrator tells us twice that the Gift will be restored when the promise is redeemed, and this exchange between Anna and Morning Star seems to do just that. It also affords a metatextual reconciliation, relieving the tensions created by the continuous layering of symbols and motifs without resolution.

The exchange of names unites cultures and beliefs, but the women themselves are also united, perhaps as an alternative, woman-centred love paralleling but also gently challenging Zinsendorf's belief in the heterosexual union of Christ with the feminine Holy Ghost. If the child of the Christian union is the feminine soul, then this union of woman and woman gives birth to peace among all nations. Thus, this scene allows H.D. to insert the last piece of the puzzle in the many associative connections between *Gift* (something that can now be redeemed), *Mother* (who births peace) and *Star* (once the German bombs but now an Indian woman's secret inner name).

We learn nothing of the nature of the relationship between Anna von Pahlen and Morning Star, but one cannot help wondering if the importance accorded this pivotal moment does not link it to the life-long connection between H.D. and her lesbian partner Bryher, whom she credits for saving her life and that of her unborn baby in the aftermath of World War I. At the time, H.D. saw Bryher as her saviour, literally and figuratively, and the bond between them was extraordinary. If this is the case, then H.D. will have succeeded in weaving her own autobiography into the feminized history of Moravian

spirituality with a two-fold result: First, H.D.'s vision of peace is cemented by the love *of* women and the love *between* women. Second, the love she shared with Bryher is elevated to a higher spiritual plane. H.D. rarely spoke openly of her lesbianism, but female same-sex love flows as an undercurrent in all of her work and is her political and gendered response to the androcentric version of modernity she encountered in her youth. To quote the inspiring words of Emily Jeremiah (2004), H.D. demonstrates in *The Gift* that "mothers can and should write literature [and] that mothering and literary production—both profoundly relational practices—can be linked and deployed as challenges to traditional western ideals of rationality and individuality, in subversive and ethically compelling ways" (231). In gathering together the courage to weave together her own story with the partly historical and partly fictional version of a maternal and feminized Moravian spirituality, H.D. acts as both mother and midwife to a tiny window of peace in the midst of the horrors of war-time London.

[1]I am indebted to Jane Augustine's introductory essay (1998) to *The Gift*. She points to important new directions in H.D. scholarship that sparked my imagination as to the intersections of maternity and spirituality in *The Gift*.
[2]H.D. writes in "H.D. by Delia Alton" (1949-51): "I assembled *The Gift* during the early war-years, but without the analysis and the illuminating doctrine or philosophy of Sigmund Freud, I would hardly have found the clue or the bridge between the child-life, the memories of the peaceful Bethlehem, and the orgy of destruction, later to be witnessed and lived through in London" (192). Thanks to Freud, H.D. was able to tap into the resources of childhood, but the material content of that childhood and the inspiration came from the world of Moravian spirituality.
[3]Rachel Blau Du Plessis (1984) is among the critics who took an early lead in emphasizing the spiritual intentions of *The Gift*. She calls it a "redemptive drama [...] a conduit for this spiritual politics" (179). Similarly, Diana Collecott (1984) calls this work a "religious and prophetic text" (x). Echoing her predecessors, Susan Stanford Friedman (1990), who has been instrumental in shaping the critical discourse on H.D., writes that *The Gift* enacts "the poet's gyno-vision of (re)birth for a world caught in the death spiral of war" (354).
[4]Due to limitations of space, I will not explain in any detail Kristeva's (1984 [1974]) theory of poetic language. I merely mention it here because her thought seems almost to run like a leitmotif through H.D.'s writing with its seemingly infinite semiotic heterogeneity, and because my own reading practices are so permeated by Kristeva's work. I refer readers to *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) for an introduction to her matrocentric semiotics.
[5]It is likely that H.D. was aware of and perhaps even intended this particular polysemicity, since German was the language of the Moravian community and, although she did not speak German as a child, she could read well. The

linguistic and cultural link between her German heritage and the German enemy in *The Gift* is a source of conflict but in the end also proves paradoxically to be a source of healing for the narrator.

[6]*Mer* is also the first of three terms in "MER-KA-BA," the star tetrahedron, a three dimensional representation of the heart chakra symbol, the place where spirit and matter meet. It is an ancient symbol of sacred geometry demonstrating the concept of the inverted energy field that surrounds all forms of life. H.D. may or may not have intended this extension, but what matters most is that this meaning of *mer* is in keeping with the kind of cosmic connectivity that she embraced.

[7]This "mother" passage is paralleled in poetic form in section 8 of *Tribute to Angels* in *Trilogy* (H.D., 1973). Here, we see a similar row of maternal figures: "mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary" (71). They are with the exception of the latin *mater* identical to the ones listed in *The Gift*. But this time they are linked to *marah* and *mar*, mentioned earlier in the poem: "a word most bitter, *marah*,/ a word bitterer still, *mar*" (71, her emphasis). *Marah* is a holy site in the Hebrew Bible, where the concept of the symbolic red heifer was introduced, the inspiration for the golden calf. *Mar* is associated with Mary and the symbol of water in the Greek/Hebrew tradition. Indeed, H.D. marries them in the context of the poem: "*marah-mar/* are melted, fuse and join// and change and alter" (71). They are altered, but that "change or *alter*" also forms a semantic "*altar*" to the proliferation of mother goddesses.

[8]A glance at the titles of H.D.'s works are one indication of her name playing, which also signals the subversion of genres. She writes with consistency on the cusp between autobiography and fiction. *Hermetic Definition*, reads acronymically as *H.D.*, and many other works begin with her own initial, the letter H: *HER*, *Helen in Egypt*, *Heliodora*, *Hedgehog*, *Hedylus*, *Hymnen* and so on.

References

Augustine, Jane. 1998. "Introduction." *The Gift: The Complete Text*. Gainesville, Fl.: University Press of Florida. 1-28.

Collecott, Diana. 1984. "Introduction." *The Gift*. London: Virago.

Duplessis, Rachel Blau. 1984. "A Note on the State of H.D.'s *The Gift*." *Sulfur* 9: 178-181.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. 1990. *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

H.D. [Hilda Doolittle]. 1973. *Trilogy*. Cheshire, Eng.: Carcanet Press.

H.D. [Hilda Doolittle]. 1986. "H.D. by Delia Alton." Ed. Adelaide Morris. *Iowa Review* 16.3: 174-221.

H.D. [Hilda Doolittle]. 1998. *The Gift. The Complete Text*. Ed. Jane Augustine. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Jeremiah, Emily. 2004. "Troublesome Practices: Mothering, Literature and Ethics." *Mother Matters: Motherhood as Discourse and Practice*. Ed. Andrea.

O'Reilly. Toronto: Association for Research on Mothering. 231-241.
Kristeva, Julia. 1984 [1974]. *Revolution in Poetic Language.* Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press.
Kristeva, Julia. 1989 [1987]. *Black Sun.* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Natasja VanderBerg

Witnessing Dignity
Luce Irigaray on Mothers, Genealogy and the Divine

I interweave feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray's writings on feminine genealogies and the feminine divine with legal theorist Drucilla Cornell's book Legacies of Dignity, *which she wrote in honour of her mother. I explore Cornell's book as an Irigarayan exercise to establish a feminine genealogy. I suggest that the creation of a feminine genealogy is indispensable to the recognition of a feminine divine. Conversely, a feminine divine is necessary to uphold a feminine genealogy. In other words, empowering the mother-daughter relationship makes possible—and is made possible by—the creation of a feminine transcendental or divine. By recognizing the full humanity of our mothers we challenge the relegation of women to the natural realm thus opening up the spiritual realm to women. We thus make possible the imagining of a feminine divine. At the same time, recognizing a feminine divine upholds a feminine genealogy by providing the symbolic power necessary to support women's becoming.*

> We have been lost to each other for so long.
> My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust.
> This is not your fault, or mine. The chain connecting mother and daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who had no way of knowing. That is why I became a footnote, my story a brief detour between the well-known history of my father, Jacob, and the celebrated chronicle of Joseph, my brother.
>
> —*Anita Diamant,* The Red Tent (1997: 1)

> No Jacob's ladder is there to help us climb back to the mother.
> Jacob's ladder always moves up to heaven, toward the father and his kingdom.
>
> —Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993b: 15)

In high school English class I received the typical assignment to write an essay about my hero. I wrote about my father, a son of immigrants who after more than 20 years working in a job he did not find fully satisfying decided to go back to school to pursue his dreams. I remember wondering why my first reaction to the assignment was not to write about my mother. I now wonder: Was it impossible for me to write that essay about my mother? I remember dismissively asking my mother a few years earlier than that high school assignment whether she had ever run a road race—which I was doing for the first time—or read the book I had recently discovered. I recall vividly the look of shock—and hurt—on my mother's face, and now, perhaps, I am coming to understand why: Was my mother not a hero candidate because I did not see her as a full person? To ask a "Sex and the City"-esque question: Why are fathers our heroes and our mothers ... well ... our mothers?

Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (1932-) believes that shedding light onto what she calls the dark continent (the mother-daughter relationship) of the "dark continent" (how Freud referred to female sexuality) is critical to opening up possibilities for female becoming. Revealing and unleashing the power of the mother-daughter relationship will change the way women relate to each other and to the divine, thinks Irigaray. By narrating the lives of our mothers we recognize them as full persons, beyond their "natural" role of child-bearing, thereby making our mothers not only naturally important to us, but also spiritually important. Through this recognition that our mothers are not only our natural mothers, but our cultural and spiritual mothers as well, we open the space for the recognition of a feminine divine. Conversely, enacting the recognition feminine divine will create the symbolic room for mothers and daughters to relate to one another as full persons. In other words, empowering the mother-daughter relationship makes possible—and is made possible by—the creation of a feminine transcendental or divine.

In the first part of this essay I explore why it is so difficult for us, as daughters, to narrate the lives of our mothers. In the second section, I explore philosopher and legal theorist Drucilla Cornell's recent book, *Legacies of Dignity: Between Women and Generations* (2002), as an Irigarayan exercise to establish a women's genealogy. In the third section, I show how the establishment of a women's genealogy creates the space for a feminine divine. In the final section, I explore the necessity of symbols of a feminine divine to uphold this genealogy of women. I suggest, with Irigaray, that a culture that recognizes the mother-daughter relationship as important will only be possible if symbols of the mother-daughter relationship are present in the important, culture-shaping arena of religion and spirituality.[1]

The Mother of mothers

Patriarchy's "staying power" lies in its ability to make love between women—particularly mothers and daughters—difficult. According to Irigaray, within patriarchy, women are reduced to the tasks of reproduction and

nurturing. It is difficult, even for women, to recognize their mothers as full persons within this society. Irigaray believes that western society has been built upon the womb of the mother. She writes,

> The culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at present ... let us look at what foundations this edifice is built upon. ... All of western culture rests on the murder of the mother.... And if we make the foundation of the social order shift, everything shifts. (Irigaray, 1991: 47)

When we challenge the premise of society—the forgetting of the mother—we challenge everything.

The reduction of women to the task of reproduction has limited women's horizon of becoming. Because motherhood has been the only acceptable role for women to do as women,[2] the place of mother is vied for amongst women, even with our own mothers. Irigaray writes,

> If we are to be desired and loved by men, we must abandon our mothers, substitute for them, eliminate them in order to be the *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 the single possible position in the desire of man. This competition equally paralyzes love among sister-women. Because they strive to achieve the post of *the unique one: the mother of mothers*, one might say. (1993a: 102, original emphasis)

Love between mother and daughter is broken because "the woman must leave her mother in order to become a mother" (1993b: 131). Because women are competing for one position—the Mother of mothers—there is neither room for love or respect of differences among women nor a language to speak about real differences between women. According to Irigaray, the result of not having a proper place in society is that women tend to have an undifferentiated, fused identity with their mothers and sisters with the only avenue for any possible differentiation being competition. We are confined to speaking in competitive terms, such as "more than," "less than," "like me," etc—terms that can only measure quantitative difference rather than qualitative differences.

In order to create room for love between women, we, as daughters, need to begin the hard work of recognizing our mothers as persons. This does *not* mean denying the value of our mothers' personhood in relation to the family, but rather means *also* recognizing our mothers as political, artistic, and spiritual beings. According to Irigaray, we must reclaim the maternal as a life-giving force in all of culture: "We bring something other than children into the world, we engender something other than children: love, desire, language, art, the social, the political, the religious for example. But this creation has been

forbidden us for centuries, and we must reappropriate this maternal dimension that belongs to us as women" (1993b: 18).

On the dignity of women

In *Legacies of Dignity: Between Women and Generations*, Drucilla Cornell bears witness to the dignity of her mother's death through bearing witness to the dignity of her mother's life. Her book arises from a promise to her mother to write a book dedicated to her that would bear witness to the dignity of her death and, also, a book that would be understood by her mother's bridge class. In order to bear witness to the dignity of her mother's death, Cornell chooses to bear witness to her life, to the life of her grandmother, and to the lives of other women. She writes, "Bearing witness to my mother's death as she saw it—as an exercise of her moral freedom[3]—can be done only indirectly by discussing how one witnesses to the dignity of the other" (Cornell 2002, xviii). From her mother's life and death comes a book "about mothers and daughters and intergenerational friendship and love between women" (xviii).

In order to have intergenerational love between women we need to have respect for each other's dignity, thinks Cornell. She defines dignity by pointing to it in literature. Nanny, in Zora Neale Hurston's book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, speaks about dignity:

> Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfil my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Da's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can stop you from wishin'. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob 'em of they will. Ah didn't want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neighther. (1990: 16)

Dignity lies in the inability of others to take away our will. Dignity is in our resistance and our broken dreams which are passed on to our daughters as the hope that things will not always be the way they are. This ability to dream of a different world speaks to our dignity.

Cornell weaves the interconnection between dignity and mourning. It is through recognizing the dignity of our mother that we will be able to mourn for what we and our mothers have lost. Cornell writes, "Of course, we can grieve for them, but mourning, at least as I am defining it, demands that we recognize that there was someone else, someone other than our fantasies of them, that we have lost" (xx). In our retellings of the stories of women, we are called to excavate, imagine and mourn.[4] "To claim dignity when it has been denied, as in Nanny's case, is already to transform the world. Once the dream is dreamt, the demand is made; it begins to echo in the ears of others," writes Cornell (2). Through the work of mourning and recognition of our mothers as persons, we will create an echo in our ear which reminds us that we too are full persons worthy of respect. We tell the stories of our grandmothers, mothers, ourselves

so that our daughters might "be able to dream what we cannot yet dream and live out that which we can barely conceive" (xx).

Cornell recognizes that our mothers and grandmothers were denied the psychic space in which to actualize their dreams. She calls this space the imaginary domain—the psychic space within which and through which we are able to individuate ourselves. The imaginary domain is shaped by our relations with others and the images they have of us. It this space which makes it simple, difficult, possible or impossible to claim our dignity. Oftentimes, the imaginary domain stifled more than women's ability to actualize their dreams, but also their ability to dream in the first place. Cornell writes about her mother's inability to dream:

> My mother experienced the space of dreams not as closed, but as foreclosed, something so lost it could not even be sought after. She experienced this until the end of her life. Then she began to mourn its loss and to see that life as a "proper lady" was not one she wanted to continue to enact (24).

Our imaginary domains "color the way in which we envision ourselves, but do not determine the reach of our imagination in dreaming up who else we might be" (29). This is what Cornell calls dignity: the ability, even within small and negative psychic spaces, to dream of a different self and a different world. Cornell's story of her mother shows that a person may dare to dream and claim her dignity when least expected, even at the end of their life. For Cornell, to have dignity is to be human; even if we are psychically unable to claim our dignity, it is still there. Cornell defends respect for dignity as the mandate to view all people as people who *in principle* can articulate their desires (29).

Cornell's project is to mourn the loss of dreams, to claim her mother's and grandmother's dignity for them, and to dream the dreams which they were not allowed to dream. At the same time, thinks Cornell, we must recognize the times when our mothers did claim their dignity and tell these stories to our children. We must share with our children how our mothers and grandmothers were busy dreaming dreams not only for their lives, but for the lives of their daughter and granddaughters. Through reclaiming our mother's and grandmother's dreams, we will create the space for our own dreaming and this space for dreaming will be passed on to our daughters. Within this enlarged psychic space, it will become increasingly possible for women to claim and live out their dignity and desires.

Both Cornell and Irigaray recognize the difficulty in recognizing our own mothers. Through recognizing our mothers as full persons, we lose the dream that they are everything to us, or, more precisely, that we are everything to them. "But to talk to one's mother as a woman presupposes saying goodbye to an all-powerful mother, accepting that one's mother isn't the all-protector, the ultimate amorous recourse, the refuge against abandonment," says Irigaray

(Irigaray 2000: 21). Cornell adds that because of our internalization of patriarchal stereotypes of mothers, we flee our mothers and any association with them. Our biggest fear is becoming our mothers. According to Irigaray and Cornell, it is the very thing that we love about our mothers, namely their never-ending love for us, that makes us fear becoming our mothers.

Cornell argues that by losing our "mothers' we will gain women with whom we will be able to have a relationship and from whom we will inherit personhood. If the woman is an actively desiring subject—in family, but also in love, in work, in writing, in politics—the relationship with the child will by its very nature be marked by a third, which will protect the child and mother from fusion, thinks Cornell. A mother who lives her life with dignity in many arenas, including, but beyond the nurturing of her child, will pass this dignity on to her child. Through telling the stories of our mothers' dignity, we create a larger story of dignity and dreams being passed on through generations of women. Through this telling, Cornell participates in an Irigarayan exercise to establish a specifically feminine genealogy.

Carving out a space for the feminine divine through genealogy

Earlier, I noted that the "staying power" of patriarchy lies in its ability to make love between mothers and daughters impossible. On a larger scale, patriarchy makes a genealogy of women impossible and, thus, women have a limited cultural and symbolic story within which to place their own lives. In the quote from Anita Diamant's novel (1997) *The Red Tent* with which I began this essay, Diamant recreates the words and inner life of Dinah, the sister of Joseph and daughter of Jacob. This quote illustrates the Hebrew Scriptures' forgetting of Dinah as a person and of the intergenerational stories of women in general. Irigaray writes about the suppression of women's genealogy: "In some way, the vertical dimension is always being taken away from female becoming. The bond between mother and daughter, daughter and mother, has to be broken for the daughter to become a woman. Female genealogy has to be suppressed, on behalf of the son-Father relationship, and the idealization of the father and husband as patriarchs" (Irigaray, 1993b: 108).

The suppression of the genealogy of women correlates to the reduction of women to the role of natural reproduction. The key to challenging the relegation of women to the natural realm, then, lies in creating a genealogy specific to women. The creation of a genealogy for women—the "putting into words" the lives of women—is important because women have traditionally been denied the right to define, through words, their own world. To put the mother-daughter relationship into words is to raise the mother from her position as the substrate upon which culture is built into culture itself. Through a genealogy of women, we will be able to create our own language, ethics and culture. Within this world, we will no longer have to vie for the ultimate place of mother because we will: a) recognize ourselves and our mothers as more than natural, interchangeable placeholders, but rather as persons who are irreducibly

unique and b) be able to speak about our differences in a non-competitive way because we will not always be measuring ourselves in terms adopted by a male world.

Recognizing our mothers and creating a feminine genealogy counteracts the ability of patriarchy to make love between women impossible. By recognizing our mothers and creating a feminine genealogy we create a world for women constituted by a vertical—constituted by mother-daughter and daughter-mother relationships—and horizontal dimension—constituted by love among women and sisters. Without a vertical dimension love among women cannot take place. Irigaray writes,

> Within themselves, among themselves, women need both of these dimensions ... if they are to act ethically ... Because this horizon has still to be built, women cannot merely remain a horizontality, ground for the male erection. Women must construct a world in all its and their dimensions. A universe, not merely for the other, as they have been asked to do in the past, as keepers of the home and children, mothers, in the name of property, the laws, the rights, and obligations of the other's State (1993a: 108-109).

By creating this world for women, we not only inaugurate the recognition of women beyond their role of reproduction, but we also create room for the recognition of a feminine divine. By recognizing women as not only natural, bodily beings but also cultural and spiritual humans, we challenge the assumption that the divine is always already male. Through creating a genealogy of women, we inaugurate, within ourselves and within society in general, recognition of the cultural, symbolic and spiritual importance of women's lives. We thus directly challenge the suppression of women's spirituality, spiritual becoming and the possibility of a feminine divine. Creating a feminine genealogy is important because it challenges the reduction of females to nature and males to culture, thus creating room for a feminine divine.

Divine images of the mother-daughter relationship

While creating a feminine genealogy is necessary to open the space for a feminine divine, the recognition of a feminine divine is important in sustaining a feminine genealogy. Without a specifically feminine divine, thinks Irigaray, we still live within a world where women are not fully recognized as both naturally and spiritually important. In order to ensure that the vertical dimension of the mother-daughter relationship creates the possibility for a new ethic, the mother-daughter relationship must be spiritually recognized. Irigaray believes that "a vertical dimension is necessary for female freedom, and that this dimension is made up of the genealogical relation and, at the same time, of woman's relation to the divine" (Muraro, 1994: 325).

The recognition of a feminine divine is important for the sustenance of a

feminine genealogy. First, as we examined in the previous section, women must be recognized as both naturally and spiritually important. The recognition of a feminine divine reinforces this recognition. Second, religion holds the symbolic power to create images and signposts for living. To use Cornell's term, our imaginary domains widen when we see ourselves, and the mother-daughter relationship, reflected in religious symbols. Third, women, like men, need to be able to project/reflect themselves in the divine realm.

While our divine images revolve around the Father-son relationship, we have limited representations of the mother-son relationship, and barely any images of a mother-daughter relationship. Mary, the most significant female in Christian thought, is truly the Mother of mothers. Given this, Irigaray recalls the time when she was surprised by a representation of the mother-daughter couple. "In the museum there is a statue of a woman who resembles Mary, Jesus's mother, sitting with the child before her on her knee, facing the observer. I was admiring this beautiful wooden sculpture when I noticed that this Jesus was a girl! That had a very significant effect on me, one of jubilation—mental and physical!" (1993c: 25). After seeing this statue of Mary and her mother Anne, which she had first mistaken for Jesus and Mary, she describes her feelings: "... joyous, in touch with my body, my emotions, and my history as a woman" (1993c: 25). If our relationships were reflected in the divine and if we could see the divine being reflected in our relationships, our relationships with women would gain a spiritual dimension. Further, by symbolizing the mother-daughter relationship in the spiritual realm, we can place our own mother-daughter relationship within the larger picture of a genealogy of women.

Like Ludwig Feuerbach (1957), Irigaray believes that humanity does and should project an idealized image of itself onto the divine. This divine, for Irigaray, is a horizon of becoming; God is the possibility for humanity's future. "God is the mirror of man," wrote Feuerbach (1957: 63), but "Woman has no mirror wherewith to become women," responds Irigaray (1993b: 67). While "Man is able to exist because God helps him define is gender (genre), helps him orient his finiteness in reference to infinity" (61), women have no God. Irigaray writes, "Having a God and becoming one's gender go hand in hand. God is the other that we absolutely cannot be without. In order to *become*, we need some shadowy perception of achievement..." (67). Women need a God so that they can have a horizon of becoming specific to women, or else they will still, ultimately, live within the horizon of man's becoming.

Love between women is impossible when we live in a world which is not our own within which we have to vie for the place of Mother of mothers. Women's becoming, thinks Irigaray, is being stifled by women's relegation to the natural realm. Without vertical access to the transcendental, women will continue to be confined to living in a world which is not really their own. In Irigaray's words, "The only diabolical thing about women is their lack of a God and the fact that, deprived of God, they are forced to comply with models that do not match them, that exile, double, mask them, cut themselves off from

themselves and one another, stripping away their ability to move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfilment" (Irigaray, 1993b: 64).

To create a world for women within which women are recognized as full persons irreducible to one another and we are able to love one another, we must have *both* a genealogy of women and a feminine divine. Learning to love our mothers as full persons is perhaps our most immediate and most individual task within the larger collective task of building a world for women with our own genealogy and divine. We, like Drucilla Cornell did in her book *Legacies of Dignity: Between Women and Generations*, need to excavate the stories of our mothers. My task, perhaps, is to return to my ninth-grade assignment and narrate the life of my mother as a full subject in love, in work, in play, in politics and in religion.

The importance of the mother-daughter relationship cannot be underestimated. "The mother/daughter, daughter/mother relationship is an extremely explosive nucleus in our societies. Conceiving it and changing it amounts to disturbing the patriarchal order," says Irigaray (2000: 21). The importance of unearthing the mother-daughter relationship lies in its potential to unsettle the patriarchal association of the feminine with the natural and the masculine with the spiritual and to blur the traditional distinction between natural and spiritual. Put simply: "The mother-daughter couple is also divine," states Irigaray (1993b: 132). To claim the right to a natural and spiritual life for women is to undermine the patriarchal order.[5]

[1]The examples in this essay of religious symbols will be drawn from Christianity because those are among the examples offered by Luce Irigaray, who was raised Roman Catholic, and the religious tradition with which I am most familiar.
[2]Women have been allowed to enter the edifice of society, but only if they do so as men.
[3]After ten years of enduring numerous illnesses, Drucilla's mother chose to end her own life. Cornell writes: "She wanted me to witness to the process in which she claimed her own person through an exercise of the right to die" (2002: xviii).
[4]Cornell writes, "Often when we look back through the history of women's lives we seem to find a grim wasteland of broken spirits, victims of their own internalized oppression. But when we impute dignity to those souls, our vision of them changes. Their worth appears to us in such a way that we can, at least, undertake to excavate, or when that fails, imagine, who or what they might have been in that struggle. If we are to remember, we must learn to mourn. Yes, there have been many women ... who were so constrained by circumstance they could not begin to fulfil their dreams of womanhood. Actual slavery is an extreme example, but we all know, from the history of our own mothers, the should have beens, the could have beens, of an unrealized life" (xx).
[5]At the same time as women are denied access to the transcendent, men have

been denied (or denied themselves) access to the natural. Irigaray believes that undermining the patriarchal order will allow men to reconnect with the natural, including their bodies.

References

Cornell, Drucilla. 2002. *Legacies of Dignity: Between Women and Generations.* New York: Palgrave.

Diamant, Anita. 1997. *The Red Tent.* New York, Picador USA.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. 1957. *The Essence of Christianity.* Trans. George Eliot. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 1990. *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Irigaray, Luce. 2000. *Why Different? A Culture of Two Subjects.* Ed. by Luce Irigaray and Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Semiotexte.

Irigaray, Luce. 1994. *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution.* Trans. Karin Montin. New York: Routledge.

Irigaray, Luce. 1993a. *Ethics of Sexual Difference,* trans. Carolyn Burk and Gillian Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Irigaray, Luce. 1993b. *Sexes and Geneologies*, trans. Gillian Gill. New York: Columbia University Press.

Irigaray, Luce. 1993c. *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference.* Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge.

Irigaray, Luce. 1991. "Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order." In *The Irigaray Reader.* Ed. Margaret Whitford. Oxford: Blackwell. 47-52.

Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman.* Trans. Gillian Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Muraro, Luisa. 1994. "Female Genealogies." In *Engaging with Irigaray.* Ed Carolyn Burk, Naomi Schor, Margaret Whitford. New York: Columbia University Press.

Oliver, Kelly. 1985. "Identity, Difference, and Abjection" in *The Future of Difference.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Andrea Lieber

Mother of all Memory

The Loss of Mother and the Search for Self in Writing by American Children of Holocaust Survivors

This essay offers a reading of two recent works by descendents of Jewish holocaust survivors, Art Spiegelman's Maus *and Thane Rosenbaum's* Second Hand Smoke, *suggesting that the mother figures in these works play a crucial role in the authors' attempt to express anxiety about genealogy, inheritance and memory. These mothers are presented as deeply flawed parents, expressed primarily in their inability to nurture. Their lives are shrouded in mystery, as the trauma of the holocaust has obscured the memory of their earlier lives. These mothers of the second generation present a radical departure from the stereotypical over-nurturing, boundariless "Jewish Mother" of earlier American Jewish fiction in that these survivor-mothers are largely defined by their inability to nurture and by their marked detachment from their sons. I suggest that the quest to locate the "lost" or "damaged" mother, to recover her story, represents the authors' attempt to reclaim his own fragmented history. That the sons' quest for identity and self-knowledge is pursued through the matriline plays on a powerful motif in the traditional understanding of the maternal role in the genealogical transmission of Jewish identity. Though patriarchal in many respects, classical Jewish tradition traces Jewish ancestry matrilineally. Paradoxically, although the mothers in these texts cannot "mother" in the ways Jewish mothers stereotypically perform that role, they nonetheless continue to represent the biologically-driven, genealogical and inherited connection to the Jewish past.*

Children of holocaust survivors are heirs to their parents' trauma. Haunted by images of atrocity, photographs of murdered relatives, and the knowledge that their orphaned parents witnessed unspeakable evil, these modern-day "Children of Job" as Alan Berger has referred to them (Berger, 1997), are inheritors of an unimaginable family history.

This essay offers a reading of two recent works by descendents of Jewish

survivors, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991) and Thane Rosenbaum's *Second Hand Smoke* (2000). I suggest that the mother figures in these works play a crucial role in the authors' attempt to express anxiety about genealogy, inheritance and memory. These mothers are presented as deeply flawed parents, expressed primarily in their inability to nurture. Their lives are shrouded in mystery: Anja Spiegelman's life is obscured by her suicide and destroyed diaries, and the life of Mila Katz by her fanatical commitment to secrecy about her past. These mothers of the second generation present a radical departure from the stereotypical over-nurturing, boundariless "Jewish Mother" of earlier American Jewish fiction[1] in that these survivor-mothers are largely defined by their inability to nurture and by their marked detachment from their sons. I suggest that the quest to locate the "lost" or "damaged" mother, to recover her story, represents the authors' attempt to reclaim their own fragmented history. That the sons' quest for identity and self-knowledge is pursued through the matriline plays on a powerful motif in the traditional understanding of the maternal role in the genealogical transmission of Jewish identity. Though patriarchal in many respects, classical Jewish tradition traces Jewish ancestry matrilineally. Paradoxically, although the mothers in these texts cannot "mother" in the ways Jewish mothers stereotypically perform that role, they nonetheless continue to represent the biologically-driven, genealogical and inherited connection to the Jewish past.

The second volume of Art Spiegelman's acclaimed *Maus* opens with a dialogue between Art and his wife in which the writer expresses anxiety about recording his father's story.

> ... I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz *with* my parents so I could really know what they lived through!... I guess it's *some* kind of guilt about having had an easier life than they did ... sigh ... I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. (Spiegelman, 1991: 14, 16).

Spielgelman's (1991) fantasy about being in a concentration camp with his parents so that he could know their suffering first hand speaks volumes about the peculiar dilemma of second-generation witnesses to the holocaust. Spiegelman shares his parents' legacy, but at the same time does not share it—his creative imagination can only take him so far in recovering his parents' past, which he conflates with his own.

Novelist Thane Rosenbaum opens his semi-autobiographical *Second Hand Smoke* with a similar, though more darkly expressed sentiment. Introducing the novel's protagonist, Duncan Katz, Rosenbaum writes:

> He was a child of trauma. Not of love, or happiness, or exceptional wealth. Just trauma. And nightmare, too... Splintered, disembodied memories that once belonged to them were now his alone, as though

> their two lives couldn't exhaust the outrage. The pain lived on as a family heirloom of unknown origins. What he saw he couldn't exactly identify; what he remembered was not something he actually ever knew. It was all interior—like a prison, like a cage. (2000: 1)

While Spiegelman wishes he were confined in Auschwitz with his parents, Rosenbaum asserts that in effect, he was—that the painful legacy of the *Shoah* is a prison that transcends generations.

Painfully aware of the odds against their birth, second-generation writers like Spiegelman and Rosenbaum are compelled to bear witness—to tell their family's story and to preserve the memory of the *Shoah*. This story is their inheritance. But, how to bear witness to events one did not experience? As Melvin Jules Bukiet writes in his recent anthology of writings by descendents of survivors, "It's our job to tell the story, to cry, 'Never Forget!' despite the fact that we can't remember a thing" (2002: 16). "Memory," he writes, "is the mantra of all the institutions that reckon with the Holocaust, but memory is an inaccurate term. For anyone who wasn't *there*, on either side of the barbed wire, Jew or German, thinking about the Holocaust is really an act of the imagination. All we know is how little we know" (Bukiet, 2002: 17).

The last decades of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of such creative imaginings by second-generation survivors in America, writers whose Jewish, European-born parents survived the Nazi concentration camps of World War II to rebuild their lives and raise families in the United States. While Holocaust memoirs like those of Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi have become standard classics of Jewish literature, narratives voiced by the children of survivors in this second generation of holocaust literature now bring new and important issues to the fore. Struggling to tell stories deemed unspeakable by the first generation, and unknowable by the second, second generation literature attempts to recover a past it paradoxically knows both intimately and not at all. [2]

While psychological profiles of the "2-G"[3] have appeared since the 1970's, many of which pathologized the "child of survivor" syndrome, scholars are beginning to turn their attention to critical analysis of the emerging genre of creative works by this second generation.[4] Comparative work analyzing literature by second-generation Jewish and second-generation German survivors is also an important trend, only now in its infancy.

Maus

Maus is perhaps the best-known work by a second-generation writer. Written in the style of a comic book, the narrative self-consciously moves back and forth between the "present" in which Arty records his father's story of his life before and during the war, and the "past" as Spiegelman (1991) puts his father's story into pictures. The work is ostensibly the story of Vladek Spiegelman, separated from his wife, Anja, during the war and reunited afterward in

Stockholm. While Vladek's story of survival frames the narrative of the book, Arty's relationship with his aging father and his pressing need to record his story also provides significant dramatic tension.

However, it is the unavailability of Anja's story, along with Arty's anxiety about recording it, which haunts both volumes of the work. Anja's suicide is mentioned in passing in the opening sequence of chapter one; her history of mental illness is later established in Vladek's description of her hospitalization for severe post-partum depression after the birth of their first child, before the war. The fullest description of Anja's suicide comes in the 4-page, unnumbered insert in volume 1, entitled "Prisoner on the Hell Planet", excerpted from Spiegelman's earlier work, in which the author recounts the events surrounding his mother's death. Spiegelman is depicted in prison garb—not unlike that worn by concentration camp victims. The sequence is a powerful depiction of the guilt and anger he feels as a result of his mother's death. In the sequence, Anja is pictured as depressed and pathetic—needing affirmation of her son's love late at night. With dark, heavy eyes, wearing a bathrobe that she clenches tightly closed across her breasts, symbolically withholding their nurturing power, she enters Arty's room asking, "'You ... still ... love ... me ... don't you?'" In response, Arty turns away, "resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord" (so that he is strangled, rather than nourished by it), and Anja walks out and closes the door.

The sequence concludes:

> Well Mom if you're listening.... Congratulations! You've committed the perfect crime.... You put me here (in prison) shorted all my circuits...cut my nerve endings..and crossed my wires!... You MURDERED me mommy, and you left me here to take the rap!!! (Spiegelman, 1991: 4 of un-numbered insert)

Arty is left imprisoned by his guilt and his rage, and his mother is depicted as a murderer. Instead of giving him life, she gives death and imposes a death sentence. The roles of prisoner/murderer are played out through a powerful inversion—Arty takes his parents' place as victim, and his mother is the perpetrator, positioned alongside the Nazis. But, Arty is also complicit with the perpetrator here, left to "take the rap" for his mother's homicide/suicide. We also learn in this sequence that Arty spent three years in a mental hospital—establishing a further identification with his mother's own history of mental illness.

Having expressed rage toward his mother, Arty also charges his father with murder when he discovers that Vladek has destroyed his mother's diaries containing her memories of the war. As Amy Hungerford has noted in her essay on Holocaust theory in, *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, though Vladek has not actually killed anyone, his destruction of Anja's record of her experiences at Auschwitz is somehow equivalent to the kinds of destruction that took

place at Auschwitz: as she says, the destruction of the representation is equal to the destruction of a person (Hungerford, 1999: 102). The destruction of Anja's diaries renders her voice mute—her past, her story is unknowable, like the story of so many of those who did not survive the war.[5]

Although Art's project unfolds as the writing of history, recording Vladek's authoritative testimony of his experiences during the Holocaust, the books are ironically haunted by a lack of knowledge of what happened: the mystery of what happened to lost relatives, to those who did not survive. This absence is symbolized by his mother's absence—the maternal voice is utterly silenced in this narrative as a result of the diaries' destruction. This absence drives Art's thirst to know, and yet the experience is unknowable precisely because so many voices have been silenced. Anja's suicide is a mystery in the same order. Her diaries burned, her voice silenced, Art will never know her. In this sense, she represents all the victims, and thus all that Art cannot know about his family history, powerfully represented as feminine. This pronounced absence is profoundly present throughout the work, and although the narrative centers around the father-son relationship, it is the mother-son relationship that is the true source of dramatic tension.

Second Hand Smoke

Rosenbaum's *Second Hand Smoke* (2000), is the story of Mila Katz. In many respects, Duncan Katz' quest to uncover his mother's hidden past in the course of the narrative is also a quest to know the self. Although both of his parents survived the holocaust, Rosenbaum's story is wholly unconcerned with Duncan's father, Yankee Katz, and instead focuses on Mila who, as Rosenbaum writes, "would not, could not mother." Here, it is Duncan's father who is curiously silent, as Rosenbaum brings to life a formidable woman in the character of Mila. Her inability to nurture is established immediately. After the opening section of the prologue in which Duncan is designated a child of "trauma" (as opposed to a child of human beings or of "woman"), Rosenbaum writes, "Without the workings of a will or a bequest, he had received an inheritance that he would rather have done without, the kind of legacy he'd just as soon give back. But it doesn't work that way. What his parents gave him, he couldn't pass off on someone else. He couldn't even explain or understand what it was that he had" (2000: 1). This passage speaks to the impotency of Duncan's legacy. His parents symbolically castrate him, in effect render him infertile and unable to pass on his inherited genealogy, conditioning him to embody the most abominable Jewish sin—that of childlessness.

The imagery of inadequate mothering continues in the first chapter of the book. In describing his relationship with Mila, Duncan says,

> It wasn't so much that the maternal bond had been severed, but rather that the fibers had never quite taken hold. It was as though Mila had delivered him into this world, and once that was done, once the

> umbilical cord went the way of fluids and placenta and all the other lifeless litter of birth—there was nothing linking them together other than the coincidence of a common address. (Rosenbaum, 2000: 20)

Duncan denies the biological ties that connect him to his mother—and nonetheless, his entire quest for self is traced through his mother's life. Mila raised Duncan to be tough—a black belt in karate—so that he would have the survival skills necessary to confront any challenge. Secrecy was the prized value in their household, and no friend or companion was allowed to get too close, lest too much be revealed. Mila even managed to conceal her own past from her family, never telling Duncan about Isaac, the half-brother she abandoned in Poland, and never discussing the details of her own lost adolescence. Although Duncan manages to separate himself from the damaged and loveless family that raised him, he becomes a professional hunter of Nazi war criminals, carrying much of Mila's rage with him into the world.

The use of visceral, genealogical symbolism is also present in the narrative of Duncan's circumcision, also in the opening chapter of the book. Here, Rosenbaum employs important Jewish symbols to make a point about his parents inability to fulfill their roles. At Duncan's *bris*, Mila insists that her baby be deprived the soothing elixir of a few drops of wine, saying, "he won't need it" and "I want him to feel it." It is worthwhile to note the irony that *mila* is actually the hebrew word for "circumcision." After the ritual, Mila cannot hold her baby close to comfort him, and carries him away at arm's distance from her body, her head turned from him in disgust. "Beads of blood dripped from his circumcised penis as if he were a stone cherub in a Florentine fountain...the mark of Duncan's manhood and the fresh bond with his God there for all to see" (Rosenbaum, 2000: 16).

This rite of circumcision that opens the novel calls attention to the role genealogy and inheritance play in the narrative as a whole. In it, the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people is inscribed on the male penis as a sign of fertility, virility and continuity. The *bris* is a traditional ritual that affirms and reinforces patrilineage (Jay, 1995; Hoffman, 1996). According to Jewish tradition, it is a father who is obligated to circumcise his son, although in most communities this obligation is discharged to a *mohel*, one who performs Jewish ritual circumcision. But, in Rosenbaum's story, instead of Yankee, it is Mila who takes the leading role in Duncan's *bris*, wanting him to feel the pain of the incision in order to build strength of character and transmit to him an American, rather than a Jewish, variety of masculinity.

At the *bris*, Mila is haunted by memories of Isaac, the baby we later learn she abandoned in Poland after a different type of ritual bloodshed. In an excruciating scene toward the end of the book, Rosenbaum describes Mila's last encounter with her first son before abandoning him in Poland as she tattoos her Auschwitz identification number on his tiny arm—a physical marker of his heritage. Mila transmitted the legacy of the *shoah* to her first son

in this brutal, cruel act, etching the numbers into his skin in an act that positions her alongside the Nazis guilty of this same crime. Those numbers had become her identity and this was the legacy she chose to leave with her abandoned son, much in the way circumcision initiates a baby boy into the Jewish people with an act of bloodshed once enacted upon the father and then on the next generation.

The juxtaposition of these images is striking: the *bris*, a Jewish ritual in which the father establishes kinship with his son by inscribing the mark of God's covenant on the skin of his penis, is a rite of passage concerned with genealogy and inheritance of tradition. When Mila inscribes her mark on her first born, she makes a very different statement about genealogy and inheritance, one that inverts the parental roles of mother/father and links her young son forever to her pain through this violent inscription in the flesh. Further, that Mila herself builds an association between Duncan's *bris* and Isaac's blood, suggests that Rosenbaum, too, wants us to see these ritual moments as inversions of the traditional Jewish rite. But, what sort of covenant is enacted here? What legacy does Mila transmit to her newborn sons? The inheritance she passes on seems to be one of pain.

The opening line of Chapter 2 announces, "A Jewish Mother was about to die. Cancer, what else? Another life claimed, a victory for the forces of an underachieving anatomy" (Rosenbaum, 2000: 17). When Mila dies of cancer, her secrets begin to unravel and Duncan begins to piece together fragments of his mother's life. Once the silence is in part broken, Duncan realizes just how little he knows about his own family history. He then begins a passionate search for information about her life, especially the child she abandoned in Poland—his half-brother—shortly after the war. As he returns to Eastern Europe, Duncan's journey into Poland parallels Mila's journey out, as if Duncan returns to Poland to reclaim what his mother left behind.

Like Anja Spiegelman's silence, Mila's secrecy symbolizes all that is unknown about the *Shoah*. Duncan is deprived of his own history and his quest to know his mother's story—to uncover her hidden past—is a quest to know the self, to achieve what Alan Berger has termed a "*tikkun atzmi*" reparation, restoration of the broken self. In the case of both women, their mothering is called into question even before the trauma of Nazi persecution damaged their lives. The birth of Anja's first child resulted in her treatment for post-partum depression, establishing her as a woman whose ability to mother was compromised early on. Mila's first experience of childbirth culminates in the cold acts of mutilation and abandonment as she asserts her own need for survival over those of her child. In both cases, these mothers fail to demonstrate the level of self-sacrifice associated with the stereotypical "Jewish Mother." And yet, these deeply flawed mothers hold the weight of their sons' Jewish identities, linking them, for better or for worse, to their inherited past.

In many respects, this situation resembles the dilemma faced by real Jewish women in the post-enlightenment period in both Europe and the United

States. Charged with the duty of anchoring the Jewish home and serving as the primary transmitter of Jewish cultural values, the Jewish mother was a pivotal figure in stereotypes of "The Jewish Family" that developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hyman, 1989, 1995). And yet, without access to traditional Jewish education, what kind of legacy could Jewish women pass on to their children? Paula Hyman has discussed at length the evidence that Jewish women bore the blame for the perceived loss of Jewish identity that came along with Jews' assimilation into western culture. Increased assimilation was traced to the Jewish mother's failure to transmit a sturdy identity to her children. Her work points to the various ways in which negative stereotyping of Jewish women in various forms of literature and popular culture might be read as expressions of this anxiety.

Indeed, both Anja and Mila are the symbolic anchors of their respective families. And yet, their ability to play this role is paradoxically compromised by their innate unavailability as mothers and lack of access to basic nurturing skills. Nonetheless, this unavailability embodies the dramatic tension that drives each son to pursue his Jewish past. In this respect, the complex portrayal of mothers in these two works by second-generation holocaust survivors expresses a very particular tension. On the one hand, these depictions seem to up-end typical mother stereotypes found in American Jewish literature. And yet, on the other hand, like those earlier stereotypes, these works use the mother figure to express anxiety about the genealogical transmission of Jewish identity after the holocaust—in particular, the painful gap between voices of the survivors and their progeny.

[1]Many contemporary theorists have studied the portrayal of Jewish mothers in fiction by both male and female authors. Among them are, Sara Pesce (2000); Lois Lyles (1999); Elvira Grözinger, (1998); Ruth Ginsburg (1997); Janet Handler Burstein (1994); Todd Pitock (1995); Anita Norich (1996); Susanne Klingenstein (1992); Barbara Frey Waxman (1988); Ruth Adler (1987, 1977); G. Rothbell (1986); Erika Duncan (1983); Jacqueline A. Mintz (1978).

[2]A recent review essay in *The New Republic* critiqued this particular motif in the writing of second generation holocaust survivors. Ruth Franklin (2004) writes, "Driven by ambition or envy or narcissism, a number of the children of survivors...have constructed elaborate literary fictions that serve to elevate their own childhood traumas above and even beyond the sufferings of their parents"(31).

[3]This is a popular "nickname" for second-generation Holocaust survivors. Bukiet (2002) seems to be the first to coin its use in writing.

[4]There is a growing scholarship on literature of second-generation Holocaust survivors. See also, Helen Epstein (1998); Catherine Hezer (2002); Marianne Hirsch (1997); Eva Hoffman (2004); Sophia Lehmann (1998); Michelle A. Friedman (2004).

[5]On the motif of muteness, see Sara R. Horowitz (1997).

References

Adler, Ruth. 1987. "Mothers and Daughters: the Jewish Mother as seen by American Jewish Women Writers." *Modern Jewish Studies* 6 (1987): 87-92.

Adler, Ruth. 1977. "The Real Jewish Mother?" *Midstream* 23 (8): 38-40.

Berger, Alan. 1997. *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Bukiet, Melvin Jules, ed. 2002. *Nothing Makes You Free: Writings by Descendents of Jewish Holocaust Survivors.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Burstein, Janet Handler. 1994. "Mother at the Center: Jewish American Women's Stories of the 1920's." in *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing.* Judith Baskin, ed. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994. 182-196.

Duncan, Erika. 1983. "The Hungry Jewish Mother." in *On Being a Jewish Feminist.* Susannah Heschel, ed. New York: Schocken. 27-39.

Epstein, Helen. 1998. *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors.* New York: Penguin Books.

Franklin, Ruth. 2004. "Identity Theft: True Memory, False Memory, and the Holocaust." *The New Republic*, May 31. 31-37.

Friedman, Michelle A. 2004. *Reckoning With Ghosts: Second Generation Holocaust Literature and the Labor of Remembrance.* Ph.D. Dissertation, Bryn Mawr College.

Ginsburg, Ruth. 1997. "The 'Jewish Mother' Turned Monster: Representations of Motherhood by Hebrew Women Novelists 1881-1993." *Women's Studies International Forum* 20 (5-6): 631-638.

Grözinger, Elvira. 1998. "The Jewish Mother' in der amerikanischen Literatur nach 1945." in *Jüdische Literatur und Kultur in Grossbritannien und den USA nach 1945.* Beate Neumeier, ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. 141-157.

Hezer, Catherine. 2002. "Shoah Survivors and the Second Generation in American Jewish Writing: Bernard Malamud, Rebecca Goldstein, Thane Rosenbaum." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 9: 143-159.

Hirsch, Marianne. 1997. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory.* Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Hoffman, Eva. 2004. *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Aftermath of the Holocaust.* New York: Public Affairs.

Hoffman, Lawrence. 1996. *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Horowitz, Sara R. 1997. *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* New York: SUNY.

Hungerford, Amy. 1999. "Surviving Rego Park: Holocaust Theory from Art Spiegelman to Berel Lang." in *The Americanization of the Holocaust.* Hilene

Flanzbaum, ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 102-124.
Hyman, Paula. 1989. "The Modern Jewish Family: Image and Reality." in *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory.* David Kraemer, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 179-193.
Hyman, Paula. 1995. *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: Roles and Representations of Women.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.
Jay, Nancy. *Throughout Your Generations Forever.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
Klingenstein, Susanne. 1992. "Destructive Intimacy: The Shoah Between Mother and Daughter in Fictions by Cynthia Ozick, Norma Rosen and Rebecca Goldstein." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 11 (2): 162-173.
Lehmann, Sophia. 1998. "'And Here [Their] Troubles Began': The Legacy of the Holocaust in the Writing of Cynthia Ozick, Art Spiegelman, and Philip Roth." *Clio* 28 (Fall): 29-52.
Lyles, Lois. 1999. "Let my Daughter Go: the Jewish Mother and the Black Mother in Novels about Catastrophe and Bondage." *Shofar* 17 (2): 102-109.
Mintz, Jacqueline A. 1978. "The Myth of the Jewish Mother in Three Jewish American Female Writers." *Centennial Review* 22 (3): 346-355.
Norich, Anita. 1996. "Mother, Mother Tongue and Motherland: theFamily in Jewish American Fiction." *YIVO Annual* 23: 159-180.
Pesce, Sara. 2000. "Blowing up the Jewish Mother: Philip Roths' 'Portnoy's Complaint' and Woody Allen's 'Oedipus Wrecks." *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 17 (2): 527-535.
Pitock, Todd. 1995. "Stereotyping the 'Jewish American Mother': Portnoy's Complaint Revisited." *Jewish Affairs* 50 (1): 61-65.
Rosenbaum, Thane. *Second Hand Smoke.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
Rothbell, G. 1986. "The Jewish Mother: Social Construction of a Popular Image." *The Jewish Family: Myths and Realities.* Steven Cohen and Paula Hyman, eds. New York and London: Holmes and Meir. 118-128.
Spiegelman, Art. 1991. *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began.* New York: Pantheon Books.
Waxman, Barbara Frey. 1988. "Jewish American Princesses, Their Mothers, and Feminist Psychology: A Rereading of Roth's 'Goodbye, Columbus.'" *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 7 (1): 90-104.

Becky R. Lee

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Motherhood in Medieval Europe

In the eyes of the medieval Christian Church it was a woman's duty to share her husband's bed and to bear his children. Yet, those very duties put her soul in peril. Motherhood was a noble vocation, but becoming a mother, that is, engaging in sexual intercourse, and bearing and birthing children, was fraught with spiritual dangers. "Between a Rock and Hard Place" examines this contradiction at the heart of medieval European motherhood, and explores some of the ways women negotiated their way through those conflicting values and expectations.

In her spiritual autobiography, Margery Kempe, a fifteenth-century English woman, and mother of fourteen children, records conversations between herself and Jesus. In one conversation, Jesus informs her that she is pregnant once again. Margery is appalled, and responds to the news by bewailing her married sexuality. "Lord," she wails, "I am not worthy to hear you speak, and still to make love with my husband, even though it is great pain and great distress to me" (1985: 84, ch. I.21). Margery, along with her contemporaries, was caught between a rock and a hard place. In the eyes of the medieval Christian Church it was a woman's duty to share her husband's bed and bear his children. Yet, those very duties put her soul in peril. Motherhood was a noble vocation, but becoming a mother, that is, engaging in sexual intercourse, and bearing and birthing children, were fraught with spiritual dangers (see Atkinson, 1991). In the following pages, I examine this contradiction at the heart of medieval European motherhood, and explore some of the ways women negotiated their way through those conflicting values and expectations.

Margery's dilemma has its roots in the earliest days of Christianity. The early church valued virginity both as a sign of contradiction amidst, what it characterised as, the lax morals of the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity,

and as a sign of faith in Christ's anticipated return (see Zizioulas, 1985: 23-43). The letters of Paul are particularly instructive in this regard. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages both men and women to live as if they are unmarried because the world as they know it is passing away. In that letter, he describes the unmarried woman as being "anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit" (I Cor. 7:34 *New Revised Standard Version*). The married woman, on the other hand, is preoccupied with less noble concerns; she is "anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband."

When Christ did not return as quickly as was anticipated, the Church Fathers turned their attention to the question of how to live the Christian life in this world. They wrote at length about sexuality and family life. Here, they embraced the influence of the Greco-Roman world, framing their discussions of sexuality and family life within Platonic and Neo-Platonic dualism, separating the spiritual from the material, identifying women's procreative bodies as imperfect, corrupt and corrupting (see Atkinson, 1983b). Holiness continued to be equated with virginity. Margery Kempe attests to the fact that this equation persisted into the late middle ages when she bemoans the loss of her virginity in another conversation with Jesus:

> Because I am no virgin, lack of virginity is now great sorrow to me. I think I wish I had been killed as soon as I was taken from the [baptismal] font, so that I should never have displeased you, and then, blessed Lord, you would have had my virginity without end. (Kempe, 1985: 86, ch. I.22)

Christianity did provide opportunities for women to live celibate lives—as nuns, recluses, and anchoresses. But the majority of women did not have the necessary financial resources and family permission to pursue them. Most women were obliged to marry. And good Christian wives could not deny their husbands their conjugal rights. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul exhorts husbands and wives to give to each other their conjugal rights. "Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7: 5 NRSV). This obligation to pay the marriage debt, as it was called, became enshrined in canon law. Both husband and wife were bound by it. If one partner desired to forego her or his sexual relationship in order to pursue the better way, a life of celibate holiness, she or he had to obtain the agreement of her or his partner.

Margery finally obtained this permission after twenty years of marriage and fourteen children.

> It happened on Friday, Midsummer Eve, in very hot weather—as this creature was coming from York carrying a bottle of beer in her hand,

> and her husband a cake tucked inside his clothes against his chest....
> (Kempe, 1985: 58, ch. I.11)

As they walked along her husband John asked Margery what she would do if a highway robber came and threatened to strike off his head unless he made love to her. They continued walking toward their destination as they debated the merits of the vow of chastity she so desired. After some very harsh words and hard bargaining he finally consented. In return, Margery agreed to pay his debts, continue to sleep in his bed, and to share his table on Fridays instead of fasting as she was accustomed to doing. Not all husbands were so accommodating.

Neither was celibacy every woman's cup of tea. Even Margery Kempe, despite her protestations to the contrary, appears to have enjoyed sex. She tells us that early in her pursuit of holiness, she was tempted to commit adultery with a man who propositioned her outside a church (see Kempe, 1985: 49-50, ch. I.4). Later, after her vow of chastity, she describes being distracted by obscene thoughts and visions for twelve days. She confesses that she found these sights and thoughts "delicious to her against her will" (Kempe, 1985: 184, ch. I.59). And most tellingly, Margery admits to having had "very many delectable thoughts, physical lust, and inordinate love" (Kempe, 1985: 221, ch. I.76) for her husband's body.

Margery Kempe was a controversial figure in her day, and she continues to be in ours. Scholars debate her motives and her place in the Christian mystical tradition (e.g. see Glascoe, 1993: 268-319; Neaman, 1988), and they question the authorship of her spiritual autobiography (e.g. see Hirsh, 1975). They do agree however that *The Book of Margery Kempe* reflects her times. Although Margery's behaviour and her piety were somewhat extreme, the sentiments she expresses conformed to the understanding of her age, and would have been shared by her friends and neighbours.

While Margery's response to the dilemma of medieval motherhood was a bit unusual, her claim to mysticism was not. Women have always found mysticism a space within which to resist and negotiate the constraints placed upon them (see Atkinson, 1983a: 157-194). Mystical experience is direct unmediated experience of God, circumventing accepted religious, social and gender hierarchies. What was unusual about Margery was that she set about pursuing a career as a mystic and a pilgrim with her husband and children in tow, figuratively if not always literally (see Atkinson, 1983a: 39-66). While still living with her husband, Margery travelled around England, Italy and the Holy Land (present-day Israel) in virginal white to consult holy monks, priests and anchoresses about her visions and conversations with Jesus. One scholar complains that Margery's claim to a mystical vocation was really a ploy on her part so that she could travel, limit the number of children she bore and hobnob with the rich and famous (Neaman, 1988: 25-7). Others suggest that her claims to mystical experience enabled her to reconcile holiness and motherhood. And

indeed, throughout her spiritual autobiography, we hear God encourage Margery to integrate her married life with the pursuit of holiness. At one point in her spiritual journey, Margery tells us that Jesus assured her of a place in heaven and then he asked her whom she would have as her companion there. She requested that her spiritual director accompany her. At this, Jesus asked, "Why do you ask for him more than your own father or your husband?" (Kempe, 1985: 55, ch. I.8). Margery also recounts that when she and her husband were living apart after their vow of chastity, her husband had a serious accident. She was reluctant to take him home and look after him because it would interfere with her devotions and ministrations to the Lord (see Kempe, 1985: 220, ch. I.76). But Jesus insisted that she care for her husband, reassuring her that in doing so she also served him. We see this repeatedly throughout her book. Margery, reflecting the dominant values of her day, rejects her wifely duties and maternal affections in order to pursue holiness. Jesus responds by insisting that those same duties and affections are the means to holiness. By the end of her account, we can only conclude that despite her ambivalence, Margery was convinced that "God loves wives also" (Kempe, 1985: 84, ch. I.21), that performing wifely duties, including engaging in sexual intercourse, and bearing and birthing children was no obstacle to holiness.

Margery Kempe authored her spiritual autobiography for the edification and instruction of others. But most medieval wives and mothers found more mundane ways to manoeuvre within the conflicting values and expectations confronting them. One of the places or spaces in which they did so was a popular childbirth ritual known in that day as the purification of women after childbirth, more commonly spoken of today as churching. From the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries in England and Europe it was customary for a new mother to go to her parish church with a group of her women relatives, friends and neighbours some four to six weeks after having given birth to receive a blessing. Before mass, the new mother would kneel at the door of the church with a candle in her hand. There the priest would greet her, sprinkle her with holy water while reciting a psalm and a prayer, and then take her by the hand to lead her into the church.

This rite concluded a woman's puerperal confinement. In medieval England and Europe, a woman customarily retreated from normal society in the latter stages of her pregnancy to be tended by the local midwife and a company of her women relatives, friends and neighbours until her purification (see Wilson, 1990: 70-78; Cressy, 1997: 201-05). During that time, which lasted approximately six weeks, the pregnant and newly-delivered woman was exempt, or prohibited, from her normal duties and obligations, including household tasks like cooking and marketing, and sexual relations with her husband. Instead, she and her companions gathered in the birthing chamber where they gossiped and ate special food and drink. Folk wisdom held that during pregnancy and while she was experiencing post-partum bleeding, a woman was more susceptible to the influence of the devil, in danger herself and

a threat to those around her (see Karant-Nunn, 1997: 83). The Church considered her defiled by the sexual act made obvious by her pregnancy.

Participation in this ritual purification after childbirth reinforced those negative stereotypes. The postures and movements prescribed for the newly-delivered mother in the purification rite configure the maternal body as unclean, impure and dangerous (for the rubrics of the rite see Henderson, 1875: xix, 23, 213-14). The new mother kneels outside the door of the church, with a candle in her hand, in an attitude of supplication. Before admitting her to the church, the priest stands over her, recites a psalm and several prayers, and then sprinkles her with holy water. Only after this symbolic rebaptism does he extend his right hand to her, raise her to her feet, and lead her across the threshold into the church. She then proceeds to a special pew reserved for her and her female cohort, called the childwife pew, separating them from the rest of the congregation until the final blessing of the mass which completes the purification.

But even as the purification rite reinforced the notion of the maternal body as unclean, impure and dangerous, it also provided a forum in which that gender stereotype could be resisted and reinterpreted. Although the childwife pew served as a fence, segregating the new mother from the rest of the congregation, it was also a place of honour. After having been welcomed at the door of the church and led over the threshold, the new mother and her company of women processed to the childwife pew at the front of the church, traditionally a place of honour and prestige. Although the ritual actions of this rite reinforced the impurity of the maternal body, the psalms and prayers recited by the whole congregation on her behalf are ones of thanksgiving for her fertility and safe delivery, and petitions for her continued safety in this life and the next. The only other time a woman was recognised and celebrated publicly like this was her first marriage (Karant-Nunn, 1997: 85).

The new mother's companions were also prominent in the public eye during the purification rite. A pregnant and newly-delivered woman was surrounded by a company of women, who by virtue of their own status as wives and mothers were immune to the spiritual dangers posed by her maternal body. Within that company, normative gender relations were turned upside down (see Wilson, 1990: 85-93). The midwife ruled the birthing chamber. The pregnant woman's husband was subject to her authority in his own home. The midwife along with the other female companions also ensured that he took care of the household while his wife rested and recuperated. They also safeguarded the new mother's right to refuse intercourse until the time of her purification. The midwife also had sacred power, for she was empowered to baptise dying infants (see Gibson, 1996: 150). This not only confounded the boundaries between male and female gender roles, but also the distinction between clergy and laity.

When the new mother and her cohort of women processed to the door of the church and sat in the childwife pew on her purification day, their subversion

of the prevailing gender roles and stereotypes was brought out of the privacy of the birthing chamber into the public forum. The rite of the purification of a woman after childbirth provided a forum in which the society of women occasioned by pregnancy and delivery was recognised. Its exemption from everyday routines, and the roles of authority and leadership women played within that society were validated (see Wilson, 1990: 92; Gibson, 1996: 149).

In assuming their place in the childwife pew, medieval women allowed themselves to be fenced off, reinforcing the notion of the maternal body as impure and dangerous. At the same time however, being set apart allowed the puerperal woman and her female companions a privileged place and a space within which to express and explore alternative understandings of the maternal body, the puerperal woman, and women's individual and collective place. The ambivalence of medieval Christianity toward the maternal body placed medieval mothers between a rock and a hard place. However that ambivalence also allowed them opportunities to resist, subvert and manoeuvre within the conflicting expectations and values of their day.

A version of this paper was presented at the 7th Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Mothering at York University, October 24-26, 2003.

References

Atkinson, Clarissa W. 1983a. *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Atkinson, Clarissa W. 1983b. "'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass': The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages." *Journal of Family History* 8: 131-142.

Atkinson, Clarissa W. 1991. *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Cressy, David. 1997. "Purification, Thanksgiving, and the Churching of Women." *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 197-229.

Gibson, Gail McMurray. 1996. "Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theater." *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England.* Eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace. Medieval Cultures, 9. Minneaplois: University of Minnesota Press. 139-154.

Glascoe, Marion. 1993. *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith.* London and New York: Longman. 268-319.

Henderson, W. G., ed. 1875. *Manuale et processionale ad usum insignis ecclesiae Eboracensis.* Surtees Society, 63. Andrews & Co.

Hirsh, J. C. 1975. "Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*." *Medium Aevum* 44: 145-150.

Karant-Nunn, Susan C. 1997. "Churching, a Women's Rite." *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany.* London and New York: Routledge. 72-90.

Kempe, Margery. 1985. *The Book of Margery Kempe.* Trans. B.A. Windeatt. London: Penguin.

Neaman, J. S. 1988. "Potentiation, Elevation, Acceleration: Prerogatives of Women Mystics." *Mystics Quarterly* 14: 22-31.

Wilson, Adrian. 1990. "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation." *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren.* Ed. Valerie Fildes. London and New York: Routledge. 68-107.

Zizioulas, John D. 1985. "The Early Christian Community." *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century.* Eds. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff. World Spirituality, 16. New York: Crossroad. 23-43.

Julieanna Frost

Remembering Mum Beall

This article explores the topic of mothers as religious leaders by reviewing the life of Pastor M.D. Beall. M.D. Beall (1896-1979) was born Myrtle Dorothea Monville in the Upper Peninsula town of Hubbell, Michigan. She was ordained by the Assemblies of God in 1933 and in 1934 founded one of the oldest Pentecostal churches in Michigan. The Bethesda Missionary Temple (now Bethesda Christian Church) located at Nevada and Van Dyke in Detroit grew from her Sunday school. M.D. was also a 39 year-old mother of three children at this time. In 1934 female preachers were still considered an oddity in the United States. Notably all three of her children entered into church work. This paper will explore a brief history of her life and also mechanisms that she utilized to successfully combine the vocations of motherhood and ministry.

How would you cope if you believed that you had damned your children to hell?

M.D. Beall experienced just such a torment. Mum Beall, also called Sister Beall by her parishioners, started one of the first Pentecostal churches in Michigan in 1934. The Bethesda Missionary Temple located at Nevada and Van Dyke in Detroit grew from her Sunday school ministry located in an old tire shop. Her church also served as a center for the Latter Rain Revival Movement and Christians from various dominations attended Bethesda for her healing ministry. The seeds planted by M.D. from a Detroit storefront have grown into a congregation over 5,000 strong in Sterling Heights, as well as planting other non-denominational churches through its Bible Institute. M.D.'s path to becoming a minister was directly tied to her experience of motherhood. Briefly, I want to explore a history of her life and also the mechanisms that she utilized to successfully combine motherhood and the ministry.

Female religious leaders often have problems of visibility within the field of religious studies. Religious studies professor Ursula King notes:

> How much the study of religion as an academic discipline is still deeply rooted in androcentric framework which often remains unquestioned ... This marginality is particularly evident in the historiography of the discipline and in current academic teaching on religion where most courses operate a 'sexism of omission' which is not overcome by instituting separate courses on women and religion. (1995: 221)

In *The Cross-Cultural Study of Women* by Margot Duley and Mary Edwards, Karen Sinclair has also commented on this trend:

> Women's religious experiences have not been thoroughly studied and their contributions to religious life have been underestimated ... Yet all too often it is the masculine perspective that is solicited and then presented as typical and representative. More importantly, religious experiences are quite often private affairs, closed to public scrutiny. The inherently private nature of women's lives tends to reinforce the personal, confidential dimension of religious awareness. (qtd. in Duley and Edwards, 1986: 107)

When the historic achievements of a female minister are noted, it is easy to fall into the traditional, androcentric pattern of describing the chronology of her life as a pastor, while ignoring the importance of other roles to her life story. This type of omission fails to recognize, as Linda Wagner-Martin notes, "the primary definition of a woman's selfhood is likely to be this combined public-private identity.... Historically, most women lived within family households; even in this century, women who have gained public recognition have also run homes" (1994: 6). Much can be learned by not only knowing the public persona, but also the private persona of such women. What are the types of choices these women had to make in order to become a pastor? Choices such as when Mae Eleanor Frey made the decision to put her daughter in boarding school in order to evangelize full-time or when Alice Belle Garrigus chose blessed singleness in order to spread the gospel or when Aimee Semple McPherson left her second husband who was not supportive of her calling. The focus of this paper is to examine the challenges of combining the public identity of pastor with the private identity of parent. This examination will take the form of a case study of Pastor M.D. Beall.

M.D. Beall (nee Myrtle Dorothea Monville 1896) was born into a working-class immigrant family in the Upper Peninsula town of Hubbell, Michigan. She was ordained by the Assemblies of God in 1933 and in 1934 founded one of the oldest Pentecostal churches in Michigan. The Bethesda

Missionary Temple (now Bethesda Christian Church) located at Nevada and Van Dyke in Detroit grew from her Sunday school ministry. At this time female preachers were still considered an oddity.

M.D. was also a 39 year-old married mother of three young children at this time. She defied conventions further by beginning her ministry at perhaps the worst time for the financial security of her own family, during the Great Depression. Many women with similar educational and professional backgrounds would have picked a job that would actually help to bring in extra money to the family unit. However, M.D. had left middle-class aspirations behind to join the lowly-regarded Pentecostals and more importantly to trust that the Lord would provide for her if she would only follow him.

M.D. left the Upper Peninsula and arrived in Detroit in 1918 after attending Michigan Normal School (now Eastern Michigan University). Instead of teaching, M.D. decided that she could support herself better by working as a payroll clerk for the Palmer Bee Company. It was here in 1919 that she met Kansan Harry Lee Beall who was a millwrite contractor. They married in the Methodist Church in 1920 over the objections of both their families. The objections were due to religious differences. M.D. was Roman Catholic and Harry was raised Methodist. "They decided to marry, which was the end of the world for both sides of the family. The Methodists were adamantly against the Catholics as the Catholics were ... vice versa" (Beall, 2002). Her family and her Church ostracized her. Eventually, the families grew to accept the union after many years. M.D. and Harry had three children, Patricia (born 1922), James (born 1924) and Harry (born 1930).

It was with the birth of her children that M.D. began questioning her religious beliefs in earnest. She had attended parochial schools as a child and this had instilled in her a deep love and fear of God. From a Catholic understanding at that time, she had failed as a woman in her inability to marry a Catholic man and raise her children in the true faith. Her unbaptized children would be considered damned—a serious failure for a mother. It was difficult for M.D. to completely disregard this worldview. "She felt Catholic. And if she was Catholic, she knew she was living in sin and was in serious trouble. Her family ignored her. Her church ostracized her. Her soul felt heavy with guilt ... the little ones weren't responsible for their eternal agony. She was damning them forever" (Bethesda Christian Church, 2003). M.D. needed to determine if there were alternatives to the Catholic viewpoint that might hold a greater truth for her family. Without her husband (who was not particularly religious), M.D. attended the Methodist church with her children and taught Sunday school. She became an evangelist after having a pronounced conversion in the Methodist church that began after attending a prayer meeting. "She began to tell God of all her worries, fears, guilts, and heartaches. She prayed for her family and asked that they would be spared the hell for which they seemed intended. She offered her life to Him, if she could only know that heaven was with her. God told her that it was" (Bethesda Christian Church, 2003). M.D.'s conversion

experience was complete following a "close call after a goiter operation"; she then dedicated her life to full-time evangelism (Ward, 1964). She worked as a Sunday school teacher for both Methodist and Baptist churches. Her son James relates, "It was her teacher training background ... the thing that happened in her conversion more than anything else is that she seemed to gain a great understanding of the Bible. And could convey it, communicate it, and people wanted to hear her" (Beall, 2002). This gift for teaching continued to develop throughout her calling. Granddaughter Patricia Beall Finley emphasized that "she could get across what she wanted to get across in fewer words than anyone I ever knew. She would preach to 3,000 or 4,000 people and just hold them in the palm of her hand. You could hear a pin drop" (Volgenau, 1979).

M.D. also utilized this teaching gift with her own children. She stressed the importance of self-sufficiency. "I think that us kids were independent. We had a good house. We never had any problems whether mother was there or not" (Beall, 2002). Additionally, it was a blessing that her ministry grew gradually so that her family was able to adjust to the changes. M.D. had a very close relationship with all of her children. She listened to them and encouraged her children to develop and utilize their God-given gifts. She modeled for her children determination and faithfulness. For example, during the later years of the Depression her husband Harry lost his job. She did not leave her small ministry to take a wage-earning job, as many would in her precarious financial situation. She believed that God would provide as he promised her. This modeling greatly influenced her children. James states, "it was a privilege being her son, working with her and learning about the gifts of the spirit" (Beall, 2002). M.D.'s skills as a mother proved invaluable to Bethesda.

Her first church was located in an old storefront that had been a tire shop in Detroit. "Children who came to her little storefront during the Depression received besides spiritual food for their souls, new soles for their feet made from machine belts in a workshop in the back of the church" (Ward, 1964). In 1944, she added radio as an evangelistic tool. She served as "a woman's voice religiously in the Detroit area" until the mid-1950s (Beall, 2002). In addition, M.D. utilized other mediums to witness, such as a publishing operation, television program, and school. Her family helped oversee various aspects of the ministry. Harry Sr. focused upon the daily operations, Pastor Patricia focused upon the print ministry, Pastor James focused upon the radio ministry, and Pastor Harry focused upon the music ministry.

Following December 5, 1948, her church also served as a center of the Latter Rain Revival Movement. In 1948, "the movement began as a revival at Sharon Orphanage and schools in North Battleford, Saskatchewan among students assembled by former Pentecostal Assemblies ministers George Hawtin and P.G. Hunt and Four Square Gospel minister Herrick Holt" (Melton, 1996: 84). This healing revival spread from Canada to the United States through the evangelism of ministers such as Oral Roberts. The movement proclaimed the unity of the body of Christ along with the expectation that the

Second Coming would be soon (Riss, 1988: 112). This association would eventually lead M.D. to the decision to break with the Assemblies of God and Bethesda would become an independent church in 1950. M.D. added catechism and confirmation to the Pentecostal tradition at Bethesda. "I guess you would call her not quite a full-fledged Pentecostal because there was much more to it than speaking in tongues, which they insisted upon personally. We have no problem with it. It's in the Bible, but it is not the central issue" (Beall, 2002). I would trace these additions to M.D. drawing upon her Roman Catholic heritage.

Referred to by her parishioners as Pastor, Sister, or Mum Beall, M.D. continued preaching up until her death at the age of 84. Currently, son James is senior pastor with granddaughter Analee Beall Dunn as associate pastor. Pastor Dunn will be the successor of James. The seeds planted by M.D. Beall from a storefront Sunday school in Detroit have grown into a congregation over 5,000 strong in Sterling Heights.

So what support mechanisms can be identified that helped M.D. be successful as a mother and in a vocation that had few mentors for her? It was beneficial that M.D. had a background in the Pentecostal tradition. "Very early in their history the Pentecostals recognized the vital role that women could play in a spiritual awakening. They utilized them as pastors, evangelists, and missionaries" (Thomas Nichol, 1966: 63). Son James further highlights, "We come from a framework of scripture that many denominations will not touch. So here is the Apostle Peter standing on the day of Pentecost and saying now (in the last days) your sons and daughters will prophesy ... Jesus was a friend of women" (Beall, 2002). In this worldview, the gifts of the spirit are not confined to one sex. "All people—common people, young and old, housewives, laborers, officials—everyone was given the Spirits, not just religious officials or prophets, priests, and kings" (Jones, 1974: 27) leads the way for development of female preachers, such as Maria Woodworth Etter, Kathryn Kuhlman, and Maria Burgess.

According to Sherilyn Benvenuti, early Pentecostalism was focused upon servanthood instead of authority. "Authority is not derived through position alone, as some may assert, but rather is found in the individual who serves the body of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit" (1995: 231). It was the issue of authority that earlier lead M.D. to become dissatisfied with the Methodist Church. The Methodist elders seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time debating the qualifications of a prospective pastor. "One morning, as she listened to another of these discussions she heard a small voice in her ear say: Tell them it is not a minister they need to seek. They need to seek Me!" (Bethesda Christian Church, 2003). M.D. blurted this out to the astonished deacons. M.D. left the Methodist Church, after she and people were filled with the Holy Spirit in her classes and she was told by the administration that Methodists do not pray like that. She found that gifts of the Holy Spirit were similarly unwelcome at the Baptist Church. M.D. viewed

speaking in tongues as a gift from God. Theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether states that in these Pentecostal and Holiness movements, "the Spirit is no discriminator among persons on the basis of gender but can empower whomever it will. Ministry is proven by its gifts, not by its credentials" (1983: 197).

Another major area of assistance was her family. Son James recalls, "my dad was an independent Midwesterner ... he could cook, he could do anything. And so all of us took on much the same thing. We had a good house. We never had any problems whether mother was there or not" (Beall, 2002). Following the conversion of Harry Sr. in 1936, "he supervised building projects, repairs, banking, all the areas of support where Myrtle was weak. Between them they created a whole that was greater than either individual" (Bethesda Christian Church, 2003). All members of the family were involved and invested in the ministry.

Another support was her *other* family, her congregation. When M.D. needed help, she did not hesitate to accept assistance from members of Bethesda. When the ministry was struggling, members of Bethesda would assist in fundraising, as well as cooking meals for the Beall family. This was indicative of her practical personality. She very much viewed her church family as an extension of her home life. James describes his mother as,

> Firm, loving, trusting. That was very important. Consistent .... I think one of her great reasons for success was that she was not only Sister Beall, but she was Mum Beall. She was a mother to the congregation ... . If she found out you (as a congregation member) were doing wrong, you could expect to be called in to talk. But kids felt good about her. They wanted to talk to her. She was a no nonsense type of person. (Beall, 2002)

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, was M.D.'s strong faith. In many instances throughout her life she obeyed God's direction even when it seemed crazy to others. M.D. could discern God's will for her and trusted the messages she received from Him. Major life decisions, such a marrying Harry, leaving the Methodist Church, starting her own church, the involvement of her family with Bethesda, were based upon her love and submission to God. One good example of this was when she talked a local businessman into buying a building for her tabernacle but did not have property for this building. The businessman was incensed by the irrationality of it all. M.D. replied, "I'm just a woman, and I don't do things the way men do. I just obeyed God and did what He told me. Since God told me about the building. God must know about the lots" (Bethesda Christian Church, 2003). M.D. dedicated her life to serving God. She believed that God had put an anointing on her life. Granddaughter Patricia Beall Finley stated, "The Lord told her to build an armory where people could come in, be taught" (Volgenau, 1979).

This belief would provide support to her unusual combination of vocations, motherhood and the ministry. She did not worry about the contradictions because from her worldview the Lord was with her.

In conclusion, in this brief history of M.D. Beall's life I have attempted to expand the historiography of religion to work toward the goal of theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether for "a working paradigm of the human situation drawn from a sufficiently large sample of experience that can eventually stimulate dialogue and lead to yet a further synthesis" (1983: 21). Women of all classes, races, ages, orientations, and religious organizations need to be researched and written about by scholars. King stresses that "many other examples of scholarly production in religious studies—articles, monographs, reference and text books—provide continuing evidence of the marginality, if not the invisibility, of women" (1995: 221). This article in its small way attempts to combat what King calls the "sexism of omission." This work also explores the support mechanisms of religious tradition, family, congregation, and faith that M.D. utilized to successfully combine motherhood and the ministry. Knowledge of these areas of support would be helpful to other wo/men that are focused on a life of service. Such models in the ministry can provide beneficial guides to wo/men who receive the call. Perhaps Pastor James Beall describes Mum Beall best when he said at her Memorial Service in 1979, "A Mother in Israel indeed. You started so many things through her Lord ... a trailblazer in every way" (Beall, 1979).

References

Beall, James. 2002. Interview by author. Bethesda Christian Church, Sterling Heights, Michigan, 17 July.

Beall, James. 1979. Memorial Service for M.D. Beall. Cassette provided by James Beall.

Benvenuti, Sherilyn. 1995. "Anoited, Gifted, and Called: Pentecostal Women in Ministry." *The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 17 (1) (Spring 1): 231.

Bethesda Christian Church. 2003. Available online: www.bethesda christianchurch.org; Accessed 28 April 2003.

Duley, Margot and Mary Edwards, eds. 1986. *The Cross-Cultural Study of Women*. New York: The Feminist Press.

Jones, James W. 1974. *Filled With New Wine*. New York: Harper & Row.

King, Ursula, ed. 1995. *Religion and Gender*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Melton, Gordon, ed. 1996. *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Detroit: Gale Research.

Radford Ruether, Rosemary. 1983. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Riss, Richard. 1988. *A Survey of 20th Century Revival Movements in North*

America. Peabody: Hendrickson Publications.
Thomas Nichol, John. 1966. *Pentecostalism.* New York: Harper & Row.
Wagner-Martin, Linda. 1994. *Telling Women's Lives*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
Ward, Hiley. 1964. "She Turned a Tire Shop into a Church." *Detroit Free Press* 13 June.
Volgenau, Gerald. 1979. "Evangelist Myrtle Beall Dies." *Detroit Free Press* 21 September.

Carol B. Duncan

Hard Labour
Religion, Sexuality and the Pregnant Body in the African Diaspora

With specific reference to selected works of authors, Nalo Hopkinson (1998), Octavia E. Butler (1993) and filmmaker, Julie Dash (1991), this paper discusses images of pregnancy in African diasporic S/F (speculative fact and fiction) narratives in film and literature. Contravening popular stereotypes of black female pregnant bodies as overly fecund, wild and animalistic, pregnancy and pregnant, black women as portrayed by these Hopkinson, Butler and Dash instead symbolize transformative hope in their families and communities.

"She nah have no ambition. She nah have no ambition at all, at all, at all." This phrase is a short form in the anglo-Caribbean communities with which I am familiar for speaking of a particular type of shame. "She nah have no ambition. Insteada' study school, she-a study man." For on the one hand, the roundedness of the school girl's belly is a visible, tangible sign of her sexual and moral agency, transgression and/or victimization. On the other hand, however, children, parenting and motherhood, in particular, are traditionally highly valued within African and African-Caribbean societies and are the occasions for religious-based individual and familial celebrations. In societies where time is cyclical and circular and ancestorship of one form or the other has influenced communitarian values, interpretations of Christianity and the development of New World African religions such as *santería* and *vodun*, children are seen as the link between the present generation, the ancestors and the future. As Nana Peazant, the elder in Julie Dash's (1991) film, *Daughters of the Dust*, noted to a disillusioned great-grandson: "The ancestor and the womb, they one." Therefore, the juxtaposition of the devalued pregnant black female body as a sign of "shame" and sexual transgression rooted in experiences of sexual exploitation or willful choices that contravene community norms against the high value of

parenthood is a highly contested terrain.

In this paper, I will explore this contradictory positioning of black women in relation to pregnancy as represented by writers, Octavia E. Butler and Nalo Hopkinson and film-maker Julie Dash. I have focused on these artists in their works which contain key characters who are young, pregnant black women because the narratives redeem the experiences of pregnant, black women, especially those who are located in marginalized social, economic and political contexts. The economic, political and psychic crises that the characters undergo and resolve are reflective of the larger family structure or community in which they reside. In their redemption and crisis resolution, the women speak ancestral wisdom and serve as channels, though reluctantly, for African-based deities. They are cast in the role of sage and founder of a religion in the case of Butler's Lauren Oya Olamina in *Parable of the Sower* (1993), healer and warrior in the instance of Ti-Jeanne, the reluctant adversary of a drug lord in a post-apocalyptic Toronto in Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), and redemptive mother, Eula-Yemaya, in Julie Dash's groundbreaking film, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991).

Stereotypes of black women and pregnancy

Mothering and motherhood for black women in the Americas has been frought with contradictions. While continental African and African diasporic cultures are overwhelmingly child-centric and value parenthood, the legacy of chattel slavery created a social context in which pregnancy and child-rearing meant not only reproduction but also profit. Enslaved black women of child-bearing age thus occupied a unique role as property which could reproduce itself thus adding to the economic value of the individual woman. As scholars such as cultural critic and activist Angela Davis in *Women, Race and Class* (1983) and historian Barbara Bush in her study of slave women in the Caribbean (1990) have noted, enslaved black women were victimized in ways that were particular to their gender in slaveholding societies. The narratives of women such as Harriet Jacobs (who wrote under the pseudonym Linda Brent) (2001 [1861]) who was enslaved in the United States, and Mary Prince (1993) enslaved in the Caribbean and England in the nineteenth century, attest to black women's sexual exploitation.

This exploitation and torture was so endemic that in a peculiar twist under an otherwise deeply patriarchal system, the status of children born in slave societies was determined not by the father but by the mother. In this way, children born to enslaved women whose fathers were free, in some cases, they were the owners of these women, would automatically inherit the enslaved status of the mother thus maintaining the status quo.

"Welfare queen," drawing unearned and unwisely spent money of "taxpayers," "unwed mother" and "crack ho" or other substance-addicted mother, are just a few of the latest North American-based incarnations of images of black women as "unfit," "maladjusted" and otherwise dangerous, bad mothers.

These contemporary stereotypes of bad, black mothers draw on older nineteenth-century images of black motherhood and black women's sexuality, in particular, such as the Sapphire (an angry, scheming, conniving, bitchy woman) and Jezebel (sexual siren and tempter of white men to their moral doom) which have their roots in American Old South racial iconography (Jewel, 1993).

These images stand in stark contrast to the asexual, subservient mammy whose maternal role is devoted sacrifice to the family who owns her. Usually desexed, mammy's enlarged breasts could be interpreted as symbols of wet-nursing prevalent during the antebellum U.S. south. These images represent pregnancy not as a valued maternal state but rather as a signifier of defilement, sexual promiscuity and individual and communal shame for the woman, her family and the black community at large. Continuing in this vein, the baby that is subsequently birthed is not a symbol of rebirth, continuity and the next generation but of the reproduction of a social problem. Thus, black children from this perspective are marked as social problem for which the society will pay in monetary, psychic and other terms.

Given the pervasiveness of this type of stereotyping, it is not surprising, then, that for many black girls growing up in North America and elsewhere in the African Diaspora, one of the most deeply entrenched messages concerning sexuality and the body is shame associated with pregnancy at an early age, especially compounded with the absence of a committed partner and/or marriage. Aside from the economic, social and emotional challenges that parenting a child at an early age present, overwhelmingly, the pregnancy itself becomes a symbol of individual shame for the girl, her family and the larger black community.

No longer "ruint": the redemption of the black female pregnant body

In their works, Butler (1993), Hopkinson (1998) and Dash (1991) proclaim a redemptive moment by saying: "hail the pregnant, suffering, female black body" for the perspective of the "least of these" (to use a phrase from Black Church talk) holds important lessons for the black community, at large, and potentially the wider society. This is especially the case in Dash's film when the character Eula, a young newly-wed and heavily pregnant woman who has been "forced" (that's the term used in the film) by a white man experiences rejection from her husband Eli and faces a life of being "ruint." As a "ruint" woman, she is socially and morally outcast and a perpetual victim blamed for her own victimization within the eyes not only of the larger white society but within her own family. In a pivotal scene Eula's husband Eli confronts his great-grandmother, Nana Peazant, who at over 100 years old in 1902 is a witness of the nineteenth century, slavery, its ending and the beginning of a new century of hope for her family. Nana tries to teach Eli that all children are sent by the ancestors and that the ancestors "wouldn't send no baby that wasn't your own."

All three artists work in speculative genres of fiction in literature and film. That is to say that through invention and a conscious incorporation of the speculative and fantastical—events and characters that decidedly outside of the normal and every day—they explore both historical and contemporary social realities of black people in the African Diaspora. To borrow Starhawk's (1988) term, they dare to "dream the dark" of contemporary and historical black realities in their narratives. That "dark" encompasses the existential predicament of enslaved people which is the quest for freedom and the full expression of humanity. The dark is the contradictory bind of being both human yet classified as property. The description of this predicament is one of the central themes of the New World African American literature that began with the slave narratives. The "dark" are also those places of sanctuary in black community life described by bell hooks in her essay, "Dreaming Ourselves Dark and Lovely" (1993) as reservoirs of knowledge based on African-American folkways and folk knowledge.

Butler (1993) and Hopkinson (1998) tap into those reservoirs through the subgenre of apocalyptic science fiction. The hallmark of this genre are stories in which contemporary North American societies are depicted as either being on the brink of, or shortly after events which have the potential for complete destruction and yet which hold the promise of renewal and rebirth. Theologian Emilie Townes in her book, *In a Blaze of Glory* (1995), describes this as the eschatological dimension of apocalypse that is radically hopeful and evident in black religious experiences of Christianity.

Toronto-based writer, Nalo Hopkinson (1998), for instance, refers to her work as "fabulist fiction"—that is to say that her works utilize the characters, fables, and folklore of African-Caribbean culture refracted through the narrative conventions of apocalyptic science fiction. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Hopkinson tells the tale of Ti-Jeanne, a young woman, in her 20s living in a post-apocalyptic early twenty-first century Toronto. She is the mother of an unnamed infant baby boy and the reluctant heir to a spiritual legacy passed on from her grandmother, Gros-Jeanne. Weaving elements from Yoruban *orisha*, Haitian *vodun* and Jamaican *pocomania* together, Hopkinson creates a Caribbean diasporic religion uniquely responsive to the life situations of migratory Caribbean peoples in Toronto. Through the course of the novel, Ti-Jeanne discovers that she is a child of the powerful Haitian vodun *lwa*, Baron Samedi, the *lwa* of the cemetery and lord of the gateway between life and death. She draws on his power and that of Yoruban orisha and her ancestors to confront evil represented by her own father a powerful drug dealer, Rudy. In a stroke of genius, the CN tower becomes the centre pole through which these ancestral spirits and gods are channeled in the novel's final showdown.

Octavia E. Butler's *oeuvre* explores African-American historical and contemporary experiences through the lens of speculative fiction. Evident in her short stories and novels such as *Wildseed* (1980) and *Parable of the Sower* (1993) is a preoccupation with genetics, family structure and reproduction. In

her three well-known series: the xenogenesis series, the parable novels and the patternist series, these themes are explored in ways which both explicitly and implicitly reference "race," reproduction, family structure and colonialism in the United States. In *Wildseed*, for example, we meet Anyanwu, a shapeshifting woman whose real body is young and teenaged while she is three centuries old. The mother of generations of transplanted Africans in the Americas, Anyanwu serves as a witness to an African past, the Middle Passage voyage across the Atlantic from Africa to the Americas and the building of communities in the Americas. Together with Doro, a masculine spirit force who uses the bodies of human hosts, she is a nation mother, ancestor and goddess to her people.

Lauren Oya Olamina is the 15 year old protagonist of *Parable of the Sower*. Her age echoes Harriet Jacobs' age of awakening to sexed and gendered realities within the household of the family who owned her as a young girl. After fleeing her walled city in a post-apocalyptic early twenty-first century United States, she heads north seeking freedom. Echoing the historic treks of the Underground Railroad, Lauren's journey north is told through a first person narrative in her journal. She becomes the creator of a new religion, Earthseed, which in its "Everything Changes" echoes some of the tenets of contemporary earth-based religions. Lauren bears the name of the Yoruba orisha of change, Oya, a goddess associated with rainstorms, fast moving water and wind. She is the daughter of a drug-addicted woman whose drug use produced hyperempathy in Lauren. She is able to experience on a physical and emotional level the experiences of animals and humans simply by witnessing. In this way, Octavia E. Butler's story finds value in the parallel of our own time, crack-addicted babies. What is to become of these children as they grow up? Butler's story points to the "gifts" of babies born to drug-addicted mothers as potent mirrors.

Julie Dash's acclaimed film, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), is fabulist in the way that Hopkinson uses the term through its use of Gullah language, culture and religion in exploring themes of African-American women's identities, family histories and the making of the African Diaspora itself. The film shifts backwards and forwards in time from the antebellum slavery period through to story's current day, the year 1902. Narrated by Eula's unborn child, the film is both backward and forward-looking at the Peazant family's history encompassing in the telling of that one family's story, the story of the creation of the African Diaspora. Eula is a young, pregnant black woman whose dilemma embodies the "ruin" of black women: Eula was "forced" by a white man shortly after her marriage to Eli. The event and her refusing to tell the identity of her rapist to her husband threatens the stability of their marriage. Eula is pregnant and her husband is unsure of the paternity of the child. She refuses to disclose the identity of her rapist for doing so would mean that her husband would have a target at which to exact revenge resulting ultimately in his own retaliatory death. Eula shares the matriarch Nana Peazant's view that "the ancestors and the womb are one." Eli, however, is unsure. The Unborn Child of Eula's pregnancy serves as the film's narrator. She is the first of the last generation and

her special bond is her connection to her great-great-grandmother, the last of the first generation, the 100-year-old Nana Peazant.

In a pivotal scene, Eula confronts her family about their refusal to accept a long-absent, visiting member, Yellow Mary because they deem her "ruint." She confronts the shame, fear and loathing that form the basis of the judgment of being a "ruint" woman, a woman whose sin and shame forever ban her from full community membership. In her countenance and style of address, Eula's lament serves as intercessory prayer and plea for not only herself and Yellow Mary but for all black women "ruint" by poverty, sexism and racism. Her body doubles over with what appears to be an experience of spirit possession. The physical setting of the seaside and the issues with which she deals suggests that Yemaya, the ocean mother of the orisha religion, manifested in Eula and spoke to her family.

Conclusion

In the works of writers Nalo Hopkinson (1998) and Octavia E. Butler (1993) and film-maker, Julie Dash (1991), the dignity and humanity of black women as moral and sexual subjects is redeemed through placing the experiences of the "ruint" represented by a young pregnant woman at the centre of the story. Like the works of writers Toni Morrison (1987) and Alice Walker (1982), the works of these black women writers and filmmaker take up the confessional and testimonial aspect of slave narratives, the first texts in the African-American literary tradition. Like other speculative texts in the African Diasporic literary and cinematic traditions (cf. Charles Burnett's *To Sleep With Anger* [1990]), these texts take up the Middle Passage, the trans-Atlantic crossing from Africa to the Americas, as a cultural moment which continues to resonate in contemporary black women's life experiences.

References

Burnett, Charles (director and writer). 1990. *To Sleep With Anger* [videorecording].

Bush, Barbara. 1990. *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838*. Kingston: Heinemann Caribbean.

Butler, Octavia E. 1993. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Butler, Octavia E. 1980. *Wild Seed*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Dash, Julie (producer, director and writer). 1991. *Daughters of the Dust* [videorecording]. America Playhouse Theatrical Films; a Geesha Girls Production.

Davis, Angela Y. 1983. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage Books.

Hopkinson, Nalo. 1998. *Brown Girl in the Ring*. New York: Warner Books.

hooks, bell. 1993. *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*. Toronto: Between The Lines.

Jacobs, Harriet. 2001 [1861]. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

Jewel, K. Sue. 1993. *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of U.S. Social Policy.* London: Routledge.

Morrison, Toni. 1987. *Beloved.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Prince, Mary. 1993. *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Starhawk. 1988. *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

Townes, Emilie. 1995. *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Walker, Alice. 1982. *The Color Purple.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Folio

Photographer unknown, vintage photograph, private collection of Joe Paczuski

Editor's Notes

In this issue of *Folio*, I am pleased to introduce the work of Martha Vertreace-Doody, excerpts from her book length manuscript titled *In this Glad Hour*. I have included Vertreace-Doody's introductory essay as an eloquent preface to her poems. Her introduction provides us with insight into the research and creative process of the poet. Additionally, through the introduction, the reader is given significant insight into the historical context and inspiration for the creative work inspired by the poet's discovery of *The Diary of Mrs. Joseph Duncan* (Elizabeth Caldwell Smith), whose life story is explored in the poems. Elizabeth was born in 1808 in New York and her diary begins in her teenage years in Newark, New Jersey, ending in 1848. Her diary records the daily life of women and the shifts in her life as she moved from a girlhood of privilege and wealth to a life as a pioneer woman and wife of an Illinois congressman. Vertreace-Doody's beautiful, moving poems have a lyric sensibility that is counter-pointed by a skillful precision with language. The poems invite the reader on a fascinating journey with Elizabeth Caldwell Smith, the mother of ten children; the reader is introduced to a woman of a different time and place, a woman whose encounters with motherhood are vividly reconstructed and powerfully re-imagined through a twenty-first century poet's words.

—Rishma Dunlop

Martha Modena Vertreace-Doody

In this Glad Hour

Morning. The sun sweeps above Lake Michigan, glazing the high-rises with a newborn look, as fresh as if to prove the words of the psalmist: "At night there are tears; but joy comes with dawn." These poems tell part of the story of a remarkable woman, Mrs. Joseph Duncan, née Elizabeth Caldwell Smith, or rather, of my attempt—perhaps obsession—to find her.

The adventure begins with a writer's restlessness to be writing, although I did not have a focus that would summon thoughts and feelings to words, and words to paper. Enter the "triggering town," Springfield, Illinois where I went to present a workshop on teaching poetry. I told the audience that a poem need not—or perhaps must not—emerge solely from the poet; that ideas often present themselves precisely because they exist in a realm separate from the poet's concerns. Predictably, in writing from these alien ideas, the poet may experience the common ground where both the poet and the idea stand face to face. The idea becomes the "dark glass," the clouded mirror which reflects the poet's face.

Certainly I never expected Springfield to be a source of poems for me.

Several months ago, as poet-in-residence at Kennedy-King College, I conducted a workshop on poetry for the Illinois Association for Teachers of English. While spending the afternoon downtown at Prairie Bookstore after my presentation, I discovered a journal, written by a little-known woman. I decided that I wanted to write a series of poems as a vehicle for my experiencing her life and times.

The promise as challenge I set before me: to search for a journal of a woman from another age, whose life was unknown to me, someone about whom I had not heard a lot of stories. I wanted to find someone who was not racist, sexist, or any other more tiresome "-ist." After all, my writing poems about her world

would involve our living together. Her words would be with me on the bus going to school, at my kitchen table eating my husband Tim's home-baked bread, in bed with me waiting for him to complete his evening ablutions.

When I uncovered the *Diary of Mrs. Joseph Duncan* (Elizabeth Caldwell Smith) on a bottom shelf under a pile of high school yearbooks in the Illinois room, I was absolutely uninterested in reading about the woman who became First Lady of Illinois, wife of Joseph Duncan. However, I challenged myself to work with the first journal I found—and hers was it. After hiding the journal under more yearbooks, I left the store, then I returned later that day to make sure it was still there. It was. The night before I left Springfield, I bought the journal for fifteen dollars. Committed. Little by little, I found myself mesmerized by this tiny woman who left a genteel life in Washington, D.C., where she met her future husband, a Congressman from Illinois, at a White House dinner. They lived in rural Jacksonville, Illinois, until his death. A mother who outlived seven of her ten children, who was widowed twice as long as she was married, she was not a feminist in the modern sense. Yet, she marched far ahead of her contemporaries in her understanding of her sense of place and the power that she possessed, not because of her husband's position, but because of her own.

The bare boned facts of Elizabeth's life—and yes, across the centuries, we are on a first-name basis—are deceptively unremarkable. Born in 1808, in New York, she was the daughter of James R. Smith, a merchant, and his wife, Hannah Ray Caldwell. Her maternal grandparents, killed during the Revolution, bequeathed as her legacy, a zeal for religion and patriotism. Her diary, which begins with her teenaged years in Newark, New Jersey, and ends in 1848, records the daily life which women endured. Born to privilege, she lived in relative ease by virtue of the wealth of her parents and her social standing.

Who is this society lady who becomes a pioneer woman? As remarkable as she was, who did she marry? Where would she find a man who would encourage her sense of duty to provide for the less fortunate, this woman for whom religion was paramount in her life, who writes in a letter, "I always enjoy the society of ministers." Elizabeth lived in turbulent times, having moved to Illinois in the shadow of the Civil War. What about the "S" word—"slavery"?

Armed with questions in my head and her journal in my hand, I returned to Springfield, and from there went to Jacksonville, the home that the couple called "Elm Grove." Pictures in the journal reveal a mansion surrounded by land and elms; today, large houses surround 4 Duncan Place.

Rain off and on all day. Clouds parted for a few minutes, only to join and produce more rain. When Tim and I got there, we discovered that the house was closed to visitors on Wednesdays. We spent our time taking tourist pictures of ourselves on the grounds and on her steps. Then we drove back to Springfield via Cozy Dog for the traditional corn dog feast. I realized that, wherever I was to encounter Elizabeth, it would not be at her house, at least not yet.

As Elizabeth and I begin our journey together, she trusts me to open myself

to the wind stirring her words around me; I trust her to keep talking. I read her journal everywhere—trains, buses, doctors' offices—once, twice, thrice—before I start to wonder about Joseph Duncan, the man she married. Her journal speaks of her domestic duties that she fulfilled, as if her very life were defined by darning stockings, preserving raspberries, going to church. I made another promise—this one, to her—not to see her with post-modern (did not exist) eyes; not to bring feminist (barely begun) presuppositions to her life. In short, I wanted to find the richness inherent in her life, not add richness to her life as if it were weighed in the balance and found wanting, from a twenty-first-century perspective.

Several motifs arose which Elizabeth's life encompassed: childbirth, rearing, death—from a woman who survived seven of her ten children. Education: Elizabeth was educated, something which she valued all her life, donating money to organizations which provided monies to educate women. Slavery: her husband Joseph Duncan freed slaves he inherited, yet felt that slaves were savages, unable to care from themselves if suddenly freed. Consequently he favored a gradual, lawful release of the slaves. Elizabeth, however, financially backed abolitionist groups, even when she was near bankruptcy.

Did Elizabeth foresee this writer dusting off her tattered journal, pulling poems from it? Imagine my surprise when I read:

> Wednesday 22nd getting a few bad Marks gave up all hopes of wearing the meddle in the vacation and was under the painful necessity of relinquishing my claims to the superior ones of Miss M V D who I doubted not would get it. [her spelling]

Of course Miss MVD is not Martha Vertreace-Doody, but like most writers, I crave validation.

Elizabeth has taken me for quite a ride. I have dined at the White House dinner party, given by John Quincy Adams, where she first met Joseph Duncan. I have stood vigil with her when her husband died, as did seven children, one by one. I have heard her make provision for the poor when her own property was swept away.

I have tried to write these poems in her voice, with her attitudes. At times, I can feel the success; at other times, their failure accuses me.

There are times, sitting in my back room facing the garden, that I half-expect Elizabeth to cross the yard, wondering at the jade-green monk parakeets feeding upside-down at the suet baskets. People surmise that a mated pair came to the midwest as stowaways on a freighter during the early seventies. Given the subzero cold and snow, the biting winds off the lake which make Chicago winters the stuff of legends, these Brazilian natives face enormous challenges.

Some thirty years later, hundreds of these birds nest on the south side of Chicago lakefront. They could not have achieved the near miracle of their survival were it not for two factors. First, they live in huge communal nests that

give the birds the opportunity to share body heat. Secondly, Hyde Parkers are bird lovers, especially because we are not orchard farmers. Consequently, we delight in feeding these birds to help them winter over. Certainly the early life in Illinois, the life which Elizabeth chose, must have been very similar.

Imagine—no Hiltons, Holiday Inns, or Best Westerns. Travelers had few places where they could spend the night, except under the stars. The Duncan home became, not only the official State House and residence, but also a way station, an open-door policy of hospitality. One servant suggests that the house should be called a hotel, not a state house.

I have wondered who I am in relation to the journal, as I realized that I was searching, not for a cause, but for a literary friend. Elizabeth's entries are full of household "stuff," but say very little about the whirlwind that grew in magnitude. They faced personal challenges—the whole money issue—as well as the various events leading to the Civil War. Part of finding Elizabeth involves discovering her culture, a period of time often romanticized in the movies. Yet the reality of her life belied the "Go west, young man" scenes. Her husband, John, died when he was 44 after a brief illness. From the description in her journal, something as simple as pneumonia may have been the cause. In an era of few antibiotics and partial understanding of hygiene, his illness was probably treatable—and curable—in our time.

So many of the issues with which Elizabeth and John struggled in the early days of Illinois still haunt us. The legacy of slavery remains, the scars still visible in politics, folklore, music. The great waterways, our roads, our railroads that her husband fought for struggle for tax dollars. The Duncans did all they could to obtain free public education for all students, male and female. As an African-American professor in a community college maintained through federal funds, I feel that we can trace our existence directly back to Duncan's foresighted plans, whose fruits he did not live to see.

How does one *mother* in a situation in which you stand a better than even chance of outliving some of your offspring? What do you cling to? What anchors you? Elizabeth was a woman of great faith, as were many of her contemporaries. The possibility of death was ever present—whether through illness or violence. Her journal entries speak of her struggle against the devil who thwarted her efforts at every turn. She speaks of church attendance, prayer, and meditation on the Scriptures as providing her with strength.

Yet her life was not spiritualized beyond its concrete reality. Ill or pregnant for most of her adult life, Elizabeth depended on the kindness of neighbors—male and female. The villages and towns of the midwest survived because the people who were drawn to them often brought with them a body of practical knowledge. When John Deere came to Grand Detour, Illinois, from Middlebury, Vermont, he was a blacksmith. Using his skills, he developed the self-scouring plow, thereby helping the pioneers till the midwestern soil that had been remarkably resistant to the cast-iron plows they brought from the east.

As a well-bred, educated woman whose mother had taught her the entire

range of housekeeping skills, Elizabeth was a perfect First Lady. The residence on what came to be called 4 Duncan Place was their home as well as the official state house—

My essay ends here, for now, my collection of poems still unfinished. Perhaps I do not want the end to come. I have experienced a world which social circumstances would have not denied me had I lived in that era. So many open doors—that is at once the beauty and the challenge of a writer's vocation.

for Walter Charles Vertreace and Modena Kendrick Vertreace
for Bryan Charles Vertreace
spirit guides

for Timothy Doody, mine

In celebration of Jim Morrissey and Bess Morrissey,
John and Sue Morrissey, my Irish family

All that we know, now and forever, all scientific knowledge that we have of this world, is as an island in the sea.

—Chet Raymo, *Honey from Stone*

To be fruitful in invention, it is indispensable to have a habit of observation and reflection.

—Abraham Lincoln, 1859

Death on pillow, be thine.

—ancient Celtic prayer

A very great vision is needed and the man who has it must follow it as the eagle seeks the deepest blue of the sky.

—Crazy Horse

Besides learning to see, there is another art to be learned—not to see what is not.

—Maria Mitchell

Grateful thanks to the following journals in which poems are published or forthcoming:

Illinois Times: "Northern Cross Railroad, 1838"
Nanny Fanny: "Water Works, 1836"
After Hours: "Nothing to Relate but a Dream, 1824"; "Beginning of a New World, 1833"; "Cornscateous Air, 1834"; "Elm Grove, 1835"; and "To Brood a Wood Thrush, 1851"
Spoon River Poetry Review: "Nothing to Relate but a Dream, 1824"
Diner: "Stone of the Flag, 1841"; "Father Time, 1876"
Into the Teeth of the Wind: "Wings, 1846"
Floating Holiday: "Widow's Weeds, 1844"; "Birth Quilt, 1841"
Florida English: "Mourning Quilt, 1844"; "New Year's Day, 1848"
Willow Review: "Wedding Quilt, 1828"

According to the Custom of This City, 1825

Tea at our usual hour.
Housework being dear to me,
I get through my lessons,
grateful to gift my mother
a comfortable day.
At our fireside,

we darn stockings. Fiery
sap crackles with hours
of laughter. These several days
which face year's-end belong to me,
almost seventeen. Mother
begs me recite my lessons

as I weave, saying the lessons
of a fanciful girl blow in fire
like ash. Simply a mother's
yen to while away hours
with her chaste daughter. My
unquiet dream? To spend my holidays

strolling up Broadway, marking today's
fashions, the lessons
of high society women—how I
should bind my hair, wear soft gowns, bring fire
to my cheeks. The hour
draws near when a mother

fades like dying embers. A wise mother
knows when days
shorten to hours.
Vapors, fog, mists, clouds—lessons
for my school journal. Fire
is the story she waits to hear me

tell her when I
greet young men who pretend to visit my mother,
eating our parlor fire;
who bring prayers on New Year's Day
for luck and health and blessing, lessons
cherished by the hour.

Martha Modena Vertreace-Doody

Mother stares at her face in the fire as it sizzles
asking again for this hour's lesson. My whisper:
Someday I will be someone's wife.

Open House: A Blessing, 1835

On the front door, the pastor
chalks initials of the Three Wise Men—
CMB—Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar—

then leads us—my children, husband, women
from my sewing circle, church, political friends
and enemies—through each room

saying peace to all
and to all who enter here.
Remember the Israelites who wandered

forty years in the Wilderness of Zin—
a prayer on three floors
for doors which open to strangers,

a hearth filled with aged wood.
The house swells with bread baking,
stew simmers with vegetables

from our garden.
My body waxes with child,
perhaps a boy who bears

my husband's given name.

Birth Quilt, 1841

October opens with a line-storm, avenging angels,
east winds
darker than I saw near the Bay.
My nestling babe swims.
I massage my stomach, feel her thrust
beneath my palm.
She rides uneven inside me, tires me
as lightning tears
through our yard elms.
My pains come
in front of that storm, ending as it passes,
leaving tall grasses
green enough to heal me.
When my baby girl
breaks through the pain
in my joy, my doctor doses me laudanum;
my midwife swaddles us
in my quilt of blue muslin,
with its violets, primroses, clovers;
piecework,
a history of hands
from the Ladies' Sewing Society—

large enough for mother and child,
as long as I have strength to hold her.

Martha Modena Vertreace-Doody

Widow's Weeds, 1844

At night by your bed, my husband, a candle, matches
you ask for so you can take your remedies: rhubarb, aloes,

blue mass: mercury, liquorice root, rosewater, honey,
sugar, dry rose petals.

Then bleeding, leeching.
Long nights we remember

brackish Potomac air when I first curtsy to you,
mountain passes when I save fellow passengers
from the crevasse, light from candles and matches
I always carry.

Pearl of great price.
Wife. Soul. Children.

I comb your hair; bathe your face
with toilet water, your lips with my tongue.

Your breath labors in the same bed
whereon I lay but to different ends.

When I awake I give suck to the babes
you seed in my womb.

I press your hand to my cheek
until you take my tears as your last memory.

Your open eyes—fearless—see
the face of God.

Mourning Quilt, 1844

Cut trousers, coats I sew for my husband, you,
with the nimble fingers of a young woman;
use each garment; trace petals
for a starburst of daisies;
our initials chain-stitched on their brown discs.
Small squares from the back
of your burial shirt, weskit, claim your heart, my heart.

Our daughter's schoolbook says Penelope
unweaves each night her cloth
to buy one more day to wait
in faith that no black-sailed ship
bears news of a funeral pyre. No one sees
the shears that hang at my waist on velvet cord.
What hurts: the emptiness.
My arms hold air. When I see you again,
I wrap myself in this quilt.
You walk toward me from your shattered grave
at the last trumpet blast,
hands open to hold my face.
The quilt falls. I stand before you
naked, young, trembling as on our wedding night.

For now, I moor
within black silk borders, lines nothing unholy can cross.

Wings, 1846

So I grant her independence, my eldest,
Mary, whose angel voice
many a troubled night lulls me beyond blurred faces
of dead children, my husband
in the cold ground. School tires her, she says,
its purse-lipped teachers,
questions with only one answer.

The choice I offer: become a milliner—decorate hats
with cattails, pine cones, acorns, feathers. Prairie grassland
gives over beauty
for the having.
In the larder, strawflowers hang
by their stems from the rafters. Grossgrain ribbons and crèpe

for crowns dangle off brims. Silk bluebells, daisies, coneflowers.
Each day, the culling, drying, stitching to please
madam of the long face.

Felt steamed to shape, a gauze veil. Black for mourning, white
for weddings. Needle scars.
Fingers numb from the thimble;—

or a school girl I raise, a favored child
who finds heaven's limits
in this house. She wonders how much of herself must die
for the dreams of others.
It's the wind in her hair, she says, makes her feet rise
over the horizon.

So I wind her curls into a bun, tortoise-shell combs,
until the day her husband
unravels her braids, spreads her wings.

Winter Harvest, 1847

Julia, my baby, sits on the rug near the hearth, her head
on my knee. Not afraid,
she whimpers, when wind creaks the door,
a frostbitten traveler seeks shelter. Not afraid, yet fire
lights her eyes like candles in frosted windows.

My hand on her back stills her as I speak of reports
in the Sangamo Journal, homesteaders—
whose end I have not heard—
who flee Springfield reeling like schoolboys with stones,
giddy to hunt squirrels;
ox-drawn wagons bound for California.
Soft fireside. Sap boils in the wood when the man
spits his throat clear.

With each crack his eyes melt shadows.
At first, he says, whispers of desert's dry hell;
then a mountain blizzard.
What food remains, eaten in frenzy. The snow says
hunker down. Let the pass
shield you from wind scarring rock walls as the dying starts.

Not your father, I tell my daughter, only seven when February
cold lays him vaulted in his park.
The traveler's voice traps us in hearth fire.
Gaunt faces, he says, stretched over bone. One by one.
Ice when bellies clench with hunger.

And someone thinks. No. Says. Harvest the winter garden.
Hoarfrost grain. The meat quick frozen
the younger the beast.
Thou shalt not. Kill. Dominion over the dead. Taste
the flesh of yourself.
A clean death in pure snow.

Not child, not woman, at ten unable to sift truth from nightmare
my daughter hides tears in my hands
as the traveler reads
a brittle-yellow page from the California Star:
made meat of the dead bodies of their companions.

Martha Modena Vertreace-Doody

New Year's Day, 1848

This day four years
ago, my only thought—my husband's
swift return, to fill the stockings—
trinkets, apples, nuts—our children
begging for a Christmas tree.
Nothing lasts this side

of grace, this side
of promise. For years
I keep before me Heaven's trees
of life, of good and evil. At the last, my husband's
eyes fix on me, our children
our entire stock

in joy, takes stock
of this world, then sides
with the angel at the gate. Our children
wear a year's
deep mourning for a father, husband.
Winter elms

wait leafless for spring; the evergreen
drops needles in the parlor. The stockings
want darning, my husband
would tease, at my side.
Pilgrims, now, all of us, until year's-
end. Soon, my favorite cousin marries. Children

follow, in due joy. My children
weep. Our farmland maples,
the home we've had for years
will slip from our hands. We stock
our hearts, take sides
against the coming storm which my husband

could not bear, this father-husband
whose sole care was for our children.
There are no safe sides
where ivy strangles the tallest oak.
What land remains, our living stock,
shields us for years

to come. Blessed husband, sweet ghost, your stocking,
too, hangs hearthside, which your children
of Elm Grove mend every year with tears.

To Brood a Wood Thrush, 1851

> Whenever a man hears it he is young, and Nature is in her spring; whenever he hears it, there is a new world and one country, and the gates of heaven are not shut against him.
>
> —Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Give birth to a daughter, Mary, my oldest,
strong child, who tickles me
rhyming her songs as she rides Dancing Feather.
Hooves spark
quail into the scrub-brush.
Years hence,
she lulls her babes as I hum to mine,
to her, this autumn girl,
born under a Barley Moon—
who reads that Jenny Lind
thrills Castle Garden Theatre
with coloratura, in New York City
I left when I was nine.
Her American
tour, thanks to showman
Barnum. Boston, Chicago, San Francisco,
more cities to come—someday
for my child with the voice of wind
in the oaks.
Hymns
her needlework, each stitch a silver note
to summon grace or peace
or thanksgiving, prayers
from our scant larder.
For twenty-five dollars,
the milch cow sends

my Mary to Saint Louis to hear
the Old World Nightingale,
but learn to trill of oaks which bend
overlow with their weight of acorns which darken
the path around our house;
pines close their cone-scales,
whose thick skins, the old folks say, speak
a hard winter of cough, fever,
newborns melting blue with mothers' tears.
She breaks the shell that binds her,
becomes a wood thrush
who brings heaven to corn and wheat fields
with her spotted breast, brown wings.

Ice Bridge, 1852

Each day, foxes thicken their coats, walnuts gather
by the bushel.
Muskrats bend reeds, rushes to cone dens
high above marshland.
Corn husks tighten against January, waxing in half-light
of the low-slung moon.
No surprise when ice floes lock the Susquehanna River

between Havre de Grace and Perryville. I remember
my husband Joseph's passion—the Illinois and Michigan Canal
he buys with his weeks away
from his babes, from me.
I dream myself preserving currants,
plums, raspberries, blackberries—treats he spoons on puddings,

compotes, bread—when firewood sparks through dawn,
him, come home
from Washington, Philadelphia, New York.

To hold heat on our knees, we huddle in quiet; listen
to our children sleep
whose antics—knotty samplers, buttery kisses,

pulled braids—amuse us in the telling.
Our Julia marries in this house.
My Joseph, gone these past several years.
The Wilmington and Susquehanna Railroad Company
lays tracks on ice as thick as he was tall
to bring people, goods, mail

to those left behind who wait for news of the outside world.
Ice groans, cracks like all creation
beneath metal wheels
that search for solid ground.

Martha Modena Vertreace-Doody

York, 1858

Afternoon tea with my husband, ages ago,
watching vultures glide
above New Salem
where they overwinter, circling the furrier's house, as they
taste the smell of flesh
scraped from rabbit, coonskin pelts.
Dark wings barely stir the updraft.

No bird is kinder to air.
What drives me past this point
of safety, the parlor where neighbors
leave calling cards in a silver tray scattering light on wallpaper?
When the moon traps
frost in the garden, dead stalks
crumble next to the bones of sparrows

the stray cat leaves to teach me
the fine art of raising young.

My newborn cringes in candlelight
as if she quit too soon the pool where she swam, mermaid,
Mary Louisa, born in 1832, the year
traders float stories on the Missouri
about York who travels with Lewis and Clark, friend to one;

slave to the other. When they set out, my husband
was a child, and I, my mother's dream.
Yet spirit sieves words
like sand across the prairie, like tears falling through sunlight.
York shoots deer, buffalo, geese, elk,
ducks for the cook-fires he feeds
with wood he whipsaws; swims to a sandbar to harvest greens;

trades for provisions along the trail;
votes like the others to choose
a winter camp. Midwife to Sacajawea
in her confinement, he proves himself big beyond his birth,
as much a man as Clark
who says his slave died of cholera,
broken by freedom,

seeking to serve him again.

Trappers say the Crow gave York,

a tipi, finding their words smooth
on his tongue. If the York River named him, as I've heard,
I should have named the child at my breast
Illinois, Mississippi, Sangamon
for rivers healing the prairie her father served,
seeking to mend a house divided.

To Taste Salt, 1859

The Old Farmer's Almanac prescribes
a rapid walk in the open field, or running
up and down stairs
several times before taking to bed—night's tonic.
Instead, sleepless tonight,
by candlelight I read to you, Mary Louisa,

of Maria Mitchell, first schooled in her father's two-story;
unpainted shingles aging grey
in Nantucket brine.
Restless like me, she follows
her lantern to the roof walk,
pins her telescope
to clear autumn sky. Like you, her father's prize.

Of my ten children whittled to three,
you, my daughter, this year a bride,
promise to fill my widow's lap with grandbabies, your womb
more cradle than mine
to grow children fatter than mine.
At home on Vestal Street—unmarried, perhaps

for always—Maria Mitchell wears
summer silk, winter wool, no cotton

plucked by slaves. In faith
with the Society of Friends.
Sunday. The bottom of the year. Bright Venus in the west
and your face meet
in my window. Your father
would salute her quiet war,

this mouse-nibble at the granary
bite by bite until the silo empties;
this Lot's wife
who dares sweep the galaxy for her name, finding a faint blur,
the comet she discovers
before anyone can.

Notes:

"Acccording to the Custom of This City, 1825"—title quoted from the *Diary of Mrs. Joseph Duncan*, p. 20.

"To Brood a Wood Thrush, 1851"—Brought to the United States by Phineas T. Barnum, Jenny Lind toured the United States from 1850 to 1852.

Some birds are poets and sing all summer. I am reminded of this while we rest in the shade and listen to a wood thrush now, just before sunset.... It is not so much the composition of the strain, the tone that interests us—cool bars of melody from the atmosphere of everlasting morning and evening. It is the quality of the sound, not the sequence. In the pewee's note there is some sultriness, but in the thrush's alone declares the immortal wealth and vigor that is in the forest. Here is a bird in whose strain the story is told.—Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862.)

Book Reviews

Mother Power: Discover the Difference That Women Have Made All Over the World

Jacqueline Horner Plumez
Niverville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2002

Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green

I was intrigued by the opening of *Mother Power*, which asserts that "[m]aternal women have a depth of love and emotion, a fierce protective instinct, a sense of right and wrong, and a persistence that, when used outside the home, can change the world." Although I was uncomfortable with claims of "instinct" and the "sense of right and wrong," I set aside my bias and settled in for what I hoped would be an empowering discussion of women's power as mothers. As I came to the end of the first page, however, where Plumez declares that "all maternal women have an innate set of skills and abilities, different from traditional male qualities, but equally powerful," I grew suspicious and skeptical of what was to follow. Was this to be yet another book that romanticizes mothering, that will leave some mothers feeling inept and guilty for not meeting unrealistic standards of motherhood? I sincerely hoped not.

An experienced writer – the author is a freelance journalist – Plumez's book is well organized and her style is accessible. She successfully uses storytelling techniques to introduce the reader to many inspirational accounts of mothers around the world who undertake outreach and political work. As a psycholo-

gist, Plumez presents scenarios, questions, answers, and suggestions at the end of each chapter, a common feature of self-help books. A limited list of sources at the end of the book consists of articles – mainly from newspapers, popular magazines, and a couple of academic journals – as well as several websites of women's organizations.

The opening section, "What Mothers Are," shows how Plumez's theory of Mother Power has been inspired by the Argentinean mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who, in 1977, began (and, to a lesser extent, continue) risking their lives by publicly protesting against the "junta" who overthrew the government and kidnapped and tortured their children. Plumez claims that these women are the strongest and most effective role models she has ever encountered, and believes that the source of their strength comes from being loving mothers. This strength is central to Plumez's vision of Mother Power, the power of women to act publicly on their strong maternal convictions to effect change.

The second section, "What Mothers Do," promotes the maternal moral authority of mothers, which includes ensuring the growth and healing of children through unconditional love, common sense, persistence, and creative mothering. In the final section, "What Mothers Need," Plumez stresses that powerful mothers must make time for themselves, reach out to others for support, and share their troubles with others as a way of turning personal pain into purposeful action. Throughout, Plumez includes stories and prescriptive suggestions.

I enjoyed the multiple narratives of how mothers across various cultures have become powerful forces for justice and fairness through brave and caring maternal action. I was left feeling, however, that Plumez had resurrected – with a new twist—the familiar, confining script of patriarchal motherhood, that mothers can only be judged worthy and "good" (a quality essential to Mother Power and a term Plumez uses throughout her book) when they bring their "maternal strengths to bear on problems outside the home" and assume the added responsibility of being global peacekeepers. Not only are mothers solely responsible for the emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, moral, and intellectual development and well being of their children, they must now be responsible for improving the larger social world, as well.

I appreciate the impressive work that many mothers carry out in the public sector, but I am not convinced that there is "a new, but as yet undiscovered, movement around the world," as Plumez claims. Most mothers struggle to raise their children in a world that systematically undersupports and continually blames them for multiple social failures. I also am disturbed by Plumez's call for mothers to enhance and employ Mother Power to create social change; by using "natural maternal instincts" and flexing their moral authority, mothers must assume responsibility for dramatically changing the world. This is an unrealistic expectation, one that women will likely fail to meet, just as they continually fail to live up to the current unrealistic and unreasonable standards of patriarchal motherhood.

Buddha Mom: The Path of Mindful Mothering

Jacqueline Kramer
New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2003

Reviewed by Marybeth White

Jacqueline Kramer's *Buddha Mom: The Path of Mindful Mothering* explores the author's journey into motherhood as a Buddhist practitioner. As a feminist mother and doctoral student of Buddhist tradition, I appreciate Jacqueline Kramer's insight that motherhood is not an obstacle on the path to enlightenment; rather, mothering is a path in itself. This proposal flies in the face of thousands of years of Buddhist practice, which depicts the life of a householder and its inherent attachments as the realm of *samsara*, or rebirth, far from that of *nirvana*, or enlightenment. Doctrinally, there is support for the notion that the life of the laity offers opportunities to work toward enlightenment, such as the Buddha's founding of four groups of practitioners, including laymen and laywomen. Indeed, some recent Buddhist scholarship has focused on the spiritual growth potential inherent in relationships (Gross, Nhat Hanh, Welwood, for example). Kramer took the five Buddhist lay precepts in 1991 under the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. While she remains rooted in Buddhist tradition, she adds a new perspective on Buddhist parenting.

Kramer dedicates her book to her mother, Rose, which sets the stage for the discussion that follows. The author does not dwell simply on her own experience as a mother, but places her experience within the context of her extended family and childhood memories of being mothered. The subtitle, *The Path of Mindful Mothering*, suggests Kramer's larger project, which is to validate the path of mothering as a legitimate form of Buddhist practice. Her book is divided into two sections. The shorter of the two, "Setting Foot on the Path," describes the author's entry into motherhood. The second section, "The Practice on the Path," explores areas of the author's life such as that of a householder, becoming a homemaker, and embracing service. Kramer also explores the "karmic patterns" of her personal relationships with family members and the importance of balancing self-love with unconditional love.

This book is not an instruction manual on "how to be a good Buddha mom," however. Rather, it dwells on the uniqueness of all relationships and the continuous work toward burning off karmic patterns of habitual relations. Useful sections of the book include the author's personal reflections and candid descriptions of her struggles to parent her teenaged daughter. Unfortunately, these sections are not in abundance.

Kramer articulates different Buddhist conceptions of love. The chapter "Unconditional Love" deals specifically with these differing forms of love. The

author explains her understanding of the Buddha's discernment between four types of love: *metta*, or loving-kindness; *karuna*, or compassion; *mudita*, or sympathetic happiness; and *upekkha*, or loving with equanimity. These typologies of love fall under the rubric of the Greek notion of *agape*, or affectionate, non-sexual love. The Greek notion of *eros*, or erotic, passionate love is also found in Buddhist teachings as a fifth type of love. This section addresses the nuances between these ways of loving and the mental states that can impair one's ability to offer each type of love. The author offers personal anecdotes demonstrating parenting skills that can kindle rather than stifle relationships with one's children.

The path of mindful parenting is one that Kramer feels parents should undertake, as it is the "higher" choice that leads to growth. Her use of terminology such as "sacrifice" and "higher choice" promotes her idea of mindful parenting as a spiritual journey. She states carefully that the choice to stay at home with one's children while they are young is entirely in the hands of women. To stay at home, however, is a "choice" for an elite few who can depend financially on a spouse. Moreover, when one parent "stays at home," the result is uneven childcare arrangements in a two-parent household. Clearly, Kramer's book is addressed to women of a traditional mindset. The chapter entitled "Mothering," for example, opens with a quote from the Dalai Lama that addresses the importance of a child's successful development and that child's dependence on a *mother's* love. Throughout her book, Kramer elevates mindful mothering to a spiritual path but she does not offer this path to fathers; in fact, the responsibility of fathers in raising their children is not mentioned.

The aspects of the book that cause this feminist mother concern are found in the potentially explosive concepts of "homemaking" and "motherhood," which are not unpacked in such a way as to expose their constructed nature. Although she advocates self-love, for example, Kramer draws a direct connection between mothers and service when she states that "women come to service naturally" (113). In addition, Kramer assigns specific roles to mothers and fathers during the time of childbirth and early parenting. She requires that fathers take a supportive role while mothers develop their capacities as primary care providers. Kramer draws implicit generalizations about the roles of mothers and fathers and suggests that mothers are able to naturally arrive at the "correct" way to nurture by turning their attention inward. Yet, she herself acknowledges a lack of "naturalness" when she finds that mothering does not come as easily as she had assumed it would.

From a Buddhist scholarly perspective, the validation of a Buddhist householder's life, especially that of a parent who is constantly dealing with issues of attachment, Kramer's book provides fresh insight into the possibility of enlightenment through the mindful relationship between parent and child. From a feminist perspective, however, Kramer's albeit mindful glorification of the sacrifice and service of motherhood is cause for concern.

Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It

Andrea J. Buchanan
New York: Seal Press, 2003

Reviewed by Debra Brenegan

According to Andrea Buchanan's, *Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It*, mothers align themselves with the "conventional assumption that motherhood is noble and joyous and uncomplicated." Using the extended metaphor that the transition into an often messy "real motherhood" is like "culture shock," Andrea Buchanan's book may help reassure new mothers who are experiencing ambivalent feelings of motherhood, but it will do little to explain the reasons for these feelings.

Buchanan spends approximately one-third of her book defending her premise that mothers are afraid, unwilling, or unable to talk about the less-than-great aspects of mothering. She cites instances when women friends claim to "love every minute" of their parenting responsibilities, leaving a sleep-deprived and sometimes stressed Buchanan bewildered. Buchanan had to stumble upon online mothering support communities and establish her own neighborhood playgroup before she finally met a few women who would dare to express anything but pure bliss about their mothering duties. She writes, "It's harder than you think to admit your even occasional dissatisfaction as a mother without feeling instant guilt, an immediate sensation of shame for even suggesting you might not be happy."

Buchanan's assumption that the majority of mothers purposely present facades of "contented womanhood" is problematic, however. Granted, media representations and "how-to" books often give the impression that mothers' loving instincts lead them along a smooth path of natural, spontaneous caregiving, but are not female support systems founded on actual experience rather than media images? It is surprising that Buchanan finds the opposite to be true.

Buchanan goes on to admit that she "slowly learned that feeling conflicted does not mean that I don't love my child." Her statement gives readers permission to set aside ambivalent feelings of self-worth and allows them to confront other issues common to new motherhood. Buchanan's book includes chapters on confronting advice-wielding friends and relatives, deciding when or if to have another baby, and establishing nurturing support systems, but her true gems of wisdom pop up seemingly unplanned amid her diary-like essays. For instance, she touches on the idea that once people find out she is a mother—and a mother who works from home—she "becomes less appealing, more easily dismissed." Moreover, in the middle of a heartfelt letter to her future daughter confessing love and sometimes frustration, Buchanan suddenly adds, "I wish

there was a better division of labor than Daddy when he has time and Mommy all day, all night." Unfortunately, Buchanan quickly drops such pertinent subjects in favour of less interesting topics, such the guilt associated with bottle-feeding or a mother's embarrassment when her toddler utters an expletive.

Buchanan's assumption that her audience is driven by media images of motherhood smacks of condescension. She should release mothers from false assumptions and offer them more of her occasional nuggets of modern wisdom. For instance, she does not link her own satisfaction derived from a rare afternoon devoted to work to a human being's need to contribute to the world by performing valuable work. Although mothering is valuable, society considers it economically valueless. Instead of confronting the underlying issue of the worth of women's work both as mothers and employees, Buchanan concludes disappointingly that she is "an idiot" for forgetting that, "for now at least, those two things are mutually exclusive." Readers are left to wonder about Buchanan's purpose in writing her book.

Still, Buchanan's style is warm and readers cannot help but be engaged by such statements as, "Now, if you moms of teenagers could kindly stop laughing at me." Although she concludes that "as a mother I am also constantly addressing the question of balance, trying to weigh my own wants and needs against my daughter's, trying to balance my interests with hers," her book clearly lacks balance. Buchanan concentrates on the mundane choices associated with motherhood and society's judgment of those choices. She does not show how contemporary mothers balance their needs, feelings, and desires with those of other people—including their children.

Twice Alive: A Spiritual Guide to Mothering Through Pregnancy and the Child's First Year

Beth Osnes
Boulder, CO: Woven Word Press, 2005

Reviewed by Juliana Forbes

I must begin by declaring that I am not an unbiased reviewer of Beth Osnes's *Twice Alive: A Spiritual Guide to Mothering Through Pregnancy and the Child's First Year*. My children's births and lives are woven inextricably throughout its words since I am a near and dear friend of the author. In fact, she and I, with two other mother friends, founded Mothers Acting Up, a movement to mobilize the vast political strength of mothers to protect the world's children. I have been privileged to read Osnes's work in gestation, was a support through

its birth, and now feel like a proud father carrying it out to the world for all to see.

Twice Alive celebrates the majesty of birth and the developing child. Chapter by chapter, it travels with the mother through each trimester of pregnancy, the sometimes-experienced overdue phase, birth, and the child's first year. Each chapter begins by describing the particular gifts and challenges of each stage, followed by journal entries from the time when Osnes was pregnant with her daughter, Melisande, and ends with a suggested "to do" list that is both inspirational and practical, and includes designing your own birthing celebration, organizing meals to be brought after the birth, and forming a mothers' group. This is less a "how to" book than a companion that shares with its readers the intimate experience of mothering that is seldom talked about but is deeply felt. Not limited to a particular faith, this book roots itself in the soul-harvest that is reaped through the process of becoming a mother. Discoveries abound of the mother-like qualities of God and visa-versa.

As any mother can testify, new motherhood is extraordinary and, if attended to with a listening spirit, can be a time of great spiritual awakening for a woman. As Osnes says, a new mother "is in such close proximity to the ultimate creative spirit that she can feel its hot breath on the back of her neck." Osnes reminds us to prioritize the importance of early motherhood by pushing away the invasive business of the world, by lying on our backs in the grass with our babes on our chests, and by letting the warm blessings of the sun spill over us. I grew profoundly nostalgic while reading this book, particularly when I realized that the precious lessons and gifts of that insular time are no longer fresh in my memory. Osnes reminds me of how far I have traveled, what I have endured, and how much wiser I am now that I am a mother. As she explains: "Now you have twice a stake in the future. You have twice the reason to care about the legacy our generation is handing down to the next and twice the strength to make a difference. You have twice the accomplishments to cheer, twice the obstacles to conquer, twice the shoes to tie, twice the laughter and tears. If you feel twice as deeply and soar twice as high then, indeed, you must be twice alive."

A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother

Rachel Cusk
London: Fourth Estate, 2001

Reviewed by Emily Jeremiah

Rachel Cusk brings a novelist's craft to bear on the experiences of pregnancy, birth, and parenting, and she does so with clarity and elegance. She writes

rhythmically and evocatively, deploying crisp and potent images to communicate complex emotional states. This is an appealing and important memoir.

A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother is structured thematically and artfully. Anecdotes—the sharp, funny, uncomfortable accounts of an antenatal class and of a mother-and-toddler group—blend with reflections on literature, representation, and society. Cusk acknowledges her debt to Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, whose fluent meshing of the personal and political she echoes here.

The structure of the book enacts a central insight of Cusk's: that motherhood consigns one to a realm of shapelessness, timelessness, bordering that "world of milk and shadows and nothingness" (84) which is early infancy. In rejecting linearity, Cusk exposes maternity as a rich, cumulative process. She also, perhaps, suggests a Kristevan "semiotic": "In motherhood a woman exchanges her public significance for a range of private meanings, and like sounds outside a certain range they can be very difficult for other people to identify. If one listened with a different part of oneself, one would perhaps hear them" (3). Cusk's multi-layered, lyrical writing encourages the development of this "different" listening part of the self. In doing so, it offers a contrast to the conventional literature on birth to which Cusk as a mother is exposed. Her dry and witty examination reveals the limiting assumptions and the hectoring certainties on which such texts are founded.

Cusk points out that which is irreducible about birth and she poses a challenge to certain poststructuralist accounts of maternity that stress constructedness at the expense of materialism. Her notion of the body and mind intertwining during pregnancy recalls such thinkers as Elizabeth Grosz. She does not ignore bodiliness, but neither does she lapse into essentialism or biologism; she shows how maternal bodies are represented and managed by institutions and discourses.

Cusk also explores humorously the question of childcare, raising the awkward issues of class and economics it involves. She is perceptive, too, in her treatments of the public/private divide and of childcare as "isolating, frequently boring, relentlessly demanding and exhausting" (7). She is tough and unsentimental and, at the same time, frequently tender and moving.

Cusk acknowledges in her introduction that she has not written much about her particular circumstances, or the people around her, and this leads at times to a rather bare feeling, and the misleading impression that Cusk as mother inhabits a vacuum. There are brief glimpses of friends and family, but the relational aspect of mothering – which has become key in recent theoretical debates—is not examined. Cusk's subject position, as a heterosexual, white, middle-class woman with an apparently loving and supportive partner, is also not explicitly or extensively investigated. But despite these omissions, this remains a powerful and provocative book and a significant contribution to the literature of maternity. It is recommended reading.

Elizabeth Smart: A Fugue Essay on Women and Creativity

Kim Echlin
Toronto: Women's Press, 2004

Reviewed by Sandra Campbell

In eloquent prose and delightful narrative, Kim Echlin offers a rich and multilayered perspective on the extraordinary life of writer Elizabeth Smart (1913-1986). Smart's passionate love affair and first pregnancy triggered an explosion of her creativity that led to her first novel, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945). This groundbreaking work offers a powerful voice and an aesthetic form that reflects authentic female experience.

Echlin begins with a question: "Why has a woman's experience of raising children and pursuing a creative life largely been concealed?" From here she moves into an exploration of Smart's unwavering commitment to write from her uniquely female experience. Echlin draws on interviews with Smart's family, friends, and work colleagues, as well as her own experiences as a passionate mother and a passionate novelist. (Echlin has published two novels, *Elephant Winter* and *Dagmar's Daughter*). As she explores Smart's journey to live, to love, and to write, Echlin shares her own stories and those of the long line of women writers who have struggled to be taken seriously. This rich context offers a mirror on women's ongoing creative struggles in a world still defined by the values of patriarchy.

Smart's personal struggle was deeply lonely and heroic. In her early years, she dared to step out of the conventions of her upper class Ottawa family to join bohemian artists in England, France, and Mexico. Yet, even her own artist friends were blind to women's potential to be creative, and most were blind to Smart's unique struggle to create. Smart's attempts to live a creative life were so savagely undermined by fierce betrayals in her relationships with her mother and her lover, George Barker, the father of her four children, that she determined to raise her children alone and in dire poverty. Still, she struggled to write from her lived experience.

While Smart was able to disregard some conventions that might shackle creativity, she was continually silenced by the powerful convention that women must put the needs and desires of others before their own. Echlin cites this poignant example from one of Smart's poems: "Why am I so frightened? / To say I'm me / And publicly acknowledge / My small mastery? / Could I stand up and say / Fuck Off! Or, Be My Slave! / To be in a very unfeminine / Very unloving state / Is the desperate need? Of anyone trying to write."

Today, many writers/mothers still feel the power of convention to prevent their telling of important stories. Echlin's insightful exploration of Smart's life

suggests that women must struggle to write with clarity and tenacity of their authentic lives. This is why her book is so important.

Child Custody, Law, and Women's Work

Susan B. Boyd
Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2003

Reviewed by Sherri Goldstein Cash

In *Child Custody, Law, and Women's Work*, legal scholar Susan B. Boyd traces the history of Canadian child custody law, exploding the myth that courts favour mothers in custody decisions. Historically held to a higher standard of morality than men, and with female nurturing and domestic work undervalued, if not invisible, mothers are highly vulnerable to losing custody in cases that go to court. Moreover, Boyd argues that the contemporary principle of gender neutrality in custody law is detrimental to women because it fails to recognize the ways that childcare work is deeply gendered. She demonstrates that dominant notions of gender as well as class, sexuality, cultural difference, race, and disability shape mothers' chances of maintaining custody of their children. By extension, Boyd's focus on child custody law illuminates wider issues of power, gender, and work in the family, the legal system, and society.

Drawing on important court cases, legislation, and official reports, Boyd's historical account opens in the nineteenth century, when the exclusive paternal right to custody began to erode with an argument that young children should reside with the mother. A major legal shift began in the 1970s with the women's movement and a "father's revolution," influences that made gender neutrality a principle of custody law. The result has been "joint custody" or "shared parenting." In ignoring parents' gender, however, judges have also ignored the sexual division of labour in the family before divorce, thereby rendering invisible mothers' roles as primary childcare providers, as well as the emotional and psychological consequences mothers and children experience when patterns of primary care are significantly altered. Concurrently, the court's attempt to maximize children's contact with fathers has resulted in blindness to fathers' abuse of mothers, as well as to allegations of paternal child abuse. Overall, Boyd contests claims of maternal bias in the courts, demonstrating that fathers who petition for custody have done "quite well."

Yet, there have been some recent "promising signs" for mothers, notably the emergence of a presumption that primary caregivers should maintain custody "unless proven unfit." While Boyd admits that this presumption is problematic, she concludes that currently it is beneficial for mothers and children. In advocating this view, Boyd's argument seems to revive the

historical debate among feminists as to whether women are most benefited by gender-blind notions of equality or by policies and programmes that recognize gender difference.

Boyd's work is largely accessible, informative, and convincing. Her discussion of the ways that class, sexuality, cultural difference, race, and disability, as well as gender enter into court decisions is particularly noteworthy, especially in the section "How Many Ways Could Mothers Lose Custody?" However, her narrative might be fortified in some ways. Specific rather than vague references to "fathers' rights groups" would be useful. The argument would also benefit from elaboration of the important evidence she cites about the suffering mothers and children experience under custody arrangements that constrain maternal contact and power. Definitions of basic relevant legal terminology would also be helpful. But these minor weaknesses do not diminish the important contribution Boyd makes with this book. Scholars, students, feminists, and others interested in the history and sociology of the family, gender, and the law will find Boyd's work crucial reading.

Contributor Notes

Aurélie M. Athan, M.A. is a first year doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research interests include qualitative methods, spiritual development in women and children, personal mythology and narrative theory—how individuals make sense of, learn, and grow from their experiences.

Patricia Bell-Scott is Professor of Child and Family Development & Women's Studies and an Adjunct Professor of Psychology at the University of Georgia in Athens. She was founding co-editor of *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* and principal editor of the award-winning anthology, *Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers and Daughters*. She is co-editor of the first text in Black women's studies, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men: But Some of Us Are Brave*, as well as editor of *Life Notes: Personal Writings by Contemporary Black Women,* and *Flat-footed Truths: Telling Black Women's Lives*. She specializes as a teacher and writer in Black women's narratives.

Barbara Bickel is a stepmother, artist, researcher, and educator. She is currently working on a Ph.D. in Education at The University of British Columbia, where her research focus is women, spiritual leadership, art and education. She has a MA in Education, a BFA in Painting and a BA in Sociology and Art History.

Mary Kay Blakely is an Associate Professor at the Missouri School of Journalism. She is the author of three books, including *Wake Me When It's Over—A Journey to the Edge and Back* (Times Books/Random House) and *American Mom—Motherhood, Politics and Humble Pie* (Algonquin/Pocket Books), and her essays have been collected in numerous anthologies. A Hers columnist for the *New York Times* and currently a contributing editor to *Ms.* and the *Los Angeles Times* magazine, she has published essays and articles about social issues in *Mother Jones, Life, Working Woman, McCalls, Redbook, Psychology Today, Self, the Chicago Tribune, the New York Times Book Review* and numerous other national publications. Her work has been translated and published in Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, England and Italy. She now teaches Advanced Writing at the University of Missouri and is the director of the New York Summer Journalism Program at the New School University.

Debra Brenegan is an English/Creative Writing Ph.D. student and T.A. at The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, also working toward a graduate certificate in Women's Studies. She's published articles, stories and poems in a variety of newspapers, magazines, and newsletters. Debra has also recently finished her first novel and is looking for a publisher.

Sandra Campbell is a published novelist and the co-creator of Esprit Publications (www.espritpublications.ca) that explores through personal narratives the connections of bodymindsoul and the process of living/writing from inside out. Her essays on imagery, culture and learning have been published in anthologies and magazines in both Canada and the United States.

Paula J. Caplan, Ph.D., is the author of *THE NEW Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship* and eight other books. She is a Visiting Scholar at the Pembroke Center for Research and Teaching on Women at Brown University and is former Professor of Applied Psychology and Head of the Centre for Women's Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She is also a playwright, actor, and director, and her play, CALL ME CRAZY, includes a monologue delivered by "Amalia Freud" (Freud's mother) that is partly about mother-blame and being a mother. She lectures and teaches workshops about mothers and daughters, as well as other subjects, and has helped organized social and political action about various matters, including sexism in psychiatric diagnosis and in the use of psychotropic drugs. Her most recent work on the latter is addressed in part in her recent article in the *National Women's Health Network's "Network News."*

Patrice DiQuinzio is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of Women's Studies at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA, USA. She is the author of *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering* (Routledge, 1999) and is co-editor with Iris Marion Young of *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy* (Indiana University Press, 1997). Her articles on philosophical problems in theorizing motherhood and on motherhood as a model for citizenship have appeared in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* and *Women and Politics*. She is currently at work on a project analyzing contemporary instances of U.S. women's civic engagement conducted under the sign of motherhood, such as the Million Mom March.

Carol B. Duncan is Associate Professor of Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier University. Trained as a sociologist, her areas of interest include Caribbean immigration to Canada, the African Diaspora, Caribbean religions in North America, especially the Spiritual Baptist Church and religion and popular culture.

Rishma Dunlop is a professor of Literary Studies and Arts Education in the

Faculty of Education and Womens Studies at York University, Toronto, Canada. She is the founder of a research collective of women artists/scholars called *The Red Shoes Collective.* Current projects include work on Testimony, History and Memory, an exploration of the engagement with literature and the arts for human rights education. Her ongoing collaborations with visual artists include exhibitions of literary texts and art, collaborative publications and performances. Rishma Dunlop is a poet and fiction writer whose work has won awards and has appeared in numerous books and journals. Her most recent books of poetry are *The Body of My Garden* (Mansfield Press, 2002), *Reading Like a Girl* (Black Moss Press, 2004) and *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets*, co-edited with Priscila Uppal (Mansfield Press, 2004). She is currently collaborating with photographer Joe Paczuski on a book of poetry and photographs about the contemporary city titled *Metropolis.*

Sherri Goldstein Cash, Ph.D., is the mother of two girls and an Assistant Professor of History at Utica College in Utica, New York, USA. She teaches U.S. history, including women's history. Her research concerns early nineteenth century poor women and social welfare institutions.

Miriam Edelson is a social activist, mother and writer living in Toronto. Her creative non-fiction and commentaries have appeared in *The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star*, CBC Radio, *This Magazine* as well as other periodicals. Born in New York, Edelson spent her teens in Toronto and completed graduate studies in political science at Carleton University. She is fluent in French and is currently pursuing doctoral studies in sociology and bio-ethics part-time at the University of Toronto. Her particular area of interest is social policy regarding the care of medically-fragile infants. Edelson has worked in the trade union movement since 1980, specializing in communications and human rights issues. She lives in Toronto with her daughter Emma.

Vanessa DesLauriers Fisher, at age twenty-one, is an aspiring Vancouver-based writer. Writing has recently become a medium with which to express her philosophical inquiries and spiritual insights into the essential nature of Beauty and its presence in our lives. She is interested in transforming and redefining our ordinary conceptions of Beauty, especially for young women.

Juliana Forbes has two children and is cofounder of Mothers Acting Up, a movement to invite and inspire mothers to passionately advocate for children around the world (mothersactingup.org). She is a painter of abstract oils and has been shown in galleries and shows in Boulder, Denver and Aspen.

Julieanna Frost is Assistant Professor of History at Concordia University - Ann Arbor. She is a doctoral candidate in Women's Studies and U.S. History at the Union Institute and University. Her scholarly interests include women's

history, religious studies, Native American studies, and African American studies.

Fiona Joy Green, PhD. is the mother of a teenaged son, an Assistant Professor, and the Coordinator of the Women's Studies Programme at the University of Winnipeg. Dr. Green's present research re-visits the development of feminist mothering for a number feminist mothers who first participated in research concerning the dialectics of feminism and mothering a decade ago. Her ongoing research explores the realities of feminist mothering for a wide range of women who live across North America. Dr. Green's work on feminist mothering can be found in the *Journal of the Association of Research on Mothering* (Vol.1.1; Vo. 5.2) and in *Mother Outlaw*, and *From Motherhood to Mothering*.

Emily Jeremiah has a Ph.D. in German Studies and is the author of *Troubling Maternity: Mothering, Agency, and Ethics in Women's Writing in German of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: MHRA, 2003). She is currently teaching at Goldsmiths College, London, and working on a novel.

Miriam Johnson is a retired Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon whose teaching and writing has been focused on gender and the family throughout her career. She is the author of a book entitled *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives* and co-author with Jean Stockard of a text on sex and gender. She and her husband of many years live in Oregon where they both taught sociology. They have two children, one married and one single. Currently she is affiliated with the Council on Contemporary Families, which attempts to get accurate research information out about the many different kinds of contemporary families besides the so called "ideal" nuclear family that now exist in the U.S. and Canada.

Chris Klassen is completing her Ph.D. in Women's Studies at York University. She does research on identity construction in feminist Witchcraft. She also teaches part-time in the Religion and Culture department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Becky R. Lee is Associate Professor in Religious Studies and Women's Studies at York University and an admirer of women like Margery Kempe who creatively resist, subvert and manoeuvre within prevailing gender stereotypes and roles.

Andrea Lieber is Associate Professor of Religion at Dickinson College where she holds the Sophia Ava Abell Chair in Judaic Studies. She is co-chair of the Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) Women's Caucus. Her efforts to establish childcare at the AJS annual meeting were featured in *Lilith Magazine,* Winter 2004.

Laura Major recently submitted her Ph.D. dissertation on the *Re-imagination of the Pregnant and Birthing Self in Contemporary American Women's Poetry* to the English department at Bar Ilan University in Israel, where she was a presidential fellow throughout her doctoral studies. Her research interests include motherhood, poetry, religion in literature, and autobiography. Laura lives in Israel with her husband and three children.

Lisa Miller, Ph.D. is a tenured Associated Professor in the Clinical Psychology Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. She has conducted a series of empirical studies on spiritual development and evolution across the lifespan, focusing primarily around the life chapters of childhood, adolescence, child birth and parenting.

Carolyn Mitchell, professor of English and Director of women's studies, earned her Ph.D. from Boston College, her master's from Michigan State University and her bachelor's from Hunter College. The author of a number of books and articles, her interests include 19th- and 20th- century American literature, African American literature, women's literature, Victorian fiction, women's studies, theory and criticism.

Ruby K. Newman is Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities at Atkinson College, School of Arts and Letters, York University. She teaches courses in Women's Studies, Humanities and Jewish Studies. She received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research interests include oral narratives of Ethiopian-Jewish women in Israel. She is the mother of two sons and a daughter and the proud grandmother of a grandson.

Andrea O'Reilly, Ph.D. , is an Associate Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University where she teaches a course on motherhood (the first course on motherhood in Canada; now taught to more than 200 students a year as a Distance Education course), and the Introduction to Women's Studies course. She is co-editor/editor of seven books on motherhood: *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Second Story Press, 1998), *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), *Mothers and Sons: Feminism, Masculinity and the Struggle to Raise our Sons* (Routledge Press 2001), *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (SUNY, 2004), *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (Women's Press, 2004), and *Mother Matters: Mothering as Discourse and Practice* (ARM Press, 2004) and author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* (SUNY, 2004). She is currently at work on three edited books: *Feminist Mothering, Motherhood: Power and Oppression* and *Women's Voices Across the Third Wave* and writing *Reconceiving Maternity.* O'Reilly is founding presi-

dent of the Association for Research on Mothering, (ARM); the first feminist association on the topic of mothering-motherhood with more than 500 members worldwide, and is founder and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering.* In 1998 she was the recipient of the University wide "Teacher of the Year" award at York University. As well she had been interviewed widely on this topic including appearances on "More to Life," "Planet Parent," "Canadian Living Television," "Sex TV," "Next.New.Now," CBC radio and *Time Magazine.* Andrea and her common-law spouse of 21 years are the parents of a 19-year old son and two daughters, ages 14 and 17.

Ruth Panofsky is Associate Director of the Joint Graduate Programme in Communication in Culture (Ryerson/York Universities). She also is Book Review Editor of the Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering. Her most recent publications include Adele Wiseman: Essays on Her Works (2001) and Lifeline (poetry, 2001).

Joe Paczuski is a photographer and high school teacher. His current work explores contemporary urban landscapes and the genre of photography as a mode of inquiry in social justice and human rights education. The cover photo is a statue in front of Mothercraft, Toronto. The statue is called "The Eternal Mother and Child," by sculptor Florence Wylie. Paczuski's photo is part of a current series about Toronto titled *Metropolis,* a collaboration with poet Rishma Dunlop.

Joanna Radbord is a lawyer with the firm of Epstein, Cole, and is a lesbian who is planning a pregnancy with her spouse. Her practice focusses on family law and gay and lesbian equality rights, and she is particularly interested in the legal regulation of lesbian mothering. Joanna was involved with *M. v. H.,* the first Supreme Court of Canada decision to successfully challenge the definition of "spouse" as restricted to opposite-sex couples. She was counsel to a lesbian father in *Forrester v. Saliba*, which states that transsexuality is irrelevant to a child's best interests. She is currently co-counsel to the eight same sex couples seeking the freedom to choose civil marriage in Ontario.

Sara Ruddick is the author of *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace.* She has co-edited three anthologies, most recently *Mother Troubles: Reflections on Contemporary Maternal Dilemmas.* For many years she taught at The New School University in New York City where she lives.

Lori Saint-Martin is a professor in the literature department at the Université du Québec à Montréal. She has published two books of short fiction, *Lettre imaginaire à la femme de mon amant* (1991) and *Mon père, la nuit* (1999), French translations of six English-Canadian novels, in collaboration with Paul Gagné

(one of which, *Un parfum de cèdre*, a translation of Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*, won the Governor General's award for translation in 2000), and several books of non-fiction on women's writing in Québec, including *Le nom de la mère: Mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin* (*The Name of the Mother: Mothers, Daughters and Writing in Quebec Women's Fiction*), 1999. A book-length feminist study of Gabrielle Roy's fiction, *La voyageuse et la prisonnière: Gabrielle Roy et la question des femmes*, is forthcoming from Éditions du Boréal. With Paul Gagné, she has two children, Nicolas, born in 1993, and Anna, born in 1995.

Jill Scott is Assistant Professor of German at Queen's University, Kingston. Her publications include *Electra after Freud* (Cornell UP, 2005) and articles on women authors, psychoanalysis and cultural studies. Her current research is on the communication of forgiveness in literature. She has two beautiful children who teach her all she needs to know about mothering.

Justyna Sempruch obtained Ph.D. in Comparative Literature (2003) at the University of British Columbia in Canada. Her research areas are transfeminist theories, public policies, family studies and women's literature. She is currently conducting her postdoctoral research on the 'Politics of Parenthood and its Impact on Women's Employment' at the Centre for Gender Studies, University of Basle (Switzerland) and York University (Canada).

Johanna H. Stuckey received her B.A. and M.A. from University of Toronto, and, in 1965, her Ph.D. from Yale University. She is currently University Professor Emerita at York University in Toronto, Canada. She is a retired member of York's interdisciplinary Division of Humanities and Programmes in Women's Studies and Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, and of the Programmes in Women's Studies and Interdisciplinary M.A. in the Faculty of Graduate Studies. She has also taught Continuing Education courses on goddessess and goddess worship at the University of Toronto. Johanna has a reading knowledge of French, German, Italian, Latin, Classical Greek, and Biblical Hebrew. She is the author of numerous learned articles, papers, book reviews, and a text book on feminist spirituality. She is at present working on another book, tentatively entitled *Goddesses and 'Dying Gods'* and on a text book on ancient goddesses and their worship. Her courses have been popular with students of all ages, and she has appeared often on television and radio. The American Academy of Religion, in an effort to connect more broadly with the media, recently compiled a list for journalists of 5,000 religious-studies scholars from all over North America. Johanna Stuckey is one of the first on their list of goddess scholars.

Trudelle Thomas is a Professor of English at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S. where she teaches courses in writing, environmental literature,

women's literature, and autobiography. Her articles have appeared in *College Composition and Communication, WPA: The Journal of Writing Program Administrators, The International Journal of Children's Spirituality, Religious Education, The Journal of American Culture*, and elsewhere. She is a child advocate, and also a mother, stepmother, and "othermother." She is currently writing a book about spirituality and maternal experience. Her book, *Spirituality in the Mother Zone*, was recently published by Paulist Press in May 2005.

Hinna Mirza Upal is currently attending the law school at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island on a full Papitto Scholarship. She was born in Canada and received a BA Honors in Sociology from Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. She has been married to her husband Anwar for four years and together they have two daughters, Somayya and Fateha.

Natasja VanderBerg is a Master's student in philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario. She is currently writing her thesis in which she explores Luce Irigaray's concept of sexual difference as a challenge to traditional western distinctions between spirit and matter; the divine and mortals; and the transcendental and the sensible. In 2004, Natasja presented a paper at the Society for Phenomenology and Existentialist Philosophy on the topic of air, breathing and spirituality in the work of Luce Irigaray.

Martha Modena Vertreace-Doody was named the Glendora Review Poet, Lagos, Nigeria. She was also twice a Fellow at the Hawthornden International Writers' Retreat in Scotland, Poetry Fellow at the Writers Center, Dublin, Ireland, and a Fellow at St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Wales, on a bursary. Her most recent book, *Glacier Fire*, won the Word Press Poetry Prize.

Karen Nelson Villanueva is a doctoral student at the California Institute of Integral Studies specializing in Women's Spirituality. She holds degrees from the University of Michigan, George Washington and Holy Names University. She currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her family where she teaches humanities and writes.

——Call for Papers——

The editorial board is seeking submissions for Vol. 8.1 of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) to be published in Fall/Winter 2006.

The journal will explore the subject:

Mothering and Feminism

The journal will explore the topic of mothering and feminism from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, artists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. We also welcome creative reflections such as poetry, short stories, and artwork on the subject.

If you are interested in writing a book review, we have books in need of a review, or if you know of a recent publication that you think would be relevant, please contact arm@yorku.ca.

Submission guidelines:
Book reviews are to be no more than 2 pages (500 words),
articles should be 15 pages (3750 words).
All should be MLA style, in WordPerfect or
Word and IBM compatible.

For more information, please contact us at:

Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson, York University,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3
Call us at (416) 736-2100 x 60366,
Email: arm@yorku.ca Fax: (416) 736-5766
Website: www.yorku.ca/crm

Submissions must be received by November 1, 2005.

To submit work to the journal, one must be a member of ARM and memberships received by November 1, 2005.

Call for Papers

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
invites submission of abstracts for our 9th annual conference on

Mothering, Race, Ethnicity and Culture

October 21-23, 2005
York University, Toronto, Canada

This conference will explore, from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, the topic of mothering, race, ethnicity and culture. We welcome submissions from students, activists, scholars, artists and others who work or research in this area. Cross-cultural, historical and comparative work is encouraged. We encourage a variety of types of submissions including academic papers, workshops, creative submissions, performances, storytelling, visual arts and other alternative formats.

Confirmed keynote speakers include:

Dorothy Roberts, author of *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*
and
Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty

Cecelie Berry, editor of *Rise Up Singing*

Jennifer James, publisher of Mommy Too! Magazine

If you are interested in being considered as a presenter, please send a 250 word abstract and a 50-word bio by **September 1, 2005** to:

Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson, York University,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3
Call us at (416) 736-2100 x 60366,
Email: arm@yorku.ca Fax: (416) 736-5766
Website: www.yorku.ca/crm

One must be a member of ARM to submit an abstract.

Call for Papers

The editorial board is seeking submissions for Vol. 8.1 of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) to be published in Fall/Winter 2006.

The journal will explore the subject:

Young Mothers

The journal will explore the topic of Young Mothers from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. We welcome submissions from scholars, students, activists, artists, mothers and others who work or research in this area. We also welcome creative reflections such as poetry, short stories, and artwork on the subject.

If you are interested in writing a book review, we have books in need of a review, or if you know of a recent publication that you think would be relevant, please contact arm@yorku.ca

Submission guidelines:
Book reviews are to be no more than 2 pages (500 words), articles should be 15 pages (3750 words).
All should be MLA style, in WordPerfect or Word and IBM compatible.

For more information, please contact us at:

Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson, York University,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3
Call us at (416) 736-2100 x 60366,
Email: arm@yorku.ca Fax: (416) 736-5766
Website: www.yorku.ca/crm

Submissions must be received by May 1, 2006.

To submit work to the journal, one must be a member of ARM and memberships must be received by May 1, 2006.

Please Mark Your Calendars!

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
is proud to present our first

Summer Institute
on
Mothering, Work and the Family

July 18 – July 22, 2005
York University, Toronto, Canada

Confirmed Faculty:

Nancy Mandell, Sociology/Women's Studies, York University
Andrea O'Reilly, Women's Studies, York University and
Director of the Association for Research on Mothering
Lorna Turnbull, Faculty of Law, University of Winnipeg

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

Joan Williams, Director of WorkLife Law,
American University, Washington and Author of *Unbending Gender: Why Work and Family Conflict and What to do About iIt*

Marlene Nourbese Phillips, Poet, Writer, Lawyer and
Author of *Harriet's Daughter, She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks*, and *Frontiers: Esssays and Writings on Racism and Culture*

For more information about the institute,
please inquire at: arm@yorku.ca

Association for Research on Mothering,
726 Atkinson College
York University, 4700 Keele Street,
Toronto, ON, Canada, M3J 1P3
Tel (416) 736-2100 x. 60366 www.yorku.ca/crm

——Call for Papers——

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
invites submission of abstracts for our
2006 Mother's Day conference on:

Carework and Caregiving: Theory and Practice

May 5 – May 7, 2006
York University, Toronto, Canada

We welcome submissions from students, activists, scholars, artists and others who work or research in this area. Cross-cultural, historical and comparative work is encouraged. We encourage a variety of types of submissions including academic papers, workshops, performances, storytelling, visual arts and other alternative formats.

Topics can include, but are not limited to:

- •Caregiving as Work
- •Care and Social Power
- •Care and Economics: Valuing paid and unpaid carework
- •Carework: Research objectives and findings
- •Carework and Social Policy:Analysis, activism and advocacy
- •Caring for Children:Social norms, cultural ideals, feminist discourse, scientific inquiry and expert advice
- •Framing Carework: Defining the process and practice of care
- •Mothering and the Politics of Care: Family values, feminism and ethics of care
- •The Globalization of Care
- •The Right to Care: Legal questions and solutions
- •The Work of the Body: Experiences of intimacy and embodiment in caregiving
- •Writing about care and carework – popular and dissenting discourses
- •Sharing Care: Progress and resistance to fully-shared parenting for gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples

Confirmed keynote speakers include:

Nancy Folbre,
author of
The Invisible Heart and *Who Cares for The Children*

Joan C. Tronto,
author of
Moral Boundaries: a Political Argument for an Ethic of Care

Eva Feder Kittay,
author of
Love's Labor,
editor, *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*

Judy Stadtman Tucker,
editor of
Mothersmovement.org

We welcome submissions from a variety of disciplines. If you are interested in being considered as a speaker, please send a 250-word abstract and a 50-word bio by **September 1, 2005** to:

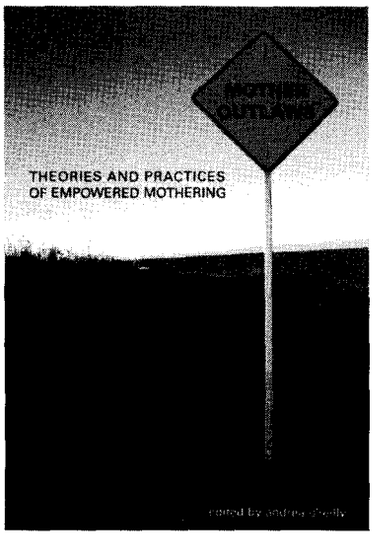
Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson, York University,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3
Call us at (416) 736-2100 x 60366,
Email: arm@yorku.ca Fax: (416) 736-5766
Website: www.yorku.ca/crm

One must be a member of ARM for 2006
in order to submit an abstract.
Membership must be received with your submission.

Contents

Mother Outlaws:
Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering

Edited by Andrea O'Reilly



Andrea O'Reilly, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University. She is co-editor/editor of five books on Motherhood: *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Second Story Press, 1998), *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), *Mothers and Sons: Feminism, Masculinity and the Struggle to Raise our Sons* (Routledge Press 2001), *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (SUNY, 2004), *Mother Matters: Mothering as Discourse and Practice* (ARM Press, 2004) and author of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart,* (SUNY, 2004). O'Reilly is founding president of the Association for Research on Mothering, (ARM); the first feminist association on the topic of mothering-motherhood with more than 500 members worldwide, and is founding and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering.* Andrea and her common-law spouse of twenty-one years are the parents of three teenagers.

Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* distinguished between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential* relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution* which aims at ensuring that that potential and all women shall remain under male control. The term motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word mothering refers to women's experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred and potentially empowering to women. The reality of oppressive motherhood thus must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of empowered mothering. While most feminist scholars now distinguish mothering from motherhood and recognize that the former is not inherently oppressive, empowered mothering has not been theorized in feminist scholarship.

The theory and practice of empowered mothering recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life, and practices mothering, from a position of agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy. Secondly, this new perspective, in emphasizing maternal authority and ascribing agency to mothers and value to motherwork, defines motherhood as a political site wherein mother can affect social change through feminist child rearing and in the world at large through political-social activism. This collection examines how mothers seek to imagine and implement a theory and practice of mothering that is *empowering* to women as opposed to oppressive, under five sections: Feminist Mothering, Lesbian Mothering, African American Mothering, Mothers and Daughters, Mothers and Sons.

May 2004 0-88961-446-6 pb 400 pp C$35.95 US$31.95
7 x 9 Women's Press

Distributed by University of Toronto Press
To Order:
(tel)1-800-565-9523 (fax) 1-800-221-9985 or
utpbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca

For additional information, or to request an examination copy of this title for course consideration, please contact:
Renée Knapp
Academic Marketing Manager
CSPI/Women's Press, 80 Bloor Street West, Suite 801
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2V6
rknapp@cspi.org 416-929-2774 ext 17

Association for Research on Mothering

ARM 2005
MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please indicate your membership option
(one year and two year memberships/subscriptions are available):

***Full ARM Membership* includes: subscription to the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* • members directory •listserve •reduced conference fees**

❑ individual $ 75.00 Cdn/US* ❑ institution $100.00 Cdn/US*

❑ 2 yrs/ind. $140.00 Cdn/US* ❑ 2 yrs/inst. $190.00 Cdn/US*

***Sustaining Full ARM Membership*: as a sustaining member, your extra contribution will help ensure that ARM, a non-profit organization, can continue to meet its operating costs. 2003 sustaining members will receive a free back issue.**

❑ individual/institutional sustaining membership $125.00 Cdn/US*

❑ 2 yrs individual/institutional sustaining membership $250.00 Cdn/US*

***Basic ARM Membership* includes: •members directory •listserve •reduced conference fees**

❑ individual $50.00 Cdn/US* ❑ student/unwaged $35.00 Cdn/US*

❑ 2 yrs/ind. $90.00 Cdn/US* ❑ 2 yrs/student/unwaged $60.00 Cdn/US*

Subscription to the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*: (a biannual publication)

❑ individual $27.00 Cdn/US* ❑ institution $47.00 Cdn/US*

❑ 2 yrs/ind. $52.00 Cdn/US* ❑ 2 yrs/inst. $92.00 Cdn/US*

Mail in your membership form today!
Just fold here and tape together.

Stamp

Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson College,
York University
4700 Keele Street,
Toronto ON M3J 1P3
Telephone: (416) 736-2100 x 60366
Email: arm@yorku.ca
Website: www.yorku.ca/crm