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Writing Back Through Our Mothers: A Transnational Feminist Study on the Woman's Historical Novel

by

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For my grandmother and my mother …

ABSTRACT

This transnational feminist study on the contemporary woman's historical novel (post 1970) argues that the genre's central theme and focus is the maternal. Analyzing the maternal, disclosed through a myriad of genealogies, voices, and figures, reveals that the historical novel is a feminist means for challenging historical erasures, silences, normative sexuality, political exclusion, divisions of labour, and so on within a historical-literary context. The novels surveyed in this work speak from the margins and spaces of silence within history and the genre. As much as the works contest masculinist master narratives, they also create and envision new genealogies. Each narrative centers on an atypical female protagonist and the role of history is not only visible but also serves as the setting for either the heroine or the author to consciously subject patriarchal values to a gender analysis. Furthermore, there is a maternal connection between the milieu/personal history of the writer and the subject matter/history of the novel, which suggests the simultaneous rewriting of the present by recalling and reclaiming the past. In recuperating and reclaiming the past, the woman's historical novel puts forth a counter text or a counter version of history, but assumes, contrary to the post-modern techniques many feminist novels employ, a historical reality and a gendered reality that extends beyond the text and that grounds the text. Acknowledging and studying this transnational corpus is, therefore, imperative for expanding and updating the genre's current masculinist Eurocentric status and bridging new relations between transnational feminism and literature. Collectively, the novels form a femino-centric space–an

imagined motherland or matria–wherein patriarchy, Eurocentrism, gender, motherhood, and the nation are fiercely interrogated. The act of writing back through our mothers is a means for making collective and personal arguments for feminist changes; thus, this study contends that a transnational feminist knowledge project on the contemporary woman's historical novel is necessary, worthwhile, and timely.

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INTRODUCTION[1]

I. The Woman's Historical Novel: A Transnational Genre

The woman's historical novel, a blurring of fact with fiction or the real with the imagination, is an immensely popular literary genre. On a whole, the historical novel has not attracted much scholarship, but women's historical novels in particular have garnered very little criticism. Typically, genre studies are devoted to the study of male historical novelists and their novels.[2] Meanwhile feminists, who have much to say about history and fiction separately, are also not forthcoming in theorizing the historical novel or women's historical novels. Therefore, research dedicated to the genre is insufficient and inadequate in understanding or defining women's historical novels. This dissertation supplements current scholarship and is a transnational study on contemporary women's historical novels (post 1970). I argue that focusing on contemporary women's historical fiction constitutes a transnational feminist writing/reading project.

This project has three objectives: 1) to acknowledge and analyze a body of transnational contemporary feminist women's historical fiction that has not been adequately studied or recognized; 2) to compare the political potential of the maternal and maternal possibilities in women's historical novels transnationally; 3) to provide a deeper understanding of the relation between transnational feminism and feminist literature.

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[1] A revised version of this dissertation has been accepted for publication. Zimmerman 2013. London/Berlin: LIT-Verlag.
[2] For example, see Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel* (1932) or Seymour Menton's *Latin America's New Historical Novel* (1993).

The following chapters articulate a common goal in both transnational feminism and women's historical novels: the political act of writing back through our foremothers to counter and disrupt patriarchal and hegemonic accounts of history and literature. Confronting patriarchal discourses is necessary if we are to envision and move into a new future for women, as women. Monika M. Elbert writes, "the past needs to be exorcised or healed for there to be a future or for there to be a reconciliation of the sexes" (38-9). The recuperation of maternal genealogies, voices, and figures is a sign of our indebtedness, as women, to women from the past who were brave enough to envisage reality differently. In a sense this project as a whole constitutes that which Tess Cosslett labels a "matrilineal narrative" (7).

A matrilineal narrative either "tells the stories of several generations of women at once" (Cosslett 7) or "shows how the identity of a central character [here woman as a collective] is crucially formed by her female ancestors" (7). The phrase "writing back through our mothers" signifies this continuity with the past, which we have inherited from historical-literary women. The phrase is indebted to Virginia Woolf's influential statements on women's writing in *A Room of One's Own*: "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (76) and "a woman writing thinks back through her mothers" (96). In women's writing "writing back" is a political action that can influence and change women's futures. Tania Modleski refers to this matrilineage as "our cultural heritage as women" (43) and Marianne Hirsch calls this a burgeoning "maternal subjectivity" (197). These transnational writers "clearly identify themselves as a

new feminist generation in relation to the maternal tradition of the past, writers for whom fathers, brothers, and husbands occupy a less prominent place, writers who are in a more distant relation to cultural and literary hegemony" (Hirsch 16). When read together the novels create a dynamic transnational maternal discourse that challenges and contests a single and stable definition of the maternal or "mother."

I use the term "mother" more figuratively than literally. Luce Irigaray asserts "we are always mothers once we are women. … We engender something other than children: love, desire, language, art, the social, the political, the religious, for example … we must reappropriate this maternal dimension that belongs to us as women" (*Irigaray Reader* 43). Thus, regardless of whether women are biological or social mothers, I consider all the protagonists studied maternal figures. This transnational survey analyzes for the first time the roles of maternal figures, voices, and genealogies in the contemporary woman's historical novel (this study as I will explain shortly focuses solely on feminist women's historical novels but for simplicity is referred to as the woman's historical novel).

Since 1970, the woman's historical novel has become a most suitable medium for writers from a plurality of transnational perspectives. In this project, I demonstrate the ways in which transnational topics have been used by contemporary women writers in order to "unmask and redefine maternal roles and subjectivities" (Podnieks and O'Reilly 5).[3] When considered as a whole,

[3] While maternal figures, matrifocal narratives, mother-daughter explorations, daughter-centric texts, mothering, and motherhood–all popular topics in women's literature, predominantly novels

these works create a politicized matrilineal genealogy that combats both master narratives and postmodern perspectives which reinforce patriarchal history, literature and historiography. Constructing a fluid sense of the maternal and the institution of motherhood is timely within transnational feminism and allows for a more nuanced exploration of how literary studies can inform, and be informed by, transnational feminist theory and practises.

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan suggest "if the world is currently structured by transnational economic links and cultural asymmetries, locating feminist practices within these structures becomes imperative" (3). Jacqui M. Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty likewise believe a transnational project will, amongst other criteria, be "a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world (24). Transnational feminism can, thus, be understood as a heterogeneous account of women's lived experiences in specific local, national, and global contexts, which is evident in the survey of texts in this study. A "politics of location," to use Adrienne Rich's term, "identifies the grounds for historically specific differences and similarities between women in diverse and asymmetrical relations, creating alternative histories, identities, and possibilities for alliances" (Kaplan 139). Women's historical novels offer compelling narratives for how we can hear a plurality of women's voices without homogenizing them.

–are now widely discussed in feminist literary scholarship (Hirsch, O'Reilly, Daly, Reddy, Brandt, Ingman, Goiogrio, Yu, Rich), a sustained discussion of the maternal in the woman's historical novel is yet to be written.

Achieved from a plurality of voices and positions, a transnational approach entails challenging national and ideological boundaries. Françoise Lionnet argues that "transnational feminism attaches much value to the questions of solidarity, for such as ethics implies that we remain respectful of differences while arguing for universal human rights in a multipolar world" (106). Lionnet's thinking provides promising directions and strategies for reading women's historical novels. Alena Heitlinger's thoughts are also worth noting:

> Transnational feminism acknowledges both the specific local and national forms of patriarchy, as well as the ways in which global economic restructuring and transnational cultural influences shape and link the material and cultural lives of women around the world ... Transnational feminism is not simply a matter of flow of ideas, but also a question of flow of money and power relations. (7)

Thus, it is imperative to identify how the woman's historical novel within transnationalism has put forth a feminist agenda in reclaiming the maternal.

This study identifies the maternal as the central theme within the woman's historical novel since recent transnational times–this becomes evident when analyzing how women writers have increasingly turned to transnational topics in order to expound and explicate the maternal in innovative ways. The following chapters identify the most common and complex of these contemporary issues: 1 founding nations, 2 matriarchal families, 3 gender and nationality, 4 religion, 5 mother figures, 6 race and postcolonialism, 7 work, 8 crime, 9 war, and 10 the arts. In addition to demarcating the chapters in the

above manner, I discuss how the works in each relate to texts written prior to the transnational turn, and proceed to provide close readings of the most meaningful femino-centric aspects. In doing so, I take into account a wide range of women's social roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, aunts, lovers, orphans, courtesans, storytellers, goddesses, midwives, idols, monsters, witches, traitors, healers, and mistresses, as well as bodily experiences with childbirth, adoption, abortion, miscarriage, infertility, rape, childlessness by choice, and cross-dressing, in addition to relationships with other women in terms of female companionship, friendship, emotional nurturing, love, sexual partners, absence, sacrifice, fear, deceit, jealousy, abhorrence, and rivalry.

The thematic structure reflects a transnational feminist approach to the subject matter of woman's historical novels and pays less attention to the form. I accept Joseph W. Turner's argument that "formal properties may not be the genre's distinguishing characteristic: it is the content more than the form, after all, that sets historical novels off from other fiction" (335). Grouping novels by theme is not intended to show a strict demarcation from each other, but, in the vein of transnational feminism, fluidity. In contradistinction to most scholarship, this study gives shape and voice to the multi-national, multi-lingual, and multicultural nature of women's historical novels, which I argue emerges in the 1970s. The connecting thread is constructing and reclaiming the maternal through the act of writing back, which is made manifest in how each novel shares several interconnecting transnational feminist concerns such as nationhood, gender/sexuality, migration, exile, family, race, romance, and so on.

My approach differs from traditional studies on the genre, which fall into the following four categories: 1) chronological and theoretical e.g., Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel* (1932), or Richard Maxwell's *Historical Novel in Europe 1650-1950* (2009); 2) single nation, i.e., England; 3) identity (gender, race, class, sexuality, for example Maurice Samuels' article "David Schornstein and the Rise of Jewish Historical Fiction in Nineteenth-Century France" (2008)); and, 4) single author studies, such as Anne Green's *Flaubert and The Historical Novel: Salammbô Reassessed* (1982). A thematic division inspired by transnational feminist thinking is the driving force behind my text selection, albeit these choices are further based on the nationality and the language of an author and/or text in order to truly express the transnational nature of this genre. While it is true the woman's historical novel does not necessarily map or fulfill all transnational feminisms require, for example anti-capitalism, what justifies and validates reading it as constituting a transnational feminist knowledge project is a unanimous invocation of maternal voices from the past as meaningful and meaningfully present in our present.

These chapters demonstrate differences between women, but more importantly they demonstrate feminist solidarity in making women's historical lives visible and in acknowledging them as inspirations for social transformation. The woman's historical novel, like transnational feminism, challenges patriarchy and argues it is a false hierarchical sexual division. In this hierarchy man occupies the privileged and superior position over and against woman and is enacted in lived experience (the familial, political, social and economic).

Margaret Whitford clarifies: "Patriarchy is defined by Irigaray as 'an exclusive respect for the genealogy of sons and fathers, and the competition between brothers'" (Section I, 24). Though patriarchy has come under attack as a false universal, for example by Sheila Rowbotham, feminist historiographer Judith Bennett defiantly calls for a "fully historicized understanding of patriarchy as feminism's central theoretical problematic" (Morgan 6). Bennett writes: "this division between women as victims and women as agents is a false one: women have always been both victims and agents ... Women have not been merely passive victims of patriarchy, they have also colluded in, undermined, and survived patriarchy" (Feminism and History, 67). A critical engagement with and against patriarchy is a defining feature of both transnational feminism and the woman's historical novel.

In contrast to other kinds of historical novels, the woman's historical novel offers a unique gendered perspective–it is a discourse by women about women seeking feminist change. Modleski argues that "it remains importantly the case that feminist critical writing is committed writing, a writing committed to the future of women" (47). This desire for cultural transformation aligns itself with the causes of transnational feminism and sets it apart from master narratives and postmodern readings of the historical novel. Despite being a vehicle for feminist arguments, transnational feminism has not engaged enough with fiction (film and media excluded). Perhaps the practice of reading/writing/engaging with texts is understood as too theoretical and that the physical, political, and economic concerns of transnational feminist organizations are more urgent and

pressing.[4] Pascal Dufour, Dominique Masson, and Dominique Caouette, for example, identify different types of transnational collective action, but, as is often the case, the role of literature remains undeveloped.

Possibly the authors believe it is too difficult to trace literature in terms of what they call "coordinated action," but I argue that the medium nevertheless has been taken up repeatedly and simultaneously by activist women writers and readers and constitutes the practice of "mobilizing and transferring resources," "deploying discourses, and constructing collective identities" (Dufour et al. 15) the authors state as necessary. Understanding literature or literary theory as detached immateriality is misguided. There is a gendered materiality and reality outside of the text because "'gender' structures society, our thinking and our actions in fundamental ways" (Westen 7). Taking into account the gendered politics and economics of book publishing, the means to purchase books, translation, reading, etc., particularly within the last three decades of globalization, suggests a more nuanced dialogic exchange between transnational feminism and literary practices is necessary.

This project invokes a transnational feminist commitment to reading women's historical novels from the 1970s onwards for the following reasons: we live in an age of hyper-globalization within which feminists and transnational feminists have been politically active for over thirty years (Acker 17); "the African diaspora in the 1970s, [is] the same period when the notions of "matrilineal tradition" and "female memory" newly prevailed among black

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[4] For example *Women Worldwide: Transnational Feminist Perspectives on Women* (2011) edited by Janet Lee and Susan M. Shaw boasts over 80 articles, including chapter 2: "World Media," but not a single article deals with literature.

feminist writers and critics" (Hochberg 3), for example, Alice Walker's influential essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1974); *la nueva mujer en la escritura de autoras hispánicas* [the new woman in the writing of Hispanic women authors] signals a unique femino-centric voice and revises "the national imagination in Latin America" (Handley 72);[5] feminist studies, notably psychoanalytic ones, on the mother figure and mothering become a topic of wide debate; postcolonial and marginal voices effectively question and re-write dominant western discourse while, at the same time, postmodernist perspectives that reduce history to narrative proliferate; abortion and contraception became legal in many western countries and new technological possibilities for the maternal (surrogacy, in-vitro fertilization, sperm banks) emerged; feminist rewritings in the 1970s demanded that the female subject be included in historical writing: "the recovering of women as subjects of, and agents in, the making of history and the simultaneous decentering of the male subject … prompted widespread re-examinations of the most fundamental of historical presumptions" (Morgan 1); and, finally, the genre became a politicized medium for feminist women writers globally.

Novels from the 1970s to the present emphasize the political potential of the woman's historical novel as a transnational feminist genre; several identities such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, and language intersect in maternal genealogies, voices, and figures in the texts. These works unanimously suggest the maternal has been and continues to be experienced differently by women depending on context; thus challenging a normative or hegemonic sense

[5] This is the title of editors Juana A. Arancibia and Yolanda Rosas's work (1995).

of the maternal. All these works, however, challenge dominant patriarchal discourses and convincingly suggest that women's past lives and struggles should not be forgotten, nor are. Thus, women's historical experiences as manifest in a literary context should be considered sources of strength and resistance against patriarchy, provide critical literary space to women from the western and non-western world, and rethink feminist writing as a political transnational praxis.

II. Situating the Woman's Historical Novel: Master Narratives, Postmodernism, and a Transnational Context

Recently, there has been a rejuvenated debate amongst contemporary scholars on the genre origins of the historical novel. Most critics no longer agree with Alessandro Manzoni, Georg Lukács, or Harold Orel that Walter Scott or his novel *Waverley* (1814) is the genre's founding author/text. Maxwell, for instance, argues in its earliest forms "historical fiction is a French genre" (Historical Novel 65) and he cites Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de La Fayette, as the original figure. Though expanding traditional national studies to include Europe as a whole and giving women writers like La Fayette due credit, Maxwell's focus remains Eurocentric and ends in the 1950s, typically considered an unpopular time for historical fiction. Milda Danytė affirms that "it is only after the second world war and the rise of post-modernism that the historical novel again attracts the attention of major writers" (35). Convincing counter-evidence, however, suggests it is erroneous to include women writers within such claims. Diana Wallace's project, for example,

emphatically undermines claims of inertia; writers Sylvia Townsend Warner, Margaret Mitchell, Winifred Ellerman (Bryher), Virginia Woolf, Anna Banti, Jean Plaidy, Marguerite Yourcenar, Norah Lofts, Margaret Irwin, and notably Nobel Prize winning Norwegian author Sigrid Undset were all writing popular historical novels during the first half of the twentieth century.

It is important to acknowledge prolific women writers from the early twentieth century in order to more fully understand the post 1970 novels discussed in this study. Danytė, for example, argues that from the 1960s onwards, coinciding with postmodern essays like Hayden White's "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" (1974), which attacks history, marginalized groups (Blacks, women, Latino/as, gbltq, feminists, the working class, and others) were beginning to recover and reclaim their histories (36). Women's particular reclaiming is put in perspective, given that "historical fiction has been one of the major forms of women's reading and writing in the second half of the twentieth century" (Light 60). Since the transnational turn, women's historical novels have been actively challenging a commitment to postmodernism and, though a postmodernist textual analysis is useful, even necessary, in exposing patriarchy as pervasive and in undermining master narratives, it cannot provide an effective feminist praxis. A social/political motivation for change drives the woman's historical novel; therefore, it cannot subscribe wholeheartedly to a master or a postmodernist position.

Wallace writes that "the historical novel has allowed [writers/readers] to invent or 're-imagine' … the unrecorded lives of marginalized and subordinated

people, especially women, but also the working classes, Black people, slaves and colonized peoples, and to shape narratives, which are more appropriate to their experiences than those of conventional history" (*Woman's*, 2). The woman's historical novel also "can centralize a female consciousness and explore female fears and desires" (*Woman's* 2). Wallace's survey of British women writers (1900-2000) is instrumental to the genre, but I stress the importance of reading beyond the nation as well as distinguishing between women's and feminist writing.

I make the distinction between the woman's and feminist woman's historical novel in the same manner as historiographers Judith Bennett and June Purvis differentiate between women's history and feminist history (Bennett, *History Matters* 15, 7). Purvis argues that women's history pertains to the subject matter of women and gender (an examination of the interdependence and relational nature of female and male identities) whereas feminist history is history informed by feminist politics and methodologies; when it is women's history in particular, Purvis refers to this as feminist women's history (7). While the links between women's and feminist history are strong, they are not interchangeable terms.

Women's history is defined by its subject matter and need not invoke a feminist perspective, whereas feminist history is defined by the very specificity of its theoretical agenda (Purvis and Weatherill 124). Many historical novels written by women–Dorothy Bonavia-Hunt's *Pemberley Shades* (1949), Colleen McCullough's trilogy on the Roman Republic/Empire, or *Tierra del Fuego* by

Sylvia Iparraguirre (2000)–do not focus on the lives of women, but on the experiences of men. On the other hand, there are many novels written by men about women; consider Richard Condon's novel *The Abandoned Woman* (1977), about Queen Caroline, the wife of George IV, or John Fowles' pastiche tale *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). Novels such as these prompt questions such as whether a male author can write a feminist novel, but unfortunately are not within the scope of this study, which will focus solely on feminist women's historical novels (that for simplicity will be referred to as the woman's historical novel) since the advent of transnationalism.

Before proceeding, I offer Sabine Von Dirke's succinct definition of the modern historical novel as a useful point for comparison and reference:

> Positioned between historiography and fiction, the modern historical novel productively exploits the hiatus of fact and fiction in a way most biographies and autobiographies cannot. The modern historical novel achieves transparency and self-reflexivity in its portrayal of the past as a specific gendered and political reconstruction situated between the historical record and imagination. Therefore, this genre has the potential to explode the closed text of history, i.e. the dominant historical narratives, from a variety of perspectives. Why not from a feminist one? (426)

I take up Von Dirke's challenge by suggesting the following supplement as sufficient for reading women's historical novels in a transnational context:

1) a heroine that is atypical (fictive or factual); for example, Margaret Muir's *The Condor's Feather* (2010), which narrates Thia Beresford's travel from England to Patagonia in 1885 in order to embark on an adventurous riding expedition across the Pampas.

2) the role of history is visible in the text or, as Wallace puts it, "in its use of a particular period for its fictional setting" (*Woman's* 4).

3) the heroine and/or female author consciously subjects patriarchal values to a feminist critique such as political theories of power, divisions of labour, philosophical discourse, psychological assumptions, or historical accounts.

4) the socio-historical milieu and/or protagonist of the novel relates to the transnational feminist concerns of the author. For instance, the epigraph in *Moi, Tituba …Black Witch of Salem* (1986) reads, "Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else. Maryse Condé."

In contrast to popular definitions of the genre, such as Lukács', mine allows the use of historical figures, both famous and relatively unknown, to be the heroine; though I agree with Avrom Fleishman that at least one "real person [be in the novel] among the fictitious ones" (4). Thus, I discuss novels like Simone Zelitch's *Louisa* (2001), which focuses on a fictional Hungarian Jew and her German daughter-in-law and their interactions with historical figures such as Bela Kun. Analyzing Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), Dorrit Cohn

characterizes historical fiction as “encounters between characters that belong to different ontological realms” (154). Tolstoy’s protagonists and many feminist heroines are at odds with the historical figures in Scott’s novels which always remain at a distance (Cohn 154). Not only do historical characters remain at a distance in Scott’s novels, but Linda Hutcheon refutes, though she is referring to the protagonists of historiographic metafiction, Lukács’ definition of Scott’s character type; she suggests, as I do of many feminist protagonists, that “they are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history” (114) instead of middle of the road characters.

I am mindful, however, of Rosi Braidotti’s claims that in this uncertain space of transnationalism and post-postmodernity that “new master narratives have taken over” (“Critical Cartography” 1). Feminists must be cautious of “the syndrome of ‘the exceptional woman’” (“Critical Cartography” 4) who has the potential to undermine feminist activity. The most serious of Braidotti’s claims that I must contend with is her belief that “even more problematic is when the quest for strong and exceptional figureheads stretches back in time, causing revisionist re-writing of history” (“Critical Cartography” 5). Braidotti specifically speaks of feminist reappraisals of Nazi sympathizers and right wing supporters such as Eva Peron, but would undoubtedly include Anchee Min’s recuperation of Jiang Ching (Madame Mao), which I include in this study.

One of the defining characteristics of our transnational era where ‘money is everything,’ Braidotti notes, is “historical amnesia.” She argues that “the new generation of corporate-minded business women and show-business icons

disavow any debt or allegiance to the collective struggles of the rest of their gender" ("Critical Cartography" 3). Fuelled by individualist thinking and capitalist markets, the opening of borders can be seen in a very different light, one that leads to "disposable bodies" (Braidotti, "Critical Cartography" 12), sex-trafficking, smuggling, domestic workers, arranged marriages, child adoptions, and a "female teleservice industry" in countries like India ("Critical Cartography" 9). Women's historical novels, however, rather than condoning this activity, attest to the challenges a transnational feminist knowledge project faces.

Braidotti's concern about historical amnesia relates to the second criterion of my definition: identifying a visible history in a novel. This is not straightforward. Manzoni, for example, argues that the historical novel is:

> A species of a false genre which includes all compositions that try to mix history and invention, whatever their form. Being the most modern of such species, the historical novel is only the most refined and ingenious effort yet to meet the challenge, as if the challenge could ever be met. (81)

Thus, identifying history in the novel, if one cannot separate it from fiction, becomes somewhat problematic.

Cohn, using *War and Peace* as an example, offers the most convincing option for the woman's historical novel; she differentiates between the historian and the novelist in terms of representing the inner life of historical figures (154). She reads historical novels "quite literally: its noun indicates (to use Doblin's

words) that it 'is, in the first place, a novel'; its adjective points to the fact that, although 'it isn't history,' the historical dimension is (may be considered to be) more importantly involved in certain novels than in others" (162). Historical novels that blur the real with the fictional often supplement the novel with the use of paratext (glossary, maps, notes) and rely on bibliographical or historical records and archives (diaries, photos, newspapers–Laura Esquivel's *Malinche* (2006) even introduces codices). Sandra Gulland's trilogy on Marie-Josephe-Rose Tascher (Josephine Bonaparte), for example, is an invented diary, complete with chronology, genealogy and love letters, of Josephine's life prior to and after becoming the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1796. Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries* (1993) is also a particularly good example because it contains a family tree, photographs, descriptions of stones which mark gravesites, and is written in the style of a diary by a seemingly fictional and ordinary character, Daisy Goodwill Flett.

Wallace contends that, in addition to the paratext, imagination is an important tool for feminist writers because "women have been violently excluded both from 'history' (the events of the past) and from 'History' (written accounts of the past) ("Letters" 25). Women's history is also often viewed as unhistorical or ahistorical, misrepresentative, inaccurate, fantastical, anti-nationalist, and/or escapist (Wallace, *Woman's* 13, 15). Historical archives, as feminist historiographers argue, have predominantly neglected the lives of women because they have been seen as constituting the familial and personal realm. This classification suggests a hierarchy between the familial and public

realms, between women's and men's lives. Women's lives, confined to the familial, are considered historically uninteresting, and unworthy of history as opposed to the public lives of men. Women's historical fictions often center on the personal and familial life of women, recognizing the personal as, not only political, but historical and, likewise, the public and political as personal. Alison Light argues that exploring "women's lives and loves, their families and their feelings" gives "the concerns of the so called private sphere the status and interest of history" (59).

This sentiment is supported by Isabel Allende who in her Bibliographical Note to *Inés of My Soul* (2006) writes: "I want to demonstrate that they [Inés's experiences] are historical fact" (n. pag.). She also personalizes the historical Spanish conquistador Pedro de Valdivia, claiming Inés Suárez would know him "in a way history could never know him: what he feared and how he loved" (Allende 99). The woman's historical novel, since going transnational, supports Light's claims, but it also gives credence to women who were politically and publically active and visible, for example Inés or Cleopatra in Margaret George's novel. The genre recognizes that patriarchy has historically permeated and underpinned most aspects of society, thus limiting women's life choices. Despite patriarchy, however, "within severe social constraints, women have made a culture that deserves attention, admiration, and commemoration … it is to honor those whose creativity took particular channels because it was prevented from taking others" (Broude and Garrard 25). This project refuses to place a hierarchy on women's history by either upholding or denigrating traditional women's

domestic lives and feminine roles (wife, mother, childrearer, wet-nurse, sewer/weaver, nun, etc.) in contrast to women who were atypical and contributed to public life (queens, political activists, warriors, artists, medical professionals).

This survey of the contemporary woman's historical novel suggests that women throughout history, have, like men, negotiated both a public and private identity (and that they often overlap); the sexes have also historically taken on and blurred masculine and feminine qualities/roles/expectations. Thus, women's experiences, in all of their myriad forms and identities, merit scholarly pursuit and being designated as "history." Two women's historical novels, which put some of these challenges into perspective, are Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and *Kamouraska* (1970) by Anne Hébert.

Since its publication, scholars (hooks, Pinckney, Walker) have disputed the historical aspects in Walker's novel (Lauret 97). Like Lauren Berlant, I argue that Walker's work, and its feminist perspective, transform the genre: "it offers a critical rewrite of the historical novel. As such it is not concerned with the public history of war and conquest, but with domestic strife and victory: a women's version of the historical novel" (qtd. in Lauret 97). Melissa Walker, however, finds this delineation problematic: "this focus on home and family implies that public history in the novel is 'something that happens to white people,' whereas black people seem to live only in the private domain and, thus, are effectively placed outside of history" (qtd. in Lauret 97-98). While public history is not the primary concern of the novel, Walker does mention a world war and the participation of black men in that war (222). One must be mindful, as with

women's lives, of creating an either or dilemma for writers: re-confining women and black peoples to the domestic realm at the expense of acknowledging public pursuits or denying the domestic and private realm as unworthy of history. In contrast to the devastating war, Walker shows how meaningful connections can be made in the domestic sphere through women's sewing.

Keith E. Byerman suggests that quilting and sewing "functions as a way of creating female community in a world that represses female expression" (164). Walker, in her essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," writes about the creative limitations imposed upon black women. She maintains, however, that creative outlets were found and she traces a matrilineage of creative work by black women, including an original quilt in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.. The quilt maker is "'an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago.' If we could locate this 'anonymous' black woman from Alabama, she would turn out to be one of our grandmothers –an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use" (Walker 239). *The Color Purple* is Walker's contribution to the creative continuum of her foremothers (Phillis Wheatley, Lucy Terry, Frances Harper, Zora Hurston, Nella Larsen, Bessie Smith, and all the others who are anonymous). She and her protagonist Celie, who is a sewer, are both inheritors of women, like the anonymous quilt maker, whose life and craft has made new creative and truth claims possible for black women.

Hébert's novel *Kamouraska*, likewise focuses on a seemingly domestic scene, and, like Walker's work, challenges the reader to think differently about history from an internal psychological perspective. As the reader enters into Elisabeth's fragmented psyche, history bears presence within the novel through its deceptive absence. Hébert's novel takes place in a very specific time and place in Québec's history –the Patriotes Rebellion of 1837-38. It is, also, the year Queen Victoria came to the throne of Britain. Mary Jean Matthews Green argues that "the Rebellion was significant in the history of Canada, because it represented the only real action taken by French Canadians first parliamentary and then military, to free themselves from English domination after the British conquest of 1760" (92). Lee Skallerup believes the protagonist "Elisabeth represents Quebec with all of the conflicts, choices, and eventual betrayals that the province faced before, during, and after the Rebellion of 1837-8. She is torn between her husband Tassy, who represents the past, and Nelson, who represents the (false) future" (138). Elisabeth, in pre-Confederation Canada, thus, faces pressures from her own Québec society, the English, and the Americans. Dr. Nelson, her American savior-lover carries out the murder of her hated husband Antoine Tassy, the Squire of Kamouraska, on January 31, 1839. By focusing on a love triangle, Hébert hints that perhaps Elisabeth is not concerned with history.

Traditional history, Gerda Lerner (175) and Von Dirke argue, is patriarchal mainstream historiography and history: wars, conquests, revolutions, the "political events and the deeds of 'great men'" (417). Daphne Marlatt in *Ana Historic* (1988) writes "i learned that history is the real story the city fathers tell

of the only important events in the world. a tale of their exploits hacked out against a silent backdrop of trees, of wooden masses. so many claims to fame. so many ordinary men turned into heroes. (where are the city mothers?)" (28). Elisabeth's life counts as little according to this definition. The text identifies a dilemma in women's history: on the one hand Hébert criticizes the limitations of a masculine history which works to exclude women from participating in that history by confining her to the familial, while at the same time arguing that the familial is historical and deserves reevaluation and archiving. Thus, her protagonist is caught/imprisoned in this paradox.

Criticisms of patriarchal history are not uncommon; for example, Catherine Morland in Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* (1817) is an avid Gothic reader who shows her disappointment and indignation in "real solemn history" because there are "hardly any women at all" (129). Is Elisabeth disinterested in history because she cannot be a part of it? Is murdering her husband an attempt to defy historical definitions and break into the annals? Skallerup asks, "can a society that denies its history, that denies the reality of its history, ever be free and independent?" (154). Women's futures in Québec appealed to Hébert. In rewriting Elisabeth's life, Hébert reworks the facts of the historical case, which can be found in the Québec Archives (Green 92).

A noteworthy past/present overlap, which resonates with my fourth criterion, is how the historical murder in *Kamouraska* (the setting of the factual squire's murder is Kamouraska, Québec), connects with Hébert's maternal

family. Antoine Tassy's murder (Achille Taché) occurred near Hébert's grandmother's house:

> The second major name change Hébert has effected in her rewriting of the historical record is that of the accused murderess from Josephte-Josephine Tache to Elisabeth Tassy, a choice that is particularly interesting because Anne Hébert's own mother was named Marguerite-Marie Elisabeth Tache. In fact Josephine Tache was a member of Hébert's mother's family, being the wife of a cousin of her grandfather's. If Hébert claims, in fact, to have long been haunted by this story, it is because she had heard it told by her own mother. If the change from George Holmes to George Nelson denotes Hebert's effort to rewrite a history of the Quebec people, her change of Josephine to Elisabeth suggests that she is also attempting to reconstruct her own history, the story of women's experience in Quebec. (Green 95)

In addition to Hébert's mater-familial tie, the names of two important historical battles are stated, Saint Denis and Saint Eustache (40); the first was won by the Patriotes, but the other signaled a great loss. Furthermore, there is the woman in black at the end of the novel (256), who is a reminder that neither the reader nor Elisabeth can escape and erase her past–the past is real. Both Walker's and Hébert's historical novels indicate that the medium is often the only source for reading about women from the past and cannot be disparaged for inventing a past that has rarely if ever been archived.

This claim is relevant to the third criterion of the definition, which I expand upon in the section on romance. For the present time, June Purvis and Amanda Weatherill's concise thoughts articulate the kind of transnational knowledge project this work creates:

> What unites all feminist histories, however, is a concern to make women visible where they had been hidden in the 'male' view of the past; an intention to challenge the traditional ways in which women had been represented stereotypically as wives and mothers who are supportive towards, and supported by, their menfolk; to present women as individuals in their own right, active agents in the making of history; to question the concepts and analyses of mainstream history; and, above all, to explore the ways in which women were disadvantaged/oppressed by the personal and institutionalized power of men in past patriarchal societies. (125)

Finally, the fourth criterion, which is relating the contemporary context of the author to the text, needs further elucidating.

Women's historical novels, in order to emphasize continuity, often move back and forth between the past and the present. This is seen particularly in novels tracing a familial genealogy or, more precisely, a matrilineage such as *The Map of Love* (2000) by Ahdaf Soueif or Uyen Nicole Duong's *Daughters of the River Huong* (2005). These novels adhere to what Cohn suggests is a typical feature of historical fiction: "the historiographically oriented authorial discourse of a 'contemporary' narrator concerned with past events" (160). As most

women's historical novels conform to Cohn's claim, they do not fulfill the parameters set out by Scott's subtitle of "tis sixty years since." Scott's restriction that the novel cannot be written in a period of the author's lifetime is supported by several twentieth century critics, including Lukács, Fleishman, Harry Henderson and Seymour Menton. Nevertheless, I support Joseph W. Turner who finds this definition unsatisfactory (333). Many other theorists since Turner, including David Cowart, have broadened or rejected the requirement that the novel takes place in a time preceding the author.

Danytė by comparison approaches history in the form of personal memory. She suggests that historical novels, like Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004) and Antanas Sileika's *Woman in Bronze* (2004), are neither traditional nor postmodern, but constitute a new kind of historical fiction that employs personal memory and popular culture (36). Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), or Gioconda Belli's *La Mujer Habitada* (1988), for example, all stem from partial auto-biography and are written during a time and place in which the respective authors lived. Referencing Ralph Samuel, Danytė states this kind of writing expresses the "'popular' or 'unofficial memory' [and] finds expression in the new postwar interest in family history or societies that collect the everyday material culture of the recent past" (36). Thus, as Danytė concludes, "the new historical novel does not celebrate the national myths, or the national heroes as did the 19th century novel, but at the same time, does not parody the past in postmodern fashion" (40). This new historical novel as described by Danytė is

relevant for women's historical novels like *Nervous Conditions* or A.Y. Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) which fuse memory and the familial history of the author or heroine by engaging her recent past.

In terms of a text's relation to its author's lifetime we can look to Allende again as a sound example. Allende's life in Santiago, Chile resonates with the remarkable contributions of her heroine Inés, who co-founds the Chilean nation in the sixteenth century. Allende's father was a first cousin of Salvador Allende, President of Chile until a military coup murdered him on September 11th, 1973 (Main 56-7). In her second novel *Of Love and Shadows* (1984) Allende re-imagines the discovery of *desaparecidos* (the disappeared ones) during the 1973 coup and the women who searched for their family, thus describing "a Latin American country in the grip of a brutal military dictatorship" (Main 67). Fearing political persecution for her feminist, socialist ideals, in 1975, Allende went into exile with her family in Venezuela. Claiming "I lost a country" (Allende, *My Invented Country* xii), for Allende exile has meant a re-examining of the nation.

Intimating that fiction is the only "home" to which she truly belongs, Allende writes, "I have also created a version of myself that has no nationality, or, more accurately many nationalities. I don't belong to one land, but to several" (*My Invented Country* 178). Later moving to the United States, she reflects that "the exile looks toward the past, licking his wounds, the immigrant looks toward the future, ready to take advantage of the opportunities within his reach" (*My Invented Country* 174). Allende's characterization is a meaningful way to think

of the woman's historical novel; it is a present mind looking back in order to look forward. Therefore, one can read the challenges faced by Inés (rape, violence, friendship between women across different classes and races, military bravery, resistance to patriarchy, etc.) as resonating with the political development in the 1970s and 80s of the Chilean feminist movement, within which Allende was active (for example, as part of ASUMA–the Association for the Unity of Women) (Weldt-Basson 108-111). In the novel there is a clear feminist agenda for recuperating the historical circumstances of women's lives, their memories, struggles, and loves, not only in the New World, but in the author's contemporary time. A maternal genealogy is established and Inés serves as a transnational figure for the woman's historical novel.

Crossing Borders and Connecting Women: Transnational/Translational Feminisms

Surveying women's historical novels written in a transnational context entails reading under-represented nations, languages, and writers that previously have not been studied. Not appearing outside of Europe until the mid-nineteenth century (with the exception of possibly some written in the United States, e.g., Louisa May Alcott), this trend changes dramatically at the turn of the twentieth century when women began writing historical novels from almost every nation and constituting large numbers of writers and readers. A lack of criticism, therefore, is no longer acceptable. The case remains, however, that most historical novels, women's or not, are still written or translated into European languages (English, French and Spanish). While there have been recent feminist

calls for crossing-borders and moving beyond Anglo-European literatures and languages, this is proving, in a time of intense globalization, a difficult undertaking.

Heitlinger, inspired by Grewal and Kaplan, argues for “the need to trace the production, circulation, reception, and mobilization of key feminist concepts and discourses within and across different political contexts” (8). Transnational feminism uniquely allows for analyzing, not only the contents of a novel but also the physical being, the book itself, and the political process of how texts are produced. The politics of writing are essential to an understanding of literature. How women writers, especially in developing nations, get their work published and disseminated into a transnational audience is dependent on globalization (Amireh and Majaj 4). Jasber Jain cautions against the marketability of certain texts geared toward specific audiences, i.e., women’s romance novels, and an ever increasing pressure to publish in English, for example diasporic writing.

Just as writing in English dramatically increases a work’s chance of success, so too does the word “woman” carry literary currency. Disclosing covert patriarchal tactics, Jain explains how including “women” in a book’s title or description plays a decisive role in the marketability of novels: “The inclusion of the word ‘woman’ in a title enhances its sale value but also at the same time transforms this newly gained subjecthood into a commodity, as publishers both in India and abroad are inclined to translate works which are about women or *dalits* [oppressed classes]” (223). Capitalism’s ever extending reach over the publication of novels, particularly into English for a targeted post-feminist

consumer, has enormous implications for writers and readers, both feminist and non-feminist alike. A strong indicator for this transnational turn in literary studies is Paul Jay's work *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (2010). Though he traces a useful history of globalization, emphasizing fluidity across borders and discussing gender, Jay only concentrates on novels written in English.

Reading novels other than those written in English, I am concerned with, like Constance S. Richards, the opportunities and limitations globalization offers feminism and women's writing. Richards poignantly points to a challenge I face in this project, the complexity of reading texts in colonial languages. I analyze novels in three languages, either in the original or in translation: French, English, and Spanish (for example *Li Chin* (2010) by Shin Kyung-sook, originally written in Korean, has been translated into French). Richards acknowledges that, though the use of Fredric Jameson's term "Third World Literatures" is problematic and too simplistic, "the production of Third World literatures has punctured colonial hegemony while at the same time surrendered itself to appropriation by the global market" (8). Referencing Aijaz Ahmad, Richards writes, "canonization which inevitably favours Third World texts in colonial languages, ignor[es] the richness and nuances of indigenous literatures in Third World mother tongues, which contain the vast multiplicity of human experiences in the former colonies" (5). For women and multi-lingual immigrant and diasporic writers in particular, the pressure to write in colonial languages is, according to Deirdre Lashgari, even more detrimental. She writes:

> For a woman writing from the margins … acceptance by the literary mainstream too often means a silencing a part of what she sees and knows. To write honestly may thus mean transgressing, violating the literary boundaries of the expected and accepted. This double bind is particularly strong for women writers of color, especially so if their vision is shaped by a language other than English. What is read by the dominant group as alien, rough-edged, jolting, strident, is more likely to offend when it comes from a woman. (Lashgari 2)

On the other hand, works written in colonial languages allow for a wider and more diverse reading audience and, thus, can be a meaningful way for connecting women's lived experiences, in which we may not have otherwise shared. Eric Hayot elaborates upon reading works in translation and discusses the linguistic challenges faced in transnational projects like mine:

> A translated text appears before its audience only after passing through the alienated act of a first reader. There it testifies to the awkward and complex relationship between author and translator, between the translation that appears and the original, authentic text that exists somewhere to ground it. The latter's existence and status as origin can be adequately testified to only by the translator who brings the text into its new linguistic home. For it is the translator who assures readers of the translation that, yes, there exists abroad some text very much like this one, some original to which they

> could return in order to verify this translation. And yet the translator, like an actor, has a strange relationship to the signs whose passage he or she transmits. There must have been a moment at which she thought, not simply, I like this book, but also, I want this book to be translated so that other people will like it. To translate is in this sense always to do something for someone else, or for something else, namely the text. But the sad paradox of translation is that the act of birthing the text into a new space will, by rewriting its language, murder the very thing that made it what it was in the first place. Or at least murder it enough, so that it emerges on the other side of the translation through the "act of a first reader." (601-2)

In light of these issues or challenges, I call, as does Richards, for a "transnational feminist reading practice" (35) as an act of "imaginative reading" (28) which seeks a middle ground between text and context, indigenous and colonial language, all the while acknowledging the politics of one's location as either a feminist woman writer, historical figure, or reader-critic.

Women, the Nation, and the Transnational Turn

Despite women's historical novels like Allende's, which problematize national studies on historical fiction, since the mid-twentieth century studies on the genre have been focusing increasingly on national literature. Suggesting that the nation has been a fundamental glue holding historical novels together since its early

manifestations in Scott's works, Lukács writes "[t]he appeal to national independence and national character is necessarily connected with a reawakening of national history" (25). This scholarship traces chronologically historical novels and their literary changes or developments within a particular nation, for instance England or the United States. There is an emphasis on defining this literature within its own national context as autonomous from other national literatures. Prominent works in this area, which show no sign of slowing down, can be read as a means for asserting nationalist sentiments that fly in the face of globalization; some examples include, *The English Historical Novel*: *Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (1971) by Avrom Fleishman*, Great Hatred Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel* (1983) by James Cahalan, and Dan Ungurianu's *Plotting History: The Russian Historical Novel in the Imperial Age* (2007).

This literature stresses the importance of the nation in our era of globalization and in times of globalization in the past, which has the simultaneous effect of breaking down and reifying borders. Seminal works on boundaries, like Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), which discusses the Mexico-United States border, highlights the aforementioned paradox. Resonating with Anzaldúa's work is the need for theorizing the woman's historical novel by examining how "different nations conceive of [history and] the historical novel" from a gendered perspective (Groot 11). The focus of critical debate, including Benedict Anderson's influential concept of "imagined communities" (which has strong connections with the advent of the printing press), is that the meaning of nationhood is

central to historical novels. Most often it is, however, the intersections between nationhood and gender or gender itself as an "imagined community" that take priority in women's historical novels. Resonating with Lukács' thoughts on national awakenings to history (25), there is an awakening of a gender consciousness in the woman's historical novel.

Problematizing nationalistic literary studies, Rey Chow makes a convincing case for why a comparative study on the woman's historical novel should not strictly adhere to national divisions: we cannot simply replace reading European texts with those from non-Western nations ("In the Name" 109). Chow suggests this position keeps the nation intact as the primary means for identifying literatures. She urges that "rather it [we] must question the very assumption that nation states with national languages are the only possible cultural formations that produce 'literature' that is worth examining" ("In the Name" 109). She insists that "instead of reconsolidating the boundaries of nations through the study of national languages and literatures, comparative literature should remain the place where theory is used to put the very concept of the nation in crisis, and with that, the concept of the nation as the origin of a particular literature" ("In the Name" 112). Chow, thus, rejects the rhetoric of nationhood as the primary source for identity. Jay, drawing on Doris Sommer's work, argues that globalization, at least since the1960s, has meant that a "romantic enchantment of one home, one language, one nation" and one literature is no longer viable (16). Sommer adds that "the effects of globalization include reshuffling the cultural map of languages and literatures. Hardly any

spaces are left to the tidy coincidence that some of us imagined between national culture and sovereign state" (3). To disregard the nation altogether, however, becomes problematic when certain groups, as in the case after colonialism, in order to be heard or for their literature to be acknowledged, need to assert a national identity and be recognized as a nation (Boehmer, *Stories of Women* 4).

Chow, nevertheless, concludes that "[t]he issues involved in women's literature, gay and lesbian literature, ethnic literature, exceed the boundaries of the nation and national language and that they demand to be studied with newer conceptual methods" ("In the Name" 114). Supporting Chow's thinking, Margaret Higonnet argues that "to presume the primary import of national or ethnic differences both denies today's world economy in its cultural manifestations and shapes a reductive politics of identity" ("Comparative Literature" 157). Sarah Webster Goodwin further confirms that "it is by now no secret that the development of literary studies has followed closely the growth of nationalist sentiment in Western cultures. But this does not mean that the borders of modern nations coincide tidily with those of their cultures, and there are countless borderline areas" (255). Chow, Higonnet, and Goodwin's thoughts questioning how literature, and for my purposes, women's historical novels, can reinforce or undermine these boundaries and identity politics highlight the complex relation between national literatures and cultural boundaries.

One sees in literary scholarship a distinct split between studies which increasingly reinforce the nation as the center and those moving towards transnational texts and theorizing transnationalism. Notable examples of the

latter include Jay's scholarship, as well as *The Grammar of Identity: Transnationalist Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (2009) by Stephen Clingman, *Re-Thinking Europe: Literature and (Trans)National Identity* (2008) edited by Nele Bemong, Mirjam Truwant and Peter Vermuelen and Richards' *On the Winds and Waves of Imagination*: *Transnational Feminism and Literature* (2000). Jay, for one, examines "a number of contemporary literary texts produced in the context of globalization in order to develop some models for the reading and analysis of fiction that are both a product of and engaged with the forces of globalization" (6). Jay's project resonates with mine, but I believe it is important to distinguish between the terms globalization and transnationalism.

While transnationalism for feminists has an ethical component or imperative and decenters the nation as a definitive territory or space, globalization or internationalism keeps the nation-state intact. Mohanty, like Grewal and Kaplan, concentrates on the role of women and gender within globalization. She writes:

> Globalization is an economic, political, and ideological phenomenon that actively brings the world and its various communities under connected and interdependent discursive and material regimes. The lives of women are connected and interdependent, albeit not the same, no matter which geographical area we happen to live in. (Mohanty 380)

Recognizing the detrimental effects of globalization on women, Grewal and Kaplan, make the further distinction between the reality of postmodern "scattered hegemonies" (17) as a problematic historical phenomenon (20) with aesthetic postmodernism, but, as I will show in the following section, this separation is unconvincing.

Undoing History: Problems with Postmodernism

A postmodern perspective exposes the instability of texts, the inherent textuality of the past, the multiplicity of meaning, a rejection of grand narratives, and the death of authority, binaries, and hierarchies. By radically re-questioning history and fiction as interconnected disciplines, the historical novel has attracted the attention of several leading postmodernists including White, Hutcheon, Elisabeth Wesseling, and author-critic E.L. Doctorow. Epitomizing this position, Hutcheon writes: "We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*" (16). In order to make sense of the past, we must impose a linguistic shape upon something that inherently has no shape (Hutcheon 17); this entails "truth, but of truths in the plural, truths that are socially, ideologically, and historically conditioned" (109). Wesseling, supporting White's and Hutcheon's claims, believes that "the most salient feature of postmodernist historical fiction, namely its overt falsification of history, is regarded as a strategy for unmasking the fictional construction of the past" (5). She believes that master narratives, such as Lukács', cannot account for "how linguistic and literary convention determines the representations of

empirical reality" (Wesseling 29). Postmodern criticism, therefore, asks valuable questions such as "whose truth?" and "whose history?" and, in doing so, identifies significant gaps in historical texts, records, and archives.

Nevertheless, in response to this corpus, Joan Scott argues that for the feminist historian, and–I would add feminist historical novelist–neutrality cannot be guaranteed because "the choice of which categories to historicize is inevitably 'political,' [and] necessarily tied to the historian's recognition of his/her stake in the production of knowledge" ("Experience" 38). Counter-texts, such as Ki Longfellow's *The Secret Magdalene* (2007) and Christine Blake's *Woman Redeemed* (2007) which offer feminist reappraisals of Mary Magdalene, suggest feminists cannot wholeheartedly subscribe to the notion of endless possibilities and interpretation that postmodernism requires. Linda Anderson claims that for feminist historians and historical novelists there is a "powerful desire for women to exist historically in the world, to be more than textually present" (131). Paradoxically writers must also admit that any recuperation of a historical female figure will involve imagination in her construction (this includes major figures such as Elizabeth I, Cleopatra, or Marie-Antoinette). Imagination is a key tool for women writers but how do feminists draw a line between a historical woman and the woman of fiction when historical records do not exist?

This problem plagued poet Christina Rossetti to such an extent that she gave up writing her biography on Ann Radcliffe because of the "dearth of information" and "scarcity of materials" (Rogers 17). Postmodernist perspectives fail to consider this dilemma and the complex dimension of telling stories and

relating history for feminist historians/writers, who reveal history as a construction but also as a reality. There is a reality and a gendered reality outside of the text and writers must ask how non-archival history or invented history can transform the discipline and be reconciled or reconsidered as history and not merely as fiction.

Sara Lennox, echoing Von Dirke, does not give priority to a postmodernist reading of history and, instead, offers a more useful account for feminism. Her aim is to bridge accounts of history as either fact, fiction, or a conflation of the two. Lennox writes:

> In response to poststructuralist critiques of history as metanarrative we understand history as textually mediated (that is shaped by the discourses of the society that produced it) without abandoning the conceptual distinction between history as historiography – the written (or oral or filmic) account of the human past – and history as that which actually happened (though in many cases texts provide our only record of it). (95)

By displacing master narratives, feminist approaches must, as postmodernist theorist Joan Scott reminds, be mindful of re-instating a master narrative of their own (“Feminism’s History” 392, 394). Audre Lorde echoes this sentiment in her essay titled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” At the same time, the woman’s historical novel challenges a postmodernist rejection of any commitment to truth in a literary narrative grounded in historical reality.

One might argue that women's novels serve as a kind of 'counterfactual' novel, which is one of the genre's most recent developments. Lubomír Doležel's *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History: The Postmodern Stage* (2010) discusses several texts including Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1955), a narrative of the South winning the American Civil War. Is Moran's novel, which argues Nefertiti was indeed Pharaoh, counterfactual? How can authors be faithful to fact if they are relying on constructed material? What difference does it make if one rewrites Bett Norris' protagonist Mary McGhee (2009), a lesbian living in Alabama just after WWII, as a heterosexual? A negotiation of facts with fiction makes women's historical novels skirt a fine line in their portrayals. Author-critic of the historical novel *Ragtime* (1975), E.L. Doctorow echoes White's feelings by citing Friedrich Nietzsche's statement that "[t]here are no facts in themselves; facts are contingent, subject to change" ("False Documents" 23). Doctorow's statement raises several relevant issues to women's historical novels, including the validity of documents, deliberate erasures from history, propaganda, and how literature can be used as a tool for survival.

Compare Atwood's comments at the end of her novel *Alias Grace* (1996) with Mary Renault's from her article "The Fiction of History" (1979). Atwood writes: "I have of course fictionalized historical events (as did many commentators on this case who claimed to be writing history)" (547). Atwood highlights history as intrinsically metahistory and the complexity in writing historical novels, but what unites her narrative with the others that she dismisses

or problematizes is the fact that the historical figure Grace Marks was accused of murder in 1843. Renault by contrast writes:

> I have never, for any reason, in any historical book of mine, falsified anything deliberately which I knew or believed to be true. Often of course I must have done through ignorance what would horrify me if I could revisit the past… But one can at least desire the truth; and it is inconceivable to me how anyone can decide deliberately to betray it; to alter some fact which was central to the life of a real human being, however long it is since he ceased to live, in order to make a smoother story, or to exploit him as propaganda for some cause. (qtd. in Winkler 198)

Adopting a feminist lens, Atwood challenges the patriarchal past and present by suggesting that much of what has been deemed "facts" should be subject to a gender analysis, and her novel may be aesthetically postmodern, but it never fully abandons hope for progressive change or any a sense of Truth in the way that Renault invokes.

The challenge I believe for the woman's historical novel, (and which Von Dirke's definition of the modern historical novel addresses), is to find a common ground that accommodates postmodernism's advocacy for a plurality of critical women's voices and experiences, while at the same time grounding these experiences in a shared understanding of gender, patriarchy, and materialism. Braidotti asserts that when narratives develop maternal genealogies, "the specificity of the lived, female embodied experience" becomes a site for

symbolic feminist change (*Nomadic Subjects* 100). One of the dilemmas women's historical novelists face, therefore, is negotiating history as construction and/or as the Real, or what Susan Stanford Friedman refers to as subjectivist epistemology versus outer positivist epistemology (232). Feminists must contend with White and other postmodernists' thinking that history has been constructed/is constructed because woman is missing from the dominant historical record (and, thus, the historical record too is clearly a construct). The question postmodernist women's writing poses is whether women's history can still be meaningful if we reject the category of woman or any set of shared experiences, for example patriarchy, beyond linguistic designations?

Linda Gordon and Claudia Koontz, in particular, ask how women can advocate agency in terms of social and political change without any basis or commonalities other than a linguistic designation (852-3, 19). In *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (2002), Braidotti articulates a notion of nomadic becoming. She claims that "what is most important for feminism is the 'political and conceptual task of creating, legitimating and representing a multi-centered, internally differentiated female feminist subjectivity without falling into relativism or fragmentation'" (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 26), stressing the need for "embodied political practices" ("Critical Cartography" 8). True relativism, she suggests, makes it difficult for feminist writers to uphold a political argument of shared embodiment, designation as a gender, or reproductive justice; after all, the laborious work of feminist historians has been, for the most part, to counter the erasure of women

from and by history (both in our past and in our present), claim subjectivity and agency, and to collectively undermine the hierarchical values of masculinist heterosexual societies. The transnational turn in feminism addresses precisely these questions of how to navigate identity in terms of difference and how to negotiate solidarity across multiple locations.

On this subject Bennett's thinking is also useful because she suggests that "'women' is a slippery concept in theory, but in practice it usually acts as a stable category – for its time and place – that can critically determine a person's life chances. This practical categorization of 'women' matters today, and it has mattered in the past; it is, therefore, a proper subject for feminist thought and feminist history" (*History Matters* 9). Bennett's response is relevant given postmodern and transnational feminist critiques of feminism as inadequate because it arguably advocates a universal notion of patriarchy, an essentialist conception of Woman and Feminism, and white middle-class bourgeoisie elitism that ignores the lives and activism of Black, Chicana, and lesbian feminists, amongst other minority feminists.

A poignant example is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's and Mohanty's disavowal of Western feminism as hegemonic, dominating, and colonizing.[6] Mohanty, for example, speaks of the production of the "Third World Woman." Rejecting Western feminism as the normative referent, she argues that:

> It is the production of Third world difference that western feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities

[6] Related to this topic, but not within the scope of this project, is the notion of a genealogy of feminism complete with 'mother' figures.

> which characterize the lives of women in these countries. … Feminist writing discursively colonizes the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/representing a composite singular 'Third World woman.' (Mohanty 19)

The author also resists the notion of sisterhood, claiming that racism, class, colonialism, and imperialism have not been fully taken into account in feminist positions; she writes that

> If relations of domination and exploitation are defined in terms of binary divisions – groups which dominate and groups which are dominated – surely the implication is that the accession to power as women as a group is sufficient to dismantle the existing organization of relations? But women as a group are not in some sense essentially superior or infallible. (39)

Despite and in response to her earlier thinking, however, Mohanty has revised her position.

Mohanty, like Bennett, now argues for feminists to build new connections, commonalities, and solidarities across borders in order to combat western global capitalism. She puts forth a notion of feminist solidarity through transborder democratic citizenship (Mohanty 248) as an anti-capitalist transnationalist feminist practice (375), "because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining, the challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately. My

concern is for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders" (266). Thus, a maternal genealogy can bring together women's past lives with women's current transnational experiences. Studying the woman's historical novel within a transnational feminist framework provides a way to understand coalitions and continuity between the diverse social and political experiences of women.

In their historical-literary specificity, women's historical novels suggest once again that a commitment to master narratives or postmodernism can only serve women's writing so far. The woman's historical novel cannot fulfill androcentric definitions of the genre, e.g., Lukács', nor fully embrace a postmodern rejection of 'History' because the woman's historical novel refuses to believe that history or gender is reducible to fiction. As Chow articulates,

> Even though feminists partake in the postmodernist ontological project of dismantling claims of cultural authority that are housed in specific representations, feminism's rootedness in overt political struggles against the subordination of women makes it very difficult to accept the kind of postmodern 'universal abandon' in Ross's title [*Universal Abandon*]. ("Postmodern Automatons" 103)

Hébert's *Kamouraska* (1970), again, is an excellent example of this negotiation. Using a postmodern aesthetic (unreliable narrators, multiple viewpoints, fragmentary time), she, nonetheless, advocates specific changes in the social position of Québécois women (both in the past and in the 1960s). Thus, Von Dirke asserts that the "criteria for a positive model of writing women back into

cultural history, [and] thereby rewriting history from a woman's perspective, show strong affinities with the poetics of the modern historical novel" (422). The woman's historical novel ultimately aligns, more or less, with the modern historical novel as outlined by Von Dirke, Sara Lennox, Danytė, and with the novel from the margins as discussed by Groot. Transnational feminism, which seeks solidarity through difference, therefore, offers promising ways to study women's novels.

Women and men have a fundamental reality outside of the text, a reality that is not constructed, but foregrounds all historiography and archiving. Both *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (2010), edited by Nupur Chaudhuri et al., and *Travelling Heritages: New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History* (2008), edited by Saskia E. Wieringa, demonstrate that historical archives must be more attentive and inventive when it comes to women's history. History does not create the archive–the archive creates history. Lisa DiCaprio and Merry E. Weisner argue that historically "records were written by literate ... male individuals" or upper class white women (7). Joan Kelly argues in her article "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" that when it comes to categorizing European women's lives, traditional designations for historical movements, i.e., Italian Renaissance, may not always be suitable. DiCaprio and Weisner add that many of the events that have been most important to women, such as effective contraceptive techniques or married women being able to keep their own wages, did not happen during so called men's golden moments, such as the Enlightenment (3). Recuperating women's

lives not only transforms accepted notions of history and previous meanings of the historical record, but is a political act.

Mohanty suggests, in reference to Palestinian narratives, that literature can be a means for political resistance and for codifying covert images. She writes:

> In the case of Palestinians, the destruction of all archival history, the confiscation of land, and the rewriting of historical memory by the Israeli state mean that not only that narratives of resistance must undo hegemonic recorded history, but they must also *invent* new forms of encoding resistance, of remembering. (Mohanty 79)

For Mohanty, writing is at once a tool for domination, collusion, and exclusion, but it can also signify a site for struggle, healing, a communal (feminist) political consciousness, and a means towards contesting reality.

This position is supported by Allende's heroine in *Inés of my Soul*. Inés reflects:

> I am amazed at Alonso's verses, which invent history and defy and conquer oblivion. Words that do not rhyme, like mine, do not have the authority of poetry, but in any case I am obliged to relate my version of events in order to leave an account of the labours we women have contributed in Chile; they tend to be overlooked by the chroniclers … the hundreds of brave women who founded the towns while their men fought the wars will be forgotten. (Allende 66)

It is in the very possibility for reconstruction post postmodernism that a transnational feminist critique contributes to the discussion of not only historical fiction and the historical record but also of progressive political intervention.

III. Maternal Genealogies and the Romance Debate

Establishing a maternal genealogy within the woman's historical novel is a necessary step in creating an alternative literary-history for women. Two recent examples of this work are Wallace's and Maxwell's, which acknowledge Madame La Fayette's *The Princess of Cleves* (1678) as "a very early historical novel" (Wallace, *Woman's* 19). Wallace further looks to Sophia Lee's *The Recess, or A Tale of Other Times* (1783), a Gothic historical novel, as the progenitor of the contemporary woman's historical novel (at least in Britain). Significantly, both Maxwell and Wallace offer maternal genealogies that bypass Scott. Irigaray, stressing the importance of these endeavours, writes:

> If we are not to be accomplices in the murder of the mother, … [we must] assert that there is a genealogy of women. There is a genealogy of women within our family: on our mother's side we have mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, and daughters. Given our exile in the family of the father-husband, we tend to forget this genealogy of women, and we are often persuaded to deny it. Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity. Nor let us forget that we already have a history, that certain women have, even if it

> was culturally difficult, left their mark on history and that all too often we do not know them. (*IrigarayReader* 44)

Femino-centric genealogies in the woman's historical novel constiute alternatives to patriarchal genealogies and encourage women to reject identification in opposition and relation to man.

Writing about women's historical lives decenters the established patriarchal order by undermining or exposing a system that operates unethically on gender hierarchies and separates women from each other as rival-commodities. Irigaray poignantly asks:

> What modifications would it [society] undergo if women left behind their condition as commodities-subject to being produced, consumed, valorized, circulated, and so on, by men alone –and took part in elaborating and carrying out exchanges? Not by reproducing, by copying, the 'phallocratic' models that have the force of law today, but by socializing in a different way the relation to nature, matter, the body, language and desire. ("Women on the Market" 188-9)

Within patriarchies, woman, primarily through her corporeality, retains her position as an inferior object, thus Irigaray, working with Italian feminists, uses the term *affidamento* to identify not only the differences between women but also the connections.

Creating a feeling of solidarity between women is essential in transnational feminism and women's historical fiction. Thus like Irigaray,

Alexander is concerned with writing alternative genealogies that serve as bridges between time and space. Her theory of the palimpsest is a feminist supplement to Lukács' dialectical model in which he argues the past is a necessary precondition for the present (21). Alexander writes of understanding the imperfect and impossible erasure of the past:

> As the 'new' structured through the 'old' scrambled, [a] palimpsestic character of time, both jettisons the truncated distance of linear time and dislodges the impulse for incommensurability … it thus rescrambles the 'here and now' and the 'then and there,' to a 'here and there' and a 'then and now,' and makes visible what Payal Banerjee called the ideological traffic between. (190)

Alexander's examples (she gives specific ones for the colonial, neocolonial, and the neo-imperial) can be read in congruence with women's historical novels. Samantha Haigh clarifies that "the move of return and reworking, of going back in order to go forward … [is] emblematic of the necessity for all women under patriarchy of going back specifically to explore their relationship with their mother" (62). The woman's historical novel functions politically as a transnational feminist genre by writing back through our mothers.

Revisionist writing is necessary in order to reclaim a historical reality for women while at the same time challenging reality defined within masculine parameters, or, as Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio puts it, "conflating realism with phallocentric representation" (167). Braidotti argues that this "amounts to a collective repossession of the images and representations of Woman such as they

have been coded in language, culture, science, knowledge, and discourse and consequently internalized in the heart, mind, body and lived experience of women" (*Nomadic Subjects* 100). It is also necessary to reject a past "colonized by the male imaginary" (101). The importance of a femino-centric reappropriation of the maternal as evidenced in the recent proliferation of women's historical novels within a transnational context is, therefore, not surprising.

"Silly Novels by Lady Novelists"[7]: The Romance Debate

Wallace reads the popular woman's novel as not only legitimate and equal to masculine narratives but also as essential to any study of historical fiction. Suzanne Keen, like Wallace, suggests that while British historical novels have increasingly gained respect within literary criticism, historical romances, widely written and read by women, have not (Keen, "Historical Turn" 170; Wallace, *Woman's* ix, 3). According to Keen, women's historical romances dominate the genre via their role in the literary market and large numbers in readership, but the "feminization" of this form has contributed to scholarly neglect ("Historical Turn" 173).

Sue Thornham, in her analysis of women, feminism, and the media, notes that though women's genres put women center stage, they also "act to contain women within the accepted boundaries of femininity" (7). The feminization of the form has been a double edged sword for feminism. Feminist studies on women's writing have shown innovation in debunking masculine myths and

[7] This is the title of George Eliot's essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856).

putting forth new narratives (Jain 221); at the same time, however, "the gender difference, instead of dismantling polarities, and changing the normative structures, has become a dividing line, with the result that women's writing still remains on the margins, framed and exhibited as a separate, distinct category which excludes as much as it includes" (223). Referring to women's marginalization as "ghettoization" (to use Shashi Deshpandi's term) and, paradoxically, centralization (223), Jain argues that a "narrow professed feminist stand is equally damaging both to the writer and the critic or reader. It may restrict aesthetic choices, falsify representation, lead to stereotyping, and, thus, limit the possibilities of womanhood, as confessional narratives of victimhood do" (224). This study on the woman's historical novel acknowledges Jain's perspective, but suggests that this writing has been, despite a plurality of writers and readers, marginalized. I do not dismiss other readings or interpretations of these novels, but give readings to the femino-centric aspects of each novel in order to centralize a transnational feminist consciousness of the maternal.

Escapism and the popular most often converge in the woman's historical romance. Feminism has a complex relationship with historical romances, especially those written prior to 1970, like Barbara Cartland's, Daphne Du Maurier's, Catherine Cookson's, or Georgette Heyer's. Traditionally, a historical romance was simply a swashbuckler tale–such as Robertson Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883)–that enjoyed readership across the sexes, but, since the 1930s, has been defined solely as a love-story, written and read by women (Hughes 3). These novels warrant study, but much like Cohn, who emphasizes

the fundamental literariness of the historical *novel*, I suggest historical *romances* are first and foremost romances. The emphasis is on the romance, not the historical. Lisa Fletcher in *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity*, for clarity, uses the term historical *romance* fiction in order to intervene "in literary treatments of history by forcing the issue of the significance of 'romance'" (6). It is not that the woman's historical novel denigrates romance–in fact many of these works develop complex romantic narratives in meaningful ways, but they do problematize texts with a predominant focus on fantasy rather than social change.

Commentating on feminist standpoints in the 1970s (Shulamith Firestone, Germaine Greer, Rebecca West), Wallace writes: "within feminist thinking, romance was rejected as an ideology which sugar-coated the economic and social realities of gender inequality within sex and marriage" (*Woman's* 152). Seminal texts such as Greer's *Female Eunuch* (1970) or *The Whole Woman* (2000) declare that "the traits invented for [the hero] have been invented by women cherishing the chains of their bondage" (Wallace, *Woman's* 152). Wallace, seeking a more middle-ground approach, argues that the uses of women's history–"escape and political intervention – are more connected than they might at first seem" (2). In some senses, this is true; however, the woman's historical novel since transnational times primarily avoids escapism as a political alternative–exemplified by Cassandra, who in Wolf's novel refuses to leave Troy, though she prophesizes she will be enslaved and die.

While women's historical romances are an excellent means for exploring taboo subject matter, particularly women's sexuality and desires, these novels often deceptively or seductively feed into patriarchal myths about women and ideologies of femininity without challenging them. Often the feminist concern for social action, such as exposing domestic violence and rape against women, is glossed over. Women's historical novels, conversely, address issues such as spousal abuse, court trials, slavery, rape, or torture. A powerful counter example is Kimberly Cutter's novel *The Maid* (2011) on Jehanne d'Arc. Greer suggests that feminist goals, like the ones in Cutter's novel, are undermined by historical romance novels.

Helen Hughes in *The Historical Romance* (1993) suggests that historical romances, in contrast to historical fiction, combine fantasy with the popular so that an imaginary past is used to capture contemporary fears. The use of a formulaic style, stocked situations, and stereotypic characters also define this unique genre (Hughes 2). Furthermore, in historical romances, the setting is subordinate to the plot; common plots revolve around abductions, escapes, rescues, and the use of masquerade or masked identity (2) and the novels problematically end with either the heroine's marriage or death (DuPlessis 4). Fletcher suggests that any book categorized as a historical romance must include the speech act "I love you"; she criticizes the way "I love you" functions to naturalize and normalize heterosexuality and works to "produce and reproduce hegemonic ideas about romance, history, and heterosexuality" (Fletcher 15). Her study engages both popular and literary historical romance novels in an effort to

write a sustained critical account of "compulsive heterosexuality," to use Adrienne Rich's term, within the genre.

According to Fletcher's research, historical romances (Scott's traditional novel, erotic historicals by Phillipa Gregory, Byatt's romance novel *Possession* (1990) and Dawn Farnham's trilogy on Singapore-Indonesia in *The Straits Quartet*)) reproduce a rigid heterosexual normativity whereby the female's desire can only be fulfilled by a man and she is always defined in relation to men. In these novels, Rosalind Coward observes that "female desire is constantly lured by discourses which sustain male privilege," (16) though, advises, we must look for subversive cracks and slippages in these narratives. The question of women's complicity within patriarchal societies (both past and present) and the reproduction of patriarchal values (both literally and figuratively) is not the primary focus of these works.

As Janice Radway asserts the success of romance novels means they cannot "deliberately challenge male and female stereotypes. Like all romances, these novels eventually recommend the usual sexual division of labour that dictates that women take charge of the domestic and purely personal spheres of human endeavor" (Radway 123). The romance novel temporarily fills an emotional void or therapeutic need in women's lives that patriarchal culture creates; however, the success of *patriarchal* culture depends on the very fact that this need can never be fulfilled, hence the rapid and repetitive consumption of romance reading (85). For this reason, I analyze many historical novels which challenge heterosexual romance as normative: Norris' *Miss McGhee*, Sa's

Empress, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) are just three examples. These novels overlap with the important sub-genre of lesbian historical fiction, which includes authors Sarah Waters, Michèle Roberts, Justine Saracen, and Penny Hayes, to name a few.

Elaborating on this point, Von Dirke draws on Sigrid Weigel's criticism of *Frauenliteratur*, "with which the publishing houses swamped the market" (421). These works "had little in common with the feminist concept of women's literature" (Weigel 421); thus, Weigel "criticizes both the literary establishment and readers for their complicity in this reductivist form of women's literature that was [and is] designed to keep it, and the gender issues that it addressed, marginalized" (421). Certainly "the emotional importance of women's reactions to historical novels should not be under-estimated" (Wallace, *Woman's* 7), but I argue that women's historical novels challenge not only the traditional masculinist form of the historical novel but also regressive, reductivist, escapist and complicit women's historical romances that undermine political equality. Since the late nineteenth century with George Eliot's *Romola* (1862-3) and the early and mid-twentieth century works like Woolf's *Orlando* (1929), Lola Kosáryné Réz's tetralogy on three centuries (1585 to 1944) of Hungarian history through the eyes of disenfranchised female protagonists in a maternal genealogy, Anna Banti's *Artemisia* (1947), and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), emerging alongside and at the same time as women's historical romances another kind of woman's historical novel committed to feminist political change

came into being. These early feminist novels serve as precursors to the post 1970 feminist woman's historical novel.

Conclusion

This introduction situated the woman's historical novel within a contemporary transnational context. The analysis has been a way for exploring how gender is historically and literarily defined and how history and literature are defined by gender. Traditional master and postmodern narratives do not adequately encompass the woman's historical novel, which entails an advocacy for social change across a plurality of voices, cultures, nations, and historical locations. For this reason, in a time of globalization, transnational feminism is an appropriate means for studying these diverse novels and for highlighting two paradoxes: first, that transnational feminism operates within globalization by interlinking and forging feminist activist connections cross-nationally–here the writing and reading of texts–while at the same time challenging the patriarchal, capitalistic and consumptive aspects of globalization, and the centrality of the nation. Secondly, feminist novels politically undermine the authority of the past while, at the same time, they assert a truth or interpretation of the past. These novels put forth, whether consciously or not, a belief in progress (reproductive justice, religious freedom, racial, sexual, class, or political equality), for women both within literature and history. They argue that women have the power to change women's lives. Though historical novels deal with the past, most feminist writers are not endorsing a return to the past; history is not an escape, but an inspiration

for making meaningful changes in contemporary settings. The following chapters therefore provide different perspectives on the ways in which women writers have explored the theme of the maternal through several key transnational topics and, in doing so, have innovatively used the genre of historical fiction as a feminist medium for writing back through our mothers.

CHAPTER ONE

REVISIONIST WRITING: MOTHERS OF THE AMERICAS

> If history is the mirror wherein generations to come shall contemplate the image of generations that went before, the novel must be the photograph that records the vices and virtues of a people, along with a moral prescription for the former and an admiring homage to the latter
> – Clorinda Matto de Turner, *Birds Without a Nest: A Novel* (1889)

Recuperating maternal figures, our "founding" mothers, is a relatively new theme in women's historical fiction and women's historiography. This (re)writing focuses primarily on early biblical contexts. For instance, Tosca Lee's *Havah: The Story of Eve* (2010), *The Secret Magdalene* (2005) by Ki Longfellow, Michèle Roberts' *The Wild Girl* (1984), and Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, which recuperates Dinah, all concentrate on this tradition. Emphasizing the importance of a maternal line, Diamant's narrator claims: "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 to 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" (1). Dinah continues, "You come hungry for the story that was lost. You crave words to fill the great silence that swallowed me, and my mothers, and my grandmothers before them" (3). These thoughts are reiterated by Marianne Fredriksson's foreword to *Hanna's Daughters* (1994) which begins, "There are no biblical words for the actions of mothers, although they are probably of greater importance than those of fathers"

(1). Such works constitute important feminist revisions of both known and formerly unknown maternal figures. In reclaiming their protagonists from derogatory historical-literary designations such as “whore” and “traitor” or “victim,” the novels complicate the notion of who constitutes a founding mother–“who and what had made the nation,” (Jameson, “Ties Across the Border” 67)–and challenge the way dominant masculine narratives have previously appropriated these maternal genealogies for patriarchal purposes, such as the national imagination.

This chapter analyzes one specific context of maternal origins in the woman’s historical novel: the colonizing of Indigenous people and their lands/nations, the Americas, by Europeans. Though feminist historians (for example, Sylvia Van Kirk’s pioneering text “*Many Tender Ties”: Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (1980)) have since the 1970s actively rewritten traditional histories, i.e., Edgar McInnis’, Harold Innis’s, or Frederick Jackson Turner’s, which suggests that women (both European-immigrants and Aboriginals) did not participate in fundamental ways to the colonizing of the Americas (Jameson, “Ties Across the Border” 67), surprisingly this topic is only now receiving literary attention. Examples of women’s historical novels include ones on the *Filles du Roi* such as Crystine Brouillet’s *Marie LaFlamme* Trilogy (1990s), Suzanne Desrochers’ *Bride of New France* (2011), and others by Nicole Macé, Elise Dallemagne-Cookson, and Lyne Laverdière. An Indigenous woman’s perspective in Western Canada is narrated in *This Widowed Land* (1993) by Kathleen O’Neal Gear, and women’s

contributions to the creation of the United States can be found in Virginia Bernhard's *A Durable Fire* (1990), which describes women immigrants to the Jamestown Colony at the turn of the seventeenth century. In this chapter, I survey Colette Piat's novel on the colonizing of Québec in *Les Filles du Roi* (1998) in conjunction with the only women's historical novels written on the colonizing of Hispanic America: *Malinche* (2006) by Laura Esquivel and Isabel Allende's *Inés of my Soul* [*Inés del Alma Mía*] (2006).[8]

This lack of scholarship, María Ángeles Cantero-Rosales argues, can be attributed to prejudices within Latin-American society "*contra la literature feminine, en realidad contra cualquier aspect de la creatividad en la mujer*" 'against women's literature, in reality against any aspect of creativity in a woman' (132). Criticism on Allende and other women writers like Angeles Mastretta, therefore, has suffered because of "*[e]l agudo sexism de la sociedad latinoamericana que, sustentada en estructuras mentales jerarquizadas, enmarca a <La Mujer> en espacios de subordinanción e inferioridad, demand de ella un rol pasivo y silencioso*" 'the acute sexism of Latin-American society, sustained in hierarchical intellectual structures which enclose "Woman" in subordinate and inferior spaces, demanding of her a role of passivity and silence' (Araújo 131). In comparing these works, several important and interconnecting transnational topics emerge, all of which contribute to changing patriarchal literary-historical

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[8] All translations from Piat's novel are my own. I use Margaret Sayers Peden's English translation for Allende's novel and Ernesto Mestre-Reed's English translation of Esquivel's *Malinche*. Chicana and Mexican feminists such as Cherríe L. Morgaga, Adelaida R. Del Castillo, Ana Nieto-Gomez, and Sandra Messinger Cypress, to name a few, have actively recuperated Malinche from feminist perspectives, but in the form of plays, essays, and poetry. For some reason, the historical novel, which seems to me the most suitable medium for such a figure, has been under utilized.

portrayals of women: exile, migration, sexual politics, religion, linguistics, and racial hybridity.

Rewriting women as symbolic progenitors of contemporary and future genealogies both within and beyond the text is, thus, an important political goal. Susan Lucas Dobrian writes:

> In the absence of a maternal genealogy, daughters can never symbolize their relation to their mother, to 'origin', a relation men symbolize by recreating it in relationships with other women. It is the resymbolization of this relationship which is the condition for a (re)symbolized relationship between women. It is thus vital that a maternal genealogy be (re)discovered, that women be able to separate themselves from and symbolize their relation to be woman-mother as 'origin.' (63)

By returning to our mother as 'origin,' the authors offer inventive feminist recuperations of complex figures for whom negotiating a transition from Old to New World, in which Christianity plays a fundamental role, is necessary.

Revisionist novels, Diana Wallace argues, refashion the historical novel into a "herstory." "Herstory" narratives "reinsert women into history using techniques (such as first-person narrative), which make them the speaking subjects, not the objects, of historical narrative. Through this and their use of non-realist discourses (myth and fantasy), they stretch the form of the historical novel well beyond the realist conventions lauded by Lukács" (*Woman's* 184). Piat, Esquivel, and Allende also adopt feminist "hyperbole as a tool for creating

fantasies or questioning the relationship between fiction and reality (and the impossibility, at times, of distinguishing between the two)" (Weldt-Basson 123). Criticized by Harold Bloom for poorly imitating Gabriel García Marquéz's magical realist works, Cantero Rosales argues that despite the fact "*la tradicíon literaria moderna ha estimado la mimesis de manera despectiva, llegando a acusar a quien la utiliza de falta de originalidad y carencia de pretensiones estéticas …las formas de 'imitación' son una alternativa para socavar y dinamitar los presupuestos ideológicos establecidos*" 'the modern literary tradition defines mimesis in a derogatory manner, accusing those who use it as lacking originality and aesthetic merit … forms of 'imitation' are capable of undermining and blowing apart the established ideological [patriarchal] assumptions' (134). The political potential of mimesis is echoed by Helene Carol Weldt-Basson, who believes what sets Allende's "use of hyperbole apart [from García Marquéz's] is its consistent employment with regard to feminine roles within a context of situational irony" (123). In addition, within each novel, "the reader is presented with two contradictory images of the protagonist … the silent, passive, female who falls in love … or the strong, influential woman" (Weldt-Basson 127). The protagonists fall in love at a young age and embrace traditional femininity, while also practising non-traditional and masculine public roles such as doctoring, fighting, and speaking in public. Rewriting women protagonists (both Aboriginal and European-immigrant) from nuanced feminist perspectives undermines master discourses of Western history and national myths. As Adele Perry suggests, these novels are a testament that "we cannot

separate the history of women, gender, and the family from that of lands 'explored,' proclamations made, wars fought, colonies governed, goods traded, and treaties signed or resisted (92).

Though often adhering to the traditional subject matter of historiography (e.g., wars, revolutions, conquests), these women's lives have for misogynistic reasons been ignored, falsified, or forgotten. Women's contributions to the nation typically focus on motherhood. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that our identity, given by the mother, our origin (both maternal and national), is coded and re-coded (43) because of woman's assigned "plac[e] in the reproductive heteronormativity that supports nationalisms" (42). She reads nationalist narratives and discourses premised upon "women as holding the future of the nation in their wombs" (43). This propagates the belief that "motherhood is woman's highest calling" (Chrisler and Garrett 132). As is evident in the novels, the private and public spheres are problematically ruled by *patria*rchy.[9] It is, thus, not a coincidence that motherhood plays such a formidable, albeit ambivalent, role in women's historical novels and figures prominently in this chapter on the colonizing of the Americas. I discuss the following femino-centric topics: transatlantic crossings, traitors to the nation, sexual politics, mother-tongues, racial hybridity, and new ties between women.

Transatlantic Crossings

[9] That the domestic and public sphere (the nation) is under patriarchal rule can be seen in the etymological origins of "pater" "patria," and "patriot."

In Allende's *Inés of My Soul* and Piat's *Les Filles du Roi*, the heroines, Inés and Marie, serve as pivotal figures in an important moment, not only in colonial but also women's, history. Both novels narrate a European heroine's memoir of crossing. The crossing for each is physical and psychical; the Atlantic Ocean serves as a means for transmuting painful and stagnant pasts in their home countries, Spain and France respectively, into imaginary promised lands, complete with freedom, discovery, and love. Veronica C. Wang writes that such a comparison "provides a multivalent look into immigrant/émigré lives, which helps to sharpen for the reader the physical, cultural, and psychological displacement felt by the protagonists" (23); thus, establishing a maternal genealogy is a means for the author-reader via heroine to cope with "psychological fragmentation and cultural dislocation" caused by their transatlantic crossing (Wang 22). Allende chronicles the historical migrancy of Inés, born in Plasencia, Spain–"a border city steeped in war and religion" (6)–in the year 1507, "following the famine and deadly plague that ravaged Spain upon the death of Philip the Handsome" (1). Inés' narrative is a memoir to her adopted daughter Isabel, written and dictated in the city of Santiago de la Nueva Extremadura, Kingdom of Chile, which she co-found with her lover Pedro de Valdivia.

Piat's novel, also a memoir in the form of a letter, is dated "*Amsterdam, en l'an de grâce, le 4e septembre 1690*" 'Amsterdam, in the year of our lord, September 4th, 1690.' It is Marie Arnault's letter to her friend, the historical figure Catherine Jérémie, a midwife from Québec who was known for her

expertise in botany. Piat's fictional heroine born in 1648 in a "*petit bourg norman non loin de Carentan*" 'a small town not far from Carentan' (13), France, is based on historical accounts of *Filles du Roi.* Also known as Daughters of the King, they were sent primarily from the Salpêtriere, the infamous Parisian hospital and prison, to New France in 1663 for the purpose of populating the new colony. The prison was "*une ville dans la ville; un vaisseau gigantesque de la misère humaine, où les rues, les venelles, les bâtisses s'entrecroisent, grouillant de mendiants, de folles, de filles de mauvaise vie, de voleuses, criminelles, indésirables de tous poils*" 'a city within a city, a great ship of human misery where the streets, alleys, and buildings intersect, full with the unfortunates, the insane, women of easy virtue, criminals, undesirables of all kinds' (Piat, "Les Filles" 97). Unlike Inés, who chooses to go to the New World under the pretext of searching for her estranged husband, only known as Juan de Málaga, Marie, a prisoner in the Salpêtriere, feels compelled, albeit not forced, to leave her family and illicit Huguenot lover, Jacob Preclair, behind.

Les Filles du Roi, Piat explains, were women who "*le Roi avait décidé d'envoyer par vaisseaux entiers des filles de familles, des ouvrières pauvres, des veuves ou des orphelines auxquelles une dot serait allouée*" 'the King had decided to send by ship–daughters from entire families, poor workers, widows or the orphans whom he would give a dowry' (*Filles du Roi* 109). One of Piat's innovative contributions is that she refutes the common belief that *Les Filles du Roi* were prostitutes. She writes:

> *Contrairement à ce que l'on a longtemps pensé, on y trouvait surtout des orphelines, peut-être quelques prostitute es, mais bien peu. Cette recherche et l'écriture de mon roman m'ont permis de rétablir la vérité historique à leur sujet, mais aussi d'écrire sur la misère épouvantable qui sévissait en France sous Louis XIV*. Contrary to what has been thought for a long time, I found above all that very few of the Orphans were prostitutes. This research and the writing of my book permitted me to reestablish the true history of this subject, but also to write on the appalling misery which raged throughout France under Louis XIV. (Piat, "Les Fille" n. pag.)

On account of Monsieur Brézin and her mother, Marie is chosen from the prisoners in the Salpêtriere for the first historic voyage to Québec under the guidance of Jean Talon on the *Neptune*.

Upon arriving in Québec, Marie delays marrying by unconventionally working as a doctor in the Ursuline's convent under Marie de l'Incarnation. She cannot, however, shirk her duty as a *Filles du Roi*. She is told "*donner votre âme à Dieu*" 'give your soul to God' (Piat, *Filles du Roi* 152) or a take a husband. Piat suggests that, in this patriarchal society, women's roles are defined by their relations to men; daughters, wives, mothers, nuns, and, of course, loyal subjects to the King who is like God, *le Père*. Marie has one choice of occupation available to her: marriage–either to an earthly husband or God.

In these novels there is migration in the physical sense but also nomadism in Braidotti's terms, because the characters do not "hesitate to challenge their societies. Being a nomad requires inventing oneself and not relying on the established customs" (Lagos 124). Nomadism emphasizes how "narratives [can] show that being in between languages and cultural codes provides … a step in the process of changing the world for women" (124) and confirms the fragility-breakability of masculine boundaries. María Claudia André points out how the heroines "deconstruct the boundaries of the space-bound stagnant female subjects" (76), but we must also be weary of this "liberatory" space-taking. In breaking out of their confined spaces, one must ask whose space might these women be inhabiting and taking? Whose space are the women infringing upon, and what women are they re-enclosing into confined spaces as a result of their new found freedom? The indigenous woman in the novel, for example, has no recourse to her own story; we only have access to the heroine's accounts and must bear this in mind in order to avoid imposing a master narrative.

Emphasizing Braidotti's addition of embodied acts of travel and displacement and her earlier concept of nomadism, all of the novels narrate a physical migration. The experience of migration for Inés first takes place in 1537, when she sails with her cousin under the captaincy of Maestro Manuel Martín. Inés describes circumstances on the ship similarly to Marie: a cramped quarter separated from the male crew only by a wooden partition, the scarcity of food, the prevalence of disease, and the threat of pirate attacks. In these

circumstances, both women reveal their skills for tending the ill and wounded. Inés, however, finds the ship's close quarters particularly difficult as she continually experiences the threat of rape from the sailor Sebastían Romero. When the crew finally disembarks, Inés has her first encounter with indigenous peoples, seeing "black-and brown-skinned persons, and the Indians" (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 48). Drunk on palm liquor, the sailors "dragged the Indian girls, against their will, into the thicket that encircled the little settlement" (48). The rape of the Indian girls signifies rape as an experience individual to its victim but a shared experience for women across race and class in Allende's work. The rape of the Indian girls foreshadows Inés' continual harassment from Romero, including two rape attempts, which result first in Inés putting a dagger to his neck (49), and then, finally, murdering him in self-defence.

Arriving in Cartagena, Inés sees that "hundreds of natives, naked in chains, were transporting large stones, spurred by the whips of overseers," as well as a cargo ship from Africa with slaves ready for market (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 51). Allende's implicit suggestion is that the wealth generated from the slave-trade, including the slavery of women, who, likewise, make a "transatlantic crossing," allows voyages like Inés' and her compatriots' to transpire in the first place. Under the pretence of searching for her husband, Inés sails on to Panamá and continues to earn her living by healing and treating those with wounds or disease (74), until she discovers that Juan has been in Peru. Making her way to Peru, she arrives in Ciudad de los Reyes, where she is informed "your husband died in the battle at Las Salinas" (77).

Traitor to the Nation: The Serpent

If Piat's and Allende's novels are about recuperating the unsung mothers of the nation, Esquivel's is a rewrite of a woman known, like the biblical tale of Eve, as the traitor of the nation. Esquivel's work reimagines the historical life of Malinalli, better known as Malinche, the slave-turned interpreter, mistress, and mother of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés's child. Jeanne L. Gillespie clarifies that in Mexican culture Malinche signals not necessarily a whore or the son of a whore, *hijo de puta* but, as Octavio Paz (74) has infamously stated, as "*hijo de la chingagada* [son of the raped or violated woman] [Sic]. … In both cases, the mother is the conduit of blame and dishonor that falls on her children" (173). The mother's only relation is to her (dis)inherited sons. Sandra Messinger Cypress writes that "Mexican women seem to be exiles in their own country if we are to accept Paz's discourse. The image of the displaced woman, exiled or disconnected from her own community and nation," is connected with the experiences of Malinche (14). Malinalli, fluent in Spanish, Mayan, and Náhuatl, effectively helps Cortés defeat Montezuma, the king of the Aztecs, and causes the fall of the Aztec Empire. Esquivel's feminist perspective, however, offers a much more complex portrayal than traditional histories (the images of *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, Paz, Fuentes, Orozco) that blame Malinalli for the fall of her nation. In contrast to Marie and Inés who, in Piat's and Allende's works, travel across the Atlantic for a new life, Esquivel adopts the viewpoint of an Indigenous woman witnessing the arrival of the Europeans.

Important to understanding Esquivel's work is her emphasis on gender and how gender determines one's life chances, as is exemplified in Malinalli's relationship with Cortés. Also significant is Esquivel's interpretation of the image of the serpent, which functions within both the Náhuatl (Malinalli's) and the biblical tradition (Cortés') by disrupting binaries of good and evil with Christ-Quetzalcóatl and Satan-Quetzalcóatl. The "*confrontation entre las deidades Nuevo Mundo … y el dios cristiano*" 'confrontation between the deities of the New World ... with the Christian God' (Torres Torres 378) mirrors the conflicted relationship between Malinalli and Cortés.

The centrality of the serpent is apparent from Malinalli's birth. The umbilical cord is caught in the child's mouth like a snake: "the grandmother took the sight as a message from the god Quetzalcóatl, who in the form of a serpent was coiled around the neck and mouth of her future grandchild" (Esquivel, *Malinche* 4). For her paternal grandmother, this is a positive sign because Quetzalcóatl, unlike the biblical serpent, is a beloved, though flawed deity. Within Náhuatl mythology, Quetzalcóatl is believed to have been betrayed by his brother Tezcatlipoca, a magician, who used a black mirror to show Quetzalcóatl "the mask of his false holiness, his dark side. In response to such a vision, Quetzalcóatl got so drunk that he even fornicated with his sister. Full of shame, the following day he left Tula to find himself again, to recover his light, promising to return one day" (71). The burial of Malinalli's umbilical cord in both the earth and water, for Esquivel, is a return to the cyclical nature of life as continual rebirth and a symbol of Quetzalcóatl (91); he, like all of the gods, is

present in all aspects of life: “life was sewn anew, returning to the earth of its origin” (6).

Coinciding with Malinalli’s birth is Cortés’ arrival in Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic). Quickly proving himself in governing projects, Cortés has a deep desire and ambition for gold and to move onto Mexican territory (Esquivel, *Malinche* 11, 48, 64). After suffering from a scorpion sting and struggling between life and death, he deliriously shouts about several events including a conjuring of the serpent image–clearly a reference to the biblical Satan, who, disguised as a serpent, seduces Eve into eating the forbidden fruit and causes hers and Adam’s banishment from Paradise (88). Esquivel writes “that it had been a serpent, a great serpent that had bitten him, a serpent that lifted itself up in the air and flew out in front of his eyes” (12). Following this prophetic vision, Cortés is declared, “reborn” (13), which he attributes to an incarnation of the Virgin Mother, the Virgin of Guadalupe (47).

Jumping forward to Malinalli as a young woman and slave of the Aztecs, we find her being sold to the Spanish. Malinalli awaits the return of the god Quetzalcóatl, who will free her peoples and end the human sacrifices performed by the Mexicas (Esquivel, *Malinche* 20). In addition, not only Malinalli but Montezuma himself perceives the conquistadors, such as Cortés, as embodying Lord Quetzalcóatl and sent by the god to punish the Aztecs (22, 38, 46, 66, 97). Therefore, Cortés as a serpent lends itself to the biblical tale of Eve as represented by Malinalli, who is seduced by the deceitful snake that causes the

banishment from Paradise, though she naively believes he has come to offer salvation.

Malinalli's critical decision in the novel occurs when she learns from a woman in Cholula that an insurrection against the Spaniards is being planned. Knowing that if the Spaniards are defeated, she will be condemned to death, Malinalli chooses to inform the Spaniards about the revolt (Esquivel, *Malinche* 69). Though Esquivel argues that Malinalli begins to doubt that the Spaniards are sent by Quetzalcóatl to save her people, she feels she has no choice but to side with them in order to survive (69, 100); Cortés, for his part, strategically plays the role of a humble man transformed into a god (86). His decisive victory in Cholula secures his welcome by Montezuma and the gift of his throne and empire (121).

At the end of the novel, one senses a final transformation in Esquivel's invocation of the serpent. Cortés is still the lying seductive snake, associated with the biblical tradition, but Malinalli recognizes herself in her own culture; she must face, like Quetzalcóatl, her dark side in order to become a messiah: "To achieve this, she had to take the same journey that Quetzalcóatl had taken through the inner earth, through the underworld, before becoming the Morning Star. The cycle of Venus was the cycle of purification and rebirth" (Esquivel, *Malinche* 179). In order to become Christ-Quetzalcóatl, Malinalli prepares to undertake a journey (more psychological and internal than physical) in which she recaptures the light (183).

> Walking into the water, Malinalli, like Quetzalcóatl before her, on facing her dark side, became aware of the light. Her will was to be one with the cosmos, and she forced the limbs of her body to disappear … her spirit became one with the water … On that thirteenth day of the month, Malinalli was born to eternity. (185)

Thus, in this critical rewrite, Esquivel offers a far more complex portrayal of Malinalli then a straightforward image of the biblical Eve seduced by a lying Quetzalcóatl-Satan-Cortés and causing the fall of her race. The novel functions as a subversive metaphor for not only European colonialism but also patriarchal Mexican historiography and history: just as Montezuma believed Quetzalcóatl had come to punish him and the Aztecs for their sins and transgressions, Esquivel's novel is a Quetzalcóatl coming to reclaim Malinalli from darkness, deception, and falsity. In this rewrite, she is an Náhuatl woman, an Eve, given her chance to speak, be redeemed, forgiven, and reborn.

Forced Marriages, Lovers, and Sexual Politics

Women's historical novels concentrating on the conquest of the Americas narrate the inherent connection between women and the nation via marriage and reproduction. Noorfarah Merali argues that marriage is "a highly valued social institution in every part of the world" (101) and, focusing on the current rights (economic, sexual, and social/cultural) partners have within marriage across the globe, considers "the issues of consent and coercion as they relate to basic human rights of freedom of association, personal security, and the opportunities

for personal development" (103). In all of the works discussed, the protagonist has little recourse to controlling her own body; instead, she is under the will of patriarchal authorities (God, King, Father, husband, brother). An implicit sexual politics regulates and controls women's bodies through rape, abortion, pregnancy, and virginity. This is found in the pro-natal positions and forced marriages the women in the novels endure.

Irigaray clarifies that woman is the site for man to mark himself and she bears several invisible and visible markings by her master–God, father, husband, employer, customer, and so on. Limited social roles for women include: mother, virgin, and prostitute, which Irigaray suggests fulfill the market's need/desire of the woman as commodity. Therefore:

> The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorisation of reproduction and nursing: faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men's "activity"; seductiveness, in order to arouse the consumers' desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself. (Irigaray, "Women on the Market" 185)

In Esquivel's *Malinche*, Malinalli's life as a slave begins when her mother begins a new family (30). After arriving in the Spanish camps, she is first given to Hernández Portocarrero, because "the gift of an Indian woman would very much flatter him" (Esquivel, *Malinche* 50). After Portocarrero, Malinalli becomes Cortés's lover. Esquivel suggests that, for both Malinalli and Cortés,

their union is a life altering and perhaps pre-ordained moment: within each other, both sense "their destiny and their inevitable union" (77); her time and Cortés's time were ineluctably interconnected, laced, tied together" (117). Challenging Irigaray's thinking, Esquivel writes,

> For a few minutes– which seemed an eternity–Cortés penetrated her time and again, like a savage, as if all the power of nature were contained in his being. … She had for the time being ceased to be 'The Tongue' to become simply a woman, silent, voiceless, a mere woman who did not bear on her shoulders the enormous responsibility of building the conquest with her words. A woman who, contrary to what would be expected, felt relief in reclaiming her condition of submission, for it was a much more familiar sensation to be an object at the service of men than to be a creator of destiny. (79)

Esquivel treads a fine line between the sexual passivity traditionally associated with women and not endorsing the role of woman as object.

Ultimately Esquivel emphasizes the limited choices a woman in Malinalli's situation would have had available. This is evident when Cortés arbitrarily marries Malinalli to his trusted man, Jaramillo (Esquivel, *Malinche* 156-7), who will "give Marina a name, a status, and bring protection to [his] son … [who will] make history" (158). When Malinalli gives birth to Jaramillo's daughter (159), she realizes it is due to Cortés's will: "A child of his blood was born from my womb and a daughter from the will of his whim was also born of

my womb. He chose the man who would insert his seed in my flesh, not me" (161). The sexual politics at play in Esquivel's novel are also echoed in Piat's.

Piat's novel addresses the issue of forced marriage first with Marie's mother, then her step-sister Jean, who is raped by her husband. Marie, herself, is threatened with rape first by her step-father, M. Renoncour– "*Marie, tu as le choix. Ou tu écartes les jambes, comme je te le demande, ou le couvent t'attend. Ou pire* ..." 'Marie, you have a choice, either you spread your legs like I ask, or the convent awaits you. Or worse …' (Piat 64)–and then the King of France in Versailles (95). This choice foreshadows the decision she has later in the novel between marrying or becoming a nun, neither of which reflects her true desires. Her refusal of both men sends her to the Salpêtriere and later to Québec as a *Filles du Roi*. Once in Québec, Marie is ordered to marry the fur trader Capitaine Antoine de Boisgrévy (154). Angrily, Boisgrévy declares "*ma jolie, vous n'étiez pas vierge? Je ne vois pas de sang*" 'my pretty, you were not a virgin? I don't see any blood' (175). Piat underscores a patriarchal society intent on controlling women's sexuality, and the consequences women face when they do not follow social protocol.

Haigh, reading Irigaray, writes:

> Within this 'hom(m)osexual economy', the virgin and the mother are the only legitimate sites that can be occupied by women. As virgin, woman represents the possibility of exchange among men. Once exchanged (between father and husband for example), she is removed from the 'market' of between-men, appropriated by her

> husband and marked by the proper name, the patronym. She becomes producer of legitimate heirs and mediator of the father-son relationship, enabling the perpetuation of the paternal genealogy. Her link with her mother is broken: the maternal genealogy, the line of mothers and daughters, subsumed within that of fathers and sons. (63)

The purpose of Marie's marriage is to "*créer une patrie*," ("create a nation"; 140) and "*peupler ce pays*" ("populate this country"; 109). Piat exposes the danger or drawback against creating a maternal genealogy misinterpreted or appropriated for patriarchal economic gains.

The pro-natal stance, as feminists have intimated, is very much a nationalistic position (Toinette, Marie's friend and former servant, has 11 children). The challenge in women's historical novels is, therefore, to support a maternal genealogy that symbolically and practically links women, but without simultaneously supporting patriarchal nationalism. Irigaray suggests the definition of woman as mother "is a social role imposed on women" ("Women on the Market" 185) and is a kind of matricide: "the woman in the mother is negated in favour of her maternal function" (qtd. in Rye 119). Thus, rewriting a maternal genealogy is very much an exercise in rethinking motherhood and an attempt to usurp patriarchal roles assigned to women. This is no easy task and, more often the not, the author, rather than presenting concrete alternatives, shows patriarchal genealogies as restrictive and destructive. Intimating through the actions and thinking of her heroines, cracks and slippages in the order,

nonetheless, begin to appear; for example, Inés' lies about searching for her husband in order to travel to the New World are a means for revolting against the established order.

Allende's heroine, like Piat's and Esquivel's, confirms the intertwining of patriarchal religion, or more specifically a fundamentalist Catholicism, with women's sexuality. Growing up in Plasencia with her grandfather, "a cabinet maker by trade, [who] belonged to the Brotherhood of Vera-Cruz" (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 6), famous for their inflicted flagellations, her "life was reduced to prayers, sighs, confessions, and sacrifices" (6). Inés lives with her grandfather, mother, and sister because her father has deserted the family (13), foreshadowing Inés's husband, Juan, later abandoning her, and the overall lack of father figures in any of the novels–in all three works the paternal father is dead, leaving the child in the primary care of the mother (a theme that is prevalent in many women's historical novels).

Inés meets her future husband, Juan, in 1526, during the holy week processions, in the same year as threats from Muslim attacks, "religious fervour, whipped by fear, reached the point of dementia" (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 7). As her grandfather cannot afford two dowries, Inés is destined not to marry. Determined to change her fate and fund her own dowry, Inés sews and embroiders. Juan stands in juxtaposition to the holy life that denies the body and the pious life Inés has been leading; he is a womanizer, a card-player and a drinker, with a lust for fortune that eventually fuels his desire to go to the New World. Thus, while Inés "embroidered and sewed from daybreak to midnight,

saving for [their] marriage, Juan spent his days wandering through the taverns and plazas, seducing maidens and whores alike" (10). Inés confesses that it is Juan's seductive nature and her youthful love that allows her to forgive him; Allende initially portrays Inés' love as ambiguous. On the one hand, Inés embodies what Weldt-Basson refers to as "the stereotype of the female ruled by her passion for a man" (128), yet, Inés, like Malinalli and Marie, is more than the stereotypical object of love. She is a desiring subject. The object of her desire, nonetheless, controls and manipulates her sexuality: in order to avoid pregnancy, like Marie, Inés uses "a vinegar-soaked sponge" (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 11). The "loss" of virginity becomes her choice, one that undermines the patriarch's law, until her grandfather, discovering the illicit affair, forces Juan to marry Inés because "honour was in large measure tied to the virtue of the women in the family" (11). Irigaray suggests that "the right to virginity should be a part of girls' civil identity" and that "the right to virginity as belonging to the girl, and not to her father, brother, or future husband, should be enshrined in law" (*Key Writings* 206).

When Juan leaves for the New World, convinced he will find, El Dorado, the city of gold, Inés moves in with her mother and is forced to dress as a widow. Despite severe restrictions on her cloistered life, Inés continues to engage in the few jobs respectable for women, including sewing, cooking, and visiting the hospital. In the hospital, she realizes she has, like Marie, a talent for healing by helping "the nuns with the sick and the victims of the plague" (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 15). With the money she makes from her labour, Inés dreams of

following Juan, not out of love, but for the promise of freedom the New World offers women.

In Plasencia, Inés is tied to her husband; she cannot divorce or remarry, so she secures a permit to go to the Americas:

> The Crown protected matrimonial ties and tried to reunite husband and wife in order to populate the New World with legitimate Christian families … They issued permits to married women to join their husbands only if a family member or another respectable went with them. (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 17)

Swearing that she is racially pure, meaning not a Jew or a Moor, “but an old Christian,” Inés secures her papers (18).

In Piat’s and Allende’s novels, we see two vulnerable young women who, as a result of a passionate/illicit love (Marie’s love is for Jacob, a condemned Huguenot) in austere Catholic settings, face confinement and isolation in their home nations. With the prospect of a better life in the New World (and Malinalli’s with the arrival of the conquistadors), the heroines challenge the stereotype of “passive and subdued traits associated with femininity” (André 77) by making their way into unknown lands. Inés, unlike Marie and Malinalli, further challenges a notion of motherhood. Rationalizing later in life, she says:

> I understand that the Virgin’s true blessing was to deny me motherhood and thus allow me to fulfill an exceptional destiny. With children I would have been held down, as we women are. With children I would have stayed in Plasencia, abandoned by Juan

> de Málaga, sewing and making empanadas. With children, I would not have conquered this Kingdom of Chile. (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 14)

Her freedom is attributed to not having children or having to perform the duties of traditional femininity that confines women spatially. At the same time the novels do not denigrate traditional feminine roles such as healing, sewing, and cooking. The complexity of femininity negotiated by the protagonists ensures the importance of the woman's historical novel in a transnational context. Sexual freedom is also a major theme and preoccupation in women's historical novels and the women in each continually and paradoxically reinforce and grate against patriarchal notions of what does and does not constitute acceptable sexual behaviour.

Proselytism and Mother-Tongues

In women's historical novels on the colonizing of the Americas, communicating with the aboriginals is imperative for survival and it is the women in the novels who understand the political importance of interpreting the other. In Allende's work, even after Inés realizes Juan is dead, she knows she cannot marry her new lover, the conquistador, Pedro de Valdivia, in the New World,. Valdivia is a "famous field marshal, the hero of many wars, one of the richest and most powerful men in all of Peru" (*Inés of my Soul* 94). Valdivia senses his duty to the Emperor Charles V as colonizing/Christianizing Chile (105). Allende writes:

> Pedro and Francisco were grateful for their good fortune in being Catholics, which guaranteed the salvation of their souls, and Spanish, that is, superior to the rest of humankind. They were hidalgos of Spain, sovereign over all the wide and beckoning world, more powerful than the ancient Roman Empire, chosen by God to discover, conquer, Christianize, found, and populate the most remote corners of the earth. (21)

Together, Inés and Pedro share a dream for earning fame and founding a utopian kingdom in Chile, which remained un-colonized following Diego de Almagro's failed attempt and "disastrous journey" (110). The 1540 journey to Chile with Pedro entails a "handful of soldiers and the thousand auxiliary Indians" (the Yanaconas are a military force of servants) (118) and is fraught with the perils of the desert, starvation, fatigue, internal fighting amongst the soldiers, and even a conspiracy from Sancho de la Hoz.

The indigenous Chileans, however, pose the greatest threat to success. As a means of securing the Spaniards' success, Inés learns the language of the Mapuche, Mapundungu (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 118). By comparison, in Piat's text, Toinette, newly arrived in Québec, notes: "*J'apprends l'algonquin, me dit-elle. Si je dois vivre ici avec Matthieu*" 'I'm learning Algonquin, she told me. I must in order to live here with Matthieu' (*Filles du Roi* 160). Marie de l'Incarnation who runs the Ursuline convent is also "*en train de rédiger un livre d'histoire sacrée en Algonquin ainsi qu'un dictionnaire Iroquois*" 'currently writing a book of sacred history in Algonquin and an Iroquois dictionary' (141)

in order to convert the indigenous effectively to Christianity. The powerful role of the woman interpreter, however, is best found in Esquivel's *Malinche.*

Cortés asks,

> How could he be able to use his best and most effective weapon on those natives, who spoke other languages? Cortés would have given half his life if he could master the languages of that strange country … these natives were civilized, different from those in Hispaniola and Cuba. Cannons and horses were effective when dealing with savages, but in a civilized context, the ideal thing was to seal alliances, negotiate, win over, and all this could be done only through dialogue, of which he was deprived from the very start. (Esquivel, *Malinche* 36-37)

Praying to the Virgin to help him triumph, Cortés sees Malinalli for the first time "and a maternal spark connected them with the same longing. Malinalli felt that this man could protect her; Cortés, that the woman could help him as only a mother could: unconditionally" (49-50). Malinalli, one of twenty slaves given to the Spanish (57), finds herself baptized as Marina by Friar Aguilar (41), who, at her request, teaches her Spanish (46) so they may discuss religion.

Again, in reference to Eve who desired knowledge, Malinalli's hunger for learning brings about her downfall. Malinalli, however, interprets the new religion, Catholicism, in terms of her own–noticing the similarities in baptisms, symbols, and Mary, Jesus' mother, who she likens to Tonantzin "the mother of them all" (Esquivel, *Malinche* 47). Cortés quickly realizes Malinalli's worth

when he learns of her gift for languages. Known as "The Tongue," she "translated what he said into the Náhuatl language and what Montezuma's messengers said from Náhuatl into Spanish" (61-2). This task for Malinalli is linked with divinity: she is literally a mouthpiece of the gods and fears "being unfaithful to the gods" and "not being able to bear responsibility" (65). Ryan F. Long identifies this as Esquivel's metanarrative, recognizing her "limitations as Malinalli-Malinche's 'interpreter'" (199). Like Esquivel, Malinalli recognizes the power of words through her role as translator and the paradoxical freedom-servitude one experiences in this position.

Esquivel writes:

> She, the slave who listened to orders in silence, who couldn't look directly into the eyes of men, now had a voice, and the men, staring into her eyes, would wait attentively to hear what her mouth uttered. She, who had so often been given away, who so many times had been gotten rid of, now was needed, valued, as much as if not more than cacao. (*Malinche* 66)

Her public role is as Cortés's tongue; thus:

> La Malinche disrupted the general Amerindian curb on 'women's tongues in public places' as well as the Christian restrictions against women speakers in public. … the use of voice by La Malinche, her role as a spokesperson, marks one of her most striking–and positive–disruptions of the patriarchy on both the indigenous and the European sides. (Cypress 17)

Esquivel, as writer, also becomes a kind of Malinche: “La Malinche is a ‘mother’ to Mexican women writers in that they are carrying out the work she began in the public arena;” they are rebelling against patriarchal restrictions and silences (Cypress 22).

When Cortés slaughters the inhabitants of Cholula, Malinalli serves as his interpreter: “She spoke in the name of Malinche, a nickname they had given Cortés, since he always had her by his side. Malinche in some way meant the master of Malinalli” (93). This is the first time Esquivel uses the word “Malinche” and, therefore, the novel’s title is subversive. Malinche, historically, is Malinalli’s nickname and means traitor, but here refers to Cortés, who is defined only by his relation as the “master” of Malinalli.[10] Cortés as master symbolizes both his legal claim over the woman and the woman’s words as she speaks only in patriarchal language with no recourse to her own voice– furthermore, Cortés holds sexual sway over her: she is his property.

Though Malinalli informs Cortés of an upcoming insurrection, after witnessing the destruction of Cholula, she

> No longer wanted to speak, to see, to struggle for her freedom. Not at such a price. Not through the death of so many innocents … She rather wished that serpents would come out of her womb and wrap themselves around her body, that they would suffocate her, leave her without breath, turn her into nothing, a word in the moistness of

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[10] Alfred Arteaga asks why Gonzalo Guerrero, Cortés’s former translator is also not “Malinche” and links the answer to a “Christian, patriarchal, imperialist project” in which “a woman Malinche is more pleasing than a man” (63).

> the tongue, a symbol, a hieroglyph, a stone. (Esquivel, *Malinche* 105)

It is, however, after she is forced to leave her son behind while on a mission to Hibueras that Malinalli finally asks for her freedom (154). Cortés refuses: "accept your mission is simply to be my 'Tongue'" (154). Saddened, Malinalli remembers

> The moments in which Cortés's mouth and her mouth had been one mouth only, and the thought of Cortés and his tongue one single idea, one new universe. The tongue had joined them and the tongue had separated them. The tongue was the cause of everything. Malinalli had destroyed Montezuma's empire with her tongue. Thanks to her words, Cortés had made allies that ensured his conquest. She decided then to punish the instrument that had created that universe. (158)

Taking a thorn from an agave plant, Malinalli pierces her tongue in two (another symbol of the serpent) and causes Cortés's defeat in Hibueras (159).

Malinalli is useless to Cortés until, arriving one day at hers and Jaramillo's home, he informs her of his great need for her to speak on his behalf in court. Malinalli responds, "'Cortés, I will forever be grateful for my son and the husband you gave me, the piece of land that you kindly gave Jaramillo and me so that we might spread our roots, but do not ask me to speak on your behalf, not in that tone. I am no longer your tongue, Lord Malinche'" (Esquivel,

Malinche 176). While Malinalli's refusal to do Cortés' bidding is her last dialogue in the novel with him, it has historical-cultural ramifications.

In an ironic reply to Paz's words that "she is the *Chingada*. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she *is* Nothingness" (86), Esquivel suggests that when Malinalli ceases to be "the Tongue," she ceases to exist in a patriarchal history; she transitions into the feminine world of domestic tranquility and silence, a world that eludes the archives. Unlike Gillespie and Long, Cypress argues that Malinalli "descended from 'la lengua' to become 'la matriz,' the 'womb' and in exercising that traditional female function, she was relegated to the position of a negotiable property used for political alliances and sexual exploits" (Esquivel, *Malinche* 18). Gillespie and Long, nevertheless, read the novel, tentatively, as "a romance novel" because "there is a 'love story,' the protagonist is fascinated by the 'wrong man,' and she is loved from a distance by the 'right man'" (178; 203). A certain amount of "domestic tranquility" is achieved, though Esquivel resists the traditional happy ending in romances– Malinalli as mother and wife leaves her family to go on a pilgrimage and sacrifices her life for the "promise of a syncretic future for her children" (Long 205). In this sense, Esquivel plays with the stereotypical dichotomous views of the mother in Mexican culture; Malinalli impossibly embodies both good and bad, mothers and, in this moment, transforms from evil Eve into her opposing image, the Virgin: selfless, passive, all-loving, and all-sacrificing.

Racial Hybridity

As a result of European mobility (both male and female), sexual encounters, including rape, occur between the indigenous and immigrants as well as amongst the immigrants (Romero's attempt to rape Inés). Piat's text describes how this mixing between colonizer (French) and aboriginal is met with ambivalence. Marie de l'Incarnation believes that:

> *Un Français devient plus facilement sauvage qu'un sauvage Français. Monsieur Talon exulte mais ne peut ignorer le nombre de jeunes gens qui abandonnent leur famille pour vivre à l'indienne, faisant le véritable métier de bandits. Et pire encore ... Les garcons courent les Indiennes et les <bois brûlés>se multiplient*.
>
> A Frenchman becomes more easily Indian, than an Indian becomes French. Mr. Talon rejoices, but he cannot ignore the number of young men who abandon their family for living with the Indians, like true criminals. And worse still … the boys are copulating with the Indians; the mixed-bloods are multiplying. (Piat, *Filles du Roi* 144-45)

Fernando Ortiz's term "transculturation" aptly describes this kind of cultural/racial "mixing" as a process or phase that not only involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture" (qtd. in Rama 19) but also the "creation of a new cultural phenomenon" (qtd. in Rama 19). The woman's historical novel, thus, challenges terms like "acculturation" or "colonization" by addressing racial hybridity as a process of transculturation in national genealogies.

Piat's text inverts the stereotype of sexual relations between indigenous women and French male settlers. She narrates the experiences of a French immigrant woman's sexual encounters with an Algonquin and complicates the origins of the Québécois. In the New World, Marie is attacked and kidnapped by the Iroquois when she accompanies her clandestine lover Jacob (who has come from France to find her) and the historical figure Robert Cavelier de la Salle on an expedition to found new territory along the Mississippi. The Iroquois, upon discovering Marie's female identity (because she is disguised as the doctor M. Robert who "*saura se vêtir en coureur de bois*" [will be dressed as a woodsman] (227), decide not to kill her, but adopt and marry her into their community (231). Desired by an Algonquin named Silence, Marie finds herself, in order to stay alive, allowing the marriage. After ten moons, Marie claims, "*J'apprenais peu à peu l'iroquois et quelques mots d'algonquin, devenant peu à peu Tiskawamis, la femme de Silence que je commençais d'aimer*" 'I learned little by little the Iroquois language and some words in Algonquin, becoming little by little Tiskawamis, Silence's woman; I began to love him' (Piat, *Filles du Roi* 234).[11] Marie's relationship with Silence, like Malinalli's with Cortés, follows closely what Mary Louise Pratt cautions as a sentimentalized "transracial love plot" wherein, when the lovers are separated, the European returns to his/her culture more or less intact and "the non-European dies an early death" (95). Silence's fate remains unknown while Marie, once able to escape, reunites with Jacob and discovers she is pregnant.

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[11] In Desrochers' novel, the protagonist, Laure, has a sexual relationship with an Iroquois.

Having given birth to a boy named Samuel, an homage to the explorer Samuel Champlain, one of Marie's neighbours observes "*pour mignon, il est mignon. Mais à mon avis, il n'est pas de chez nous … Il n'a pas le tête de chez nous… Je le vois bien*" 'Cute, he is cute. But in my opinion he doesn't look like us … He doesn't have our face, I see that clearly' (Piat, *Filles du Roi* 241). Piat complicates, like Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity that rejects the notion of pure racial or national origins (156), the myth of Québec's founding mother. Marie's familial lineage, like many other descendants of the *Filles du Roi*, has indigenous blood, which is often not (but must be/should be) acknowledged by the historical archives.[12]

In Esquivel's work, racial hybridity is of central importance. As Cortés' slave and lover, Malinalli has little access to her own desire and, following Cortés's triumph over Montezuma's empire, gives birth to a son (Esquivel, *Malinche* 145), who is symbolically, though not historically, the first mestizo in Mexico. Esquivel writes: "She knew that in her womb there was beating the heart of a being that would unite two worlds. The blood of Moors and Christians with that of the Indians, that pure, unmixed race" (146). Unlike Malinalli, who perceives her own race as pure in contrast to the Europeans, when the child is born, Cortés, though relishing an heir, considers his son a bastard and a "mestizo" (147). Thus, part of Esquivel's objective in *Malinche* is engaging the Indigenous past, the maternal past, seen as inferior to their European father that

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[12] The focus of her sequel, *Dans les plaines d'Abraham*, chronicles the life of two of Marie's descendants, Louis de Préclair–a surgeon in Quebec–and his correspondence with Marie–a lecturer at the court of Versailles.

Paz believes perpetuates the statehood of Mexicans as orphans “wandering in the labyrinth of solitude” (Cypress 19).

Related to the Mexican condition of orphan-hood described by Paz as lacking a positive identification with the mother, Allende provides a perspective on Chileans. Allende suggests that a lieutenant in the New World “kept thirty Indian concubines … the norm in the New World, where Spaniards take Indian and black women at their will” (78). Characterized by Pratt’s term “contact zones,” “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (*Inés of my Soul* 7), for Allende, European, black, and indigenous women in the New World “meet” and “clash” under the rule of men. These zones in the woman’s historical novel stress that, ultimately, men are the dominating power, not nationhood, over women’s lives.

Inés, like Marie, is one of the first European women to undertake a voyage to the New World and one of a few European women living in Peru: “at that time, the number of Spanish women in Peru could be still be counted on one’s fingers … they were wives or daughters of soldiers, and had come at the insistence of the Crown, which was attempting to reunite families and create a legitimate and decent society in the colonies” (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 79). On route to her final destination, Chile, Inés admires Pedro because he “never doubted his mission: to populate Chile with Spaniards and to evangelize the Indians” (127). The Spanish feel “the best way to serve [their] majesty in the Americas was to people it was mestizos … the solution to the problem was to kill all males older than twelve, sequester the children, and patiently and

methodically rape the women" (135). This view explains the celebrations when Cecelia, an Inca princess and part of the Chilean entourage, gives birth to Pedrito Gómez, the first Chilean mestizo (139). Thus, the intersection between religious conversion, territorial expansion, and the lives of aboriginals plays a pivotal role in understanding the woman's historical novel.

Part of this understanding comes with narrating the women's actions. Esquivel relates Malinalli's role in the massacre of Cholula, but both Marie and Inés also play a violent part in establishing the nation. When Toinette "*hurlant: - Les Iroquois nous attaquent!* " 'screams: -the Iroquois are attacking us!' (Esquivel, *Malinche* 214), Marie exclaims, "*ce fut la première fois que je devais tuer des hommes; je le fis sans scruples. Entre eux et nous, il n'y avait point de choix*" 'it was the first time that I had to kill men; I did it without thinking. It was either them or us, I had no choice' (214). Tensions between the new European settlers and indigenous peoples over territory and dominion is a primary theme in these works and is mirrored in Allende's novel when Valdivia is away from the settlement of Santiago and Inés is forced to act militarily.

Facing imminent defeat against a Mapuche assault, Inés descends into the prison where "seven captive caciques [were] spurring on their warriors at the top of their lungs" (*Inés of my Soul* 199). Inés, thus, orders the prisoners to be killed. When the soldiers seem reluctant to execute "the governor's hostages" (200), Inés, taking matters into her own hands, beheads the caciques with her sword and throws them into the midst of her enemy, prompting a speedy retreat (201). Surrounded by the ruins of Santiago, Inés is haunted by her deed and begs for

forgiveness for her violence (205), though she is heralded as a hero and savoir of the city (207).

Both Allende and Piat refuse to romanticize their heroine's murders, but Inés laments that the Spanish, including Spanish women, will "eventually exterminate the natives of this land, because they would rather die free than live as slaves" (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 119). Inés' sentiment is echoed in Piat's novel when Marie, working in the convent and then as a rural doctor, witnesses the natives devastated by European religions, wars, and diseases, including sexual ones (Piat, *Filles du Roi* 143, 210). Malinalli's true desire in Esquivel's work is to be free from servitude, though she regrets her means to achieve it: she despises herself for having "'looked at myself in your [Cortés'] mirrors, in your black mirrors'" (Esquivel, *Malinche* 178).

After the uprising in Allende's novel, Pedro, upon his return, tells Inés he wants to persevere and found Chile with her, naming her "Inés of my soul" (*Inés of my Soul* 208). Valdivia's utterance is important. Not only does Allende's title stem from these words, but they are also the final words of the novel. Upon Valdivia's death, Inés, suffering from a fever, hears him in a dream whisper "Farewell, Inés of my soul …" (313). One must ask of Allende, like of Esquivel, whose story is really being written? Cortés is, after all, Malinche. In Allende's work, the voice is Inés', the memories are of her life and the founding of Chile, but Allende's choice of Valdivia's words for her title implies either that this is actually *his-story*, that Inés forms her identity based on her relation to Pedro, or

Allende has appropriated for herself the same endearment–Inés is a maternal figure, a Chilean ancestress of her twentieth century soul.

Forging New Ties: Woman to Woman

A prominent feature of these novels is their creation of woman to woman kinship. Cantero Rosales writes: "*Si en la novella tradicional el amour heterosexual era la preocupación fundamental de la heroína, ahora esta narrativa propone un Nuevo circuito de comunicacíon en el que la Amistad entre mujeres es la clave en torno a la giran las vidas de las protagonistas*" 'If in the traditional novella heterosexual love was the fundamental concern of the heroine, Allende now proposes a new narrative communication circuit in which the friendship between women is the key to turning around the lives of the protagonists' (168). Cantero Rosales' thinking suggests that these women's historical novels secure the bond between women both in friendship and in motherhood.

In *Malinche*, Malinalli's grandmother plays the prominent maternal role and tells her granddaughter that "[t]he earth is our mother, who feeds us, who reminds us where we came from whenever we rest upon her. In our dreams she tells us that our bodies are earth, that our eyes our earth, and that our thoughts will be earth in the wind" (Esquivel, *Malinche* 23). It is for this reason that Malinalli later tells Cortés, when he declares that his God does not have a wife, that this is impossible: "Without a womb, without darkness, light cannot emerge, life cannot emerge. It is from her greatest depths that Mother Earth creates

precious stones, and in the darkness of the womb that gods and humans take their forms. Without a womb there is no god" (62). The image of the Virgin Mary also awakens Malinalli to a:

> Nostalgia for the maternal arms, a longing to feel enveloped, embraced, sustained, and protected by her mother, as at one time she must have been; by her grandmother, as she definitely had been; by Tonantzin, as she hoped she would be; and by a universal mother, like that white lady who held the child in her arms. (47)

At the end of the novel, Malinalli, on her pilgrimage, not only enacts the rebirth of Quetzalcóatl but also realizes a femino-centric desire to create a new maternal genealogy, "a link in the feminine chain created by countless generations of women" (6).

She buries her grandmother's precious objects, including some kernels of corn, while praying to Tonantzin, "the Aztec goddess of fertility" (Paz 84), to "nourish those grains" (182). Symbolically, Malinalli is on the hill where, in the future (1531), Juan Diego will witness the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe. Paz suggests that a "return to the ancient feminine deities … is a return to the maternal womb" (84-85). Unlike Paz, however, who juxtaposes the Virgin Mother against "the *Chingada*," Esquivel transforms Malinalli[13]; she "becomes the mortal equivalent to the spiritual convergence of culture and spirituality

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[13] Paz adds the goddess Cihaucóatl, *La Llorona* "the long-suffering Mexican mother" to this Mexican mother triad (75). Esquivel writes that this goddess "at nights wandered through the canals of the great Tenochtitlán weeping for her children. They said that those who heard her could not go back to sleep, so terrifying were her mournful, anxious wails for the future of her children. She shouted out all the dangers and devastations that lay in wait for them. Malinalli, like Cihaucóatl, wept at not being able to protect her harvest" (18).

represented by the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe" (Long 204). In Esquivel's novel, the old female goddesses never die; they simply transform (181), which stresses the importance of breaking patriarchal cycles. Esquivel's emphasis in the text on women forging bonds with women is also highlighted in Allende's and Piat's works.

When Inés' husband is confirmed dead, she decrees, "Juan Malaga was dead and I was free" (Allende, *Inés of my Soul* 85). Like Marie's husband, who is fur-trapping and fighting the Iroquois, Toinette knocks on Marie's door one day declaring, "*Ils l'ont trouvé gelé près de la rivière Richelieu*" 'They found him [Antoine] frozen near Richelieu River' (Piat, *Filles du Roi* 189). Antoine's quest for wealth in the New World results in his death and marks for Piat's heroine another chance for rebirth in New France. In this new life, Marie meets Catherine Jérémie, renown for her science of plants, who, like Inés' new Quecha Indian servant, Catalina, knows "many remedies and enchantments" (86). Together the women do medicinal work. As in Piat's novel, Allende gives Catalina's knowledge of herbal plants and women's bodily experiences (abortion, pregnancy, birth) an equal, if not privileged, knowledge position. Vrinda Dalmiya and Linda Alcoff in "Are Old Wives' Tales" Justified?" challenge masculine-dominant notions of epistemology by referencing traditional women's knowledge as a "gender-specific experiential knowing as a species of the more general 'experiential' knowledge" (228). This gender knowledge, Dalmiya and Alcoff claim, stems from a basis for experience among women, such as childbirth and pregnancy. It is called *determinable* because "there are

some gender-specific 'subjective facts' that are not accessible to subjects who are not of that gender" (Dalmiya and Alcoff 229) and they suggest that midwives, like Jérémie in Piat's novel and Catalina in Allende's, possess this type of "G-experiential knowledge" (231). Piat writes that "she was magic"in opposition to the formal training and propositional knowledge of male doctors (109). Though we see a positive evaluation of traditional women's knowledge in the novels, traditional hierarchies such as race and class, particularly in the form of servitude, between women remain intact. For example, though Inés' relationship with her friend and servant Catalina has a magical and spiritual quality, she is still a servant.

Catherine in Piat's work, because she is of the same race and class, figures as more or less Marie's equal. Piat's novel concludes with Marie, after re-meeting and marrying Jacob in Québec, recounting her return to France with Jacob and her son Samuel in order to avoid religious persecution, only to discover France is expelling, murdering, and converting non-Catholics. Piat references the Edict of Nantes (38), which was supposed to put an end to the war of religions in France and grant the Huguenots rights and religious freedom, but on "*le 19 octobre 1685, le Roi signa un «édit de Fontainebleau» dont la teneur fut répandue dans toutes les provinces: l'édit de Nantes était révoqué"* 'October 19th, 1685, the King [Louis XIV] signed the edict of Fontainebleau, the contents of which spread across all regions; the Edict of Nantes was revoked' (*Filles du Roi* 248). This revocation explains Jacob's and his father's death at the hands of Louis XIV's army for refusing to convert to Catholicism. Marie, forced to

escape, is exiled in Amsterdam, where she finishes her letter by signalling she may indeed return again to New France, because, as an exile and twice widowed woman, Marie and her children are nationless/homeless: "*mais, ma chère Catherine, hélas, vous étiez loin de moi. Et mon pays. Quel pays?* 'but, my dear Catherine, alas, you are from me. And my country. Which country?' (Piat, *Filles du Roi* 254). There is a sense that Catherine Jérémie, the famed mid-wife and "*la magicienne de ma vie au Québec*" ("the magician of my life in Québec"; 163), and the sorority Marie shares with her are the center of Marie's life; Marie's return to Québec is, essentially, a return, not to a nation, but to a woman. The woman to woman relationships evident in Piat's, Allende's and Esquivel's (if we think of Malinalli's grandmother) are effective because, as in many women's historical novels, e.g., Fredriksson's *Hanna's Daughters* (1994) or Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), "a female duo replaces the phallic hero at the center of the frame of representation" (Anderlini-D'Onofrio 162). Fusing the past with the present, the woman's historical novel on the Americas constructs a revisionist matrilineal narrative, which establishes a new symbolic order for women.

Conclusion

The woman's historical novel on the colonizing of the Americas marks a transitional period in history and the new imagining of national boundaries and borders, often "separating people of shared ethnicity and kinship into residents" of different political territories (Jameson, "Connecting" 7). Women's roles in

shaping nations and territories, however, has been marginalized and underwritten. Writing “herstories” not only “historicize women’s experiences and identities,” but force us to revise and rethink who has made the nation (Perry 83). The transnational maternal genealogies in Esquivel’s, Allende’s, and Piat’s works challenge both national origins and a definition of motherhood/maternal origins. Each novel “radically open[s] up the idea of the ‘mother’ to indicate that this is above all a positioning rather than an identity, and one any woman might adopt or reject according to her voluntary desires” (Jennings 82). Breaking with traditional historical novels by adopting a femino-centric focus, the writers show the difficulties women in the Americas faced in transitioning from an Old World into a New World (for Inés and Marie, this is symbolized by the transatlantic crossing, while Malinalli confronts colonialism by the Christian Spaniards in her own land). Searching for a better life, these women endured the threat of rape, unwanted pregnancy, loss of virginity, repercussions from the church, loveless marriages, kidnapping, domestic violence, and murder as well as romantic love and sexual freedom outside of marriage, cross culturally, nationally, linguistically, and racially.

CHAPTER TWO

TRANSNATIONAL MATER-FAMILIAL SAGAS: THE MATRIARCH

> Let it be myth then…Whether the Golden Age of Matriarchy ever existed in history is not important: what is important is that the myth exists *now*; that there is a story being passed from woman to woman, from mother to daughter, of a time in which we were strong and free and could see ourselves in the Divine, when we lived in dignity and peace
> – Ann Carson, *Feminist Spirituality*

A revival and updating of primarily British family sagas from the 1930s, such as Vera Brittain's *Honourable Estate: A Novel of Transition* (Wallace, *Woman's* 55), the contemporary woman's historical novel concentrates on the establishment of a transnational maternal genealogy in what I call the "mater-familial saga." Mater-familial sagas, for example Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds* (1977), V.C. Andrews' prolific series *Dollanganger* (1979-86), *Emma Harte Saga* (1979-2009) by Barbara Taylor Bradford, Philippa Gregory's Wideacre trilogy (1987-1990), Joan Chase's *During the Reign of the Queen of Persia* (1983), or *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* (2005) by Kim Edwards, revolve not just around the family, as in typical familial sagas, but distinctly around the transnational lives of women and, in particular, a powerful mother or grandmother figure. The role of the mother figure in literature is a familiar topic (Hirsch, Adalgisa Giorgio, Irigaray, Lori Saint-Martin, just to name a few), but scholarship, specifically on the matriarch in women's historical novels, in particular, is rare. Typically, in women's historical novels, matriarchs figure prominently in two literary-historical time-frames: premodern societies, for

example Joan Wolf's series on a prehistoric matriarchal society in southern France (1991-93) or Mary Mackey's Earthsong trilogy (1993-8), and the long twentieth century. In this chapter, I focus on the latter time-frame as it is the same time frame invoked by family sagas written in the 1930s. I discuss Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), Adhaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999), *Daughters of the River Huong* (2005) by Uyen Nicole Duong and *The Toss of a Lemon* (2008) by Padma Viswanathan.[14] Unlike works on early matriarchal societies, which Cynthia Eller in *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* calls falsified "feminist narratives of a peaceful, egalitarian, Goddess-worshipping society" (Kraemer 240), the matriarch discussed here is an ambivalent and unconventional figure. Contemporary novels suggest that the family is once again experiencing a time of radical transition. This transition is reflected in the life of the matriarch, who, as a complex mother figure, is revered and resented, respected yet feared, challenged, sometimes loved, and often pitied by her family.

Mater-familial sagas today are multi-vocal, multi-perspectival, cross-national, and collapse/combine different historical eras into a unified narrative. Mary Green argues that there is "an opportunity to turn back to her place of origin, to her mother, and to her mother's mother, allowing her to insert herself within a female genealogy" (98). Gill Rye describes this process as chronicling "women's relations *with* their mothers through to women's experiences *as*

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[14] I'm using the English translation of Esquivel's *Como Agua Para Chocolate* by Carol Christensen and Tom Christensen.

mothers" (118). These novels assert the political potential of the woman's historical novel through the process by which a woman inserts herself into a female genealogy and her rememoriation of the past. These memories express an insider's perspective to colonization/globalization, as opposed to the national enthusiasm the protagonists in chapter one share in their respective New Worlds. For example, in *Daughters of the River Huong*, the narrator highlights the devastating effects of war on women's lives when she makes her escape from war-torn Vietnam by marrying an American journalist.

Male absences, often attributed to death, are the norm in these novels. In Viswanathan's novel *The Toss of a Lemon*, Sivakami's husband dies while she is still a teenager and Goli, the husband of her daughter Thangham, is a wandering father who sees his children once every few years. Soueif's protagonists Omar and Sharif in *The Map of Love* die; Andre Foucault's death in Duong's novel can be read as not only a personal freeing from a man but also as the symbolic death of French colonialism in Vietnam; and in Esquivel's work, the heroine, Tita, dies while making love to Pedro (she is only heroine whose death is dramatically marked in these novels).

The matriarch's freedom or power–political, religious, social, economic, familial–arises from male absence. Hirsch argues that in contrast "to the female family romance prevalent in nineteenth-century novels" that revolved "around the attachment to a male figure" and the female family romance of the 1920s that subscribed to "compulsory heterosexuality … the feminist family romance of the 1970s de-emphasizes the role of men … the concentration on mother-daughter

bonding and struggle, and the celebration of female relationships of mutual nurturance leave only a secondary role to men" (133). Gil Zehava Hochberg, drawing on the work of Hortense J. Spillers and the African-American woman's narrative, writes on women writers of the African diaspora, such as Simone Schwarz-Bart's historical novel *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*; Hochberg claims that:

> With the absence of the symbolic patriarchal figure … 'the monstrosity' of a strong maternal figure ('with the capacity to name') offers a radical identity position for (African American) women and an alternative narrative of female empowerment, based on the specific (destruction of) the African American family during slavery. (2)

In the textual analysis to follow, in addition to the notable absence of men, I examine forbidden romances, rebellious sisters, rememoriation, exile, mirrors, and sacred objects, all of which figure prominently and elucidate an understanding of the matriarch's role in transnational maternal genealogies.

Forbidden Romances and Matriarchs

Warning against matriarchal societies that merely reverse patriarchy, Luce Irigaray writes that in these cases "[t]he mother commands, the daughter is to listen and obey. The elder seems to repeat to her daughter what has been forced upon her as a woman" (*I Love to You* 130). Similarly, Hope Jennings, writing about Angela Carter's apocalyptic/science fiction works *Heroes and Villains*

(1970) and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), suggests, like Eller, that "matriarchal myths are more often than not equally as oppressive as their patriarchal counterparts, since those feminisms that express a desire for the maternal as a source of inherent female power do not so much grant women freedom from phallocentric parameters but, in fact, help keep them in place" (66). Elleke Boehmer warns African women writers who inscribe the continent as "Mother Africa" ("Stories" 4-7) of the risk in imagining an idealized, mythologized, "homeland in the Motherland" (James Alexander 10). In addition, noting the dangers in essentializing reproductive roles for women, Jennings claims that what can be a source of power for women can also enslave women (66). Her insights are particularly true of Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, which centers on the matriarchal figure of Mama Elena and her daughters Rosaura, Gertrudis, and Tita.

In Esquivel's novel, the dominating force of the United States is clear. The De la Garza family lives on a ranch on the US-Mexico border during the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910). Mexico's national struggles within the novel serve as an important backdrop in this mater-familial saga and parallel the battles between Mama Elena and her daughters. Eric Skipper suggests that the Revolution itself plays such an essential role in shaping events that it ultimately functions as a protagonist and should be treated as such (186). Skipper identifies Mama Elena and Tita as representing the two opposing sides of the Revolution: Mama Elena as matriarch runs her household according to patriarchal authority, traditions and customs; she stands for the Federal troops and the dictatorship of

Porfirio Díaz. The relationship "can be classified as a colonized relationship between the colonizer and colonized in which the (powerful) mother fits the profile of a colonizer and the (powerless) daughter is the colonized" (James Alexander 19). Mama Elena is a dictator in her family, and forbids Tita from marrying her lover Pedro, because the youngest daughter, according to Mama Elena's Mexican tradition, is to be a caretaker.

Mama Elena is also portrayed with physical strength, skill, and calculating coldness, for example, her ability to kill chickens or crack sacks of walnuts without tiring (Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate* 230). Tita, on the other hand gains confidence as the novel progresses. Her rebellious nature supports the revolutionaries, who desire socialist change, and a dismantling of the old systems (187). Tita resents her mother's ways until the end of the novel when she discovers Mama Elena once had a secret lover, José Treviño, who was murdered. This revelation invokes compassion, if not pity, within Tita for her already deceased mother. It is significant that first Mama Elena, (including her ghost) and then Tita, after her mother's death and after making love to Pedro, dies. The De la Garza ranch burns as a result of Tita's and Pedro's lovemaking, which was so impassioned that it literally burns the household and the lovers themselves to the ground.

Mónica Zapata confirms that the army is, indeed, the background, but that, for her, the domestic scene is the central focus of the text (71). This is not necessarily a reversal of traditional historical novels, for example Scott's *Waverley* or Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that clearly gives textual space to the

domestic, but, here, the familial takes centre stage and, in doing so, reflects the state of the nation during the Revolution. Zapata writes that "*[c]omo agua para chocolate est l'un des premiers romans écrits par des femmes qui déplace complètement le lieu d'où émane le discours en même temps qu'il instaure une temporalité parallèle et plus fécondé que celle du calendrier 'officiel*'" '[l]ike *Water for Chocolate* is one of the first novels written by women, which completely displaces the place from where the discourse originates, and at the same time it establishes a parallel temporality more fruitful than the one of the 'official' calendar'' (72). There is a sense of irony in Zapata's words because Esquivel sets her novel in conjunction with her recipes, according to the months of the calendar (thus fusing linear time within the cyclical aspects of her narrative).

Painting a complicated picture of the past, on the one hand, Esquivel implies through the ranch burning that the past cannot repeat itself–is not wanted to repeat itself. On the other hand, because of the fire, a chance for rebirth and renewal for the De la Garza family emerges. Tita's great niece, the anonymous narrator of the novel, claims that "all they found under the remains of what had been the ranch was this cookbook … they say that under those ashes every kind of life flourished, making this land the most fertile in the region" (Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate* 246). The narrator describes her own relation to the land, after her mother has an apartment rebuilt on the site, by recounting her mother's cooking of the Christmas Rolls. The narrator clearly is tied to her mother, but in a healthy or more nourishing way than the previous generations; she connects

her intimate relationship with her mother as linked with her great-aunt Tita, “who will go on living as long as there is someone who cooks her recipes” (246). In a sense, Esquivel writes a matricide so that, like a phoenix from the flames, a more promising, loving, and productive maternal genealogy–ending with Mama Elena and commencing with Tita–can begin.

That cooking is meaningful in creating this genealogy, Anna Marie Sandoval argues, is clear: “it is a literal border narrative. It also crosses borders through its form, one that has traditionally been associated with women – the recipe book” (58). Encapsulated in the novel’s subtitle—*A novel in monthly instalments with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies*, Esquivel transforms a woman’s space and her traditional labour with food from an imposed patriarchal space/labour into a mode of resistance and creativity. Tita uses cooking as an emotional outlet, seen for example when her lover Pedro marries her sister Rosaura. She cries so many bitter tears into the wedding cake batter that the guests get food poisoning and vomit.

Traditionally a woman’s space, the kitchen is a way for Tita to bond with another woman, Nacha, the family’s indigenous servant (mirroring Catalina in Allende’s novel). Nacha breastfeeds Tita as a baby because Mama Elena is still in shock from the death of her husband (he dies shortly after discovering her secret affair) and cannot produce milk: a symbol of her spiritual and physical maternal lack. This scene mirrors when, later in the novel, Tita magically produces milk for Roberto, Rosaura’s and Pedro’s son, because Rosaura cannot. Incidentally, when Mama Elena forbids Tita from feeding Roberto any longer, it

is nothing less than infanticide in Tita's eyes because Roberto dies of starvation shortly after Pedro and Rosaura, under Mama Elena's orders, move to Texas.

Roberto's death causes Tita a nervous breakdown and her relocation to the house of the local doctor, Dr. Brown, who nurses her back to health. It is only, however, at the end of the novel, after Mama Elena's death, that Tita comes to terms with her mother. Tita opens a hidden box:

> It contained a diary and a packet of letters written to Mama Elena from someone named José Treviño. Tita put them in order by date and learned the true story of her mother's love. José was the love of her life. She hadn't been allowed to marry him because he had Negro blood in his veins. A colony of Negroes, fleeing from the Civil War in the United States, from the risk they ran of being lynched, had come to settle near the village. Young José Treviño was the product of an illicit love affair between the elder José Treviño and a beautiful Negress. When Mama Elena's parents discovered the love that existed between their daughter and this mulatto, they were horrified and forced her into an immediate marriage with Juan De la Garza, Tita's father. (Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate* 137)

The narrator explains that "[t]he action didn't succeed in stopping her from keeping up a secret correspondence with José even after she was married, and it seemed that they hadn't limited themselves to that form of communication either, since according to the letters Gertrudis was José's child and not her

father's" (137). Like Marie's son, Samuel, in Piat's novel and Malinalli's in *Malinche*, Esquivel, once again, complicates the issue of racial origins in Mexico. Esquivel describes Mama Elena as a matriarch who inflicts the pain of her own life upon the lives of her daughters. Forbidden her true love and desires, as an act of vengeance, she forbids her daughters this experience. Esquivel underscores there is an inherent violence in the matriarchy, both physically and emotionally, when it operates essentially as a patriarchy.

Rebellious Sisters

Desperate for an escape from matriarchal rule, Esquivel's and Duong's novels include the rebellious sisters of the protagonists, who serve as foil characters. In Esquivel's novel, Gertrudis courageously stands up to Mama Elena in a way Tita is unable to. In one of the most memorable scenes of the novel, Getrudis takes a cold shower in order to suppress her sexual desires heightened after eating Tita's Quail in Rose Petal Sauce. Inflamed, she spontaneously runs naked through a field and is swooped up in dramatic-romantic fashion by one a rebel leader. Drawn to Gertrudis and the scent of rose petals, he believes "a higher power was controlling his actions" (Equivel, *Like Water for Chocolate* 55). Esquivel's parody of the popular romance novel's rescue paradigm is evident, particularly when Getrudis later works "in a brothel on the border" (58), a "transgressive" location and occupation for a woman. Gertrudis is in the process of forging "an underlying theme of rebellion, change, and momentum in the gender politics of the novel and confronts Mexican popular myths of femininity within the bloody

conflict" (Dobrian 57). Like Lucia Robson's novel *Last Train from Cuernavaca* (2010), which also recuperates a young girl joining Zapata's army in the Mexican Revolution, Susan Lucas Dobrian, writing on Getrudis, reaffirms Skipper's and Zapata's arguments that the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution serves as a sign of imminent political change. She writes:

> By placing the armed revolt within the context of female domesticity and frustration, Esquivel defines as a political act Gertrudis's revolt against her mother and the repressive demands of a rigid society. Gertrudis is successful not only in escaping the preordained female domesticity demanded by society, but she also achieves success in the male world, where might makes right, as she rapidly distinguishes herself as a *generala* of the Revolution and commands a regiment of men. (Dobrian 63)

Gertrudis' rebellion against traditional femininity (weakness, peace-loving, maternal) is clear, but this theme also finds resonance in Duong's novel *Daughters of the River Huong* with the defiant Aunt Ginseng.

Aunt Ginseng is Simone's great aunt who she never meets. She is described by Simone's mother, Dew, as a "black-clad tigress whose fate belonged to the Vietnamese goddess" (Duong 103) and, compared to the infamous historical gold-armoured Lady Trieu, is "fighting a war for the good of all of us" (101). Ginseng is portrayed as a "patriotic feminist," to use Djurdja Knezevic's term (67), because the first time she meets Dew she is dressed as a revolutionary soldier wearing black pajamas, sandals, and a straw hat (Duong

102). During this brief respite from the grim Indochina War between France and the Viet Minh, Ginseng declares her mother, the Mystique Concubine, a traitor to the nation, telling her sister and Simone's grandmother, Cinnamon: "She betrayed all of us … Face up to reality, your revered mother slept with the enemy for wealth and security…People are dying every day and you are well fed!" (100). Like Malinalli, the protagonist of Esquivel's *Malinche*, the mother in this novel is portrayed as a traitor to the nation. In this case, however, we see the mother defined through her daughter's eyes.

As if in retribution for her mother's sins, Ginseng pays a price for national independence, seen on her return from Hoa Lo prison and the war in 1949. She is severely disfigured: "part of her upper lip was missing," "one little finger was missing," "a stooping, limping old woman with dead eyes and a scarred face," "scar tissues on her breasts. The nipples were missing" (Duong 104-105). Duong's use of anaphora emphasizes Ginseng's loss of femininity and her physical identity as a woman, which stands as a contrast to her sister's and her mother's physical beauty. Psychologically traumatized, Ginseng repeatedly asks, "Do you have a pair of a womb and a pair of breasts?" (105);" her bodily mutilation and loss of identity result in her suicide and, though she sacrifices herself and her body for her people, in the end she is betrayed. Novels like Duong's, which contrast Ginseng's painful experiences with the very different lived experiences of the other women in her family, incite a re-read of Getrudis in Esquivel's novel.

Dobrian maintains that:

> The diversity of female participants in the Mexican Revolution has been eclipsed and reduced to two common stereotypes: the submissive servant and the erotic enticer. Within this context, Esquivel's presentation of Gertrudis's escape from domesticity into war, where she successfully rises through the ranks, restores the image of the warrior woman that has been eliminated from history and myth. (64)

Dobrian's support for Esquivel's protagonist is questionable considering Gertrudis' transformation at the end of the novel when she returns to the ranch for Esperanza's wedding: "in a model T Ford coupe … Stepping out of the car, she nearly dropped the huge wide-brimmed hat trimmed with ostrich feathers she was carrying. Her dress with its shoulder pads was the most daring, absolutely latest thing" (Duong 234). Esquivel's once rebellious warrior is now a beautiful sophisticated lady and mother who stands as a romanticized portrait, the same one Simone's mother once held for her own aunt until the grim reality of the war transformed her into the real Aunt Ginseng, a disfigured revolutionary.

Untouchable: Romance, Race, and Religion

In Viswanathan's novel *Toss of a Lemon*, the matriarch is different from the Mystique Concubine or Mama Elena. Sivakami, unlike the Mystique Concubine, never has another sexual relationship after the death of her husband and she is in many ways less cruel and calculating than Mama Elena. Her strict adherence to her religious caste system, however, creates problems not only for herself but

also for those in her family. Sivakami is thrust into her role as matriarch when her father marries her to Hanumarathnam, a man whose astrological signs signal a short-life. When the prophesized death becomes reality, Sivakami, after eight years of marriage, is left to run her household and raise her two children, Thangham and Vairum (Viswanathan 61). Viswanathan exemplifies the rigidity of Sivakami's belief system when, upon his death bed, Hanumarathnam sits up straight and beckons Sivakami towards him, to which she responds that "no middle-class Brahmin wife with any kind of breeding walks through the main hall and talks to her husband in front of guests" (61). The Brahmin code, also, does not permit Muchami, the local boy Hanumarathnam has hired to help Sivakami run his fields and land after his death, to walk on the Brahmin street without being accompanied by a Brahmin (61). Sivakami, who refuses to let anyone see her cry after Hanumarathnam's death, embraces her instructions on operating the fields though she is not permitted to physically traverse them. While she has known other women who do the family accounting, she admits "she is the first she has known whose husband has trained her at these tasks, shown faith and approval in her abilities" (50). On her husband's death, Sivakami, still a very young woman, accepts her social destiny as a Brahmin-widow.

In a traditional ceremony, she is escorted through the street by her father, eldest brother, and son. On the riverbank, her brother tears her blouse and she exchanges her bright clothing and pendants of wifehood for "two white cotton saris that will be her only garments and her badge" (Viswanathan 64). The most

important aspect to this ritual from *sumangali* to *aamangali*, however, is the shaving of her hair. The loss of Sivakami's hair symbolizes her Brahmin-status of widowhood as well as poses a threat to it as the barber is an untouchable: "From now on, she will be *madi*, maintain a state of preternatural purity from dark to dark, so that no one may touch her after her pre-sunrise bath until the sun sets. And she will be as invisible as any untouchable in the Brahmin quarter (65). The novel, in many ways, narrates Sivakami's struggle with consistently adhering to her new lifestyle and the spaces to which she is confined. This includes not being able to touch her own children before and after certain times and when her daughter Thangham marries she is not permitted to participate in, or even witness, the wedding (99).

The primary conflicts in the novel, however, are Sivakami's constant confrontations with Vairum, who has over the years renounced traditional Brahmanism. As a Brahmin, he is "to be married to Brahmin girls, live in Brahmin quarters, eat only with Brahmins" (Viswanathan 102). When her brother insists that Vairum attend a paadasaalai, a school for Brahmin priests instead of the secular one, Sivakami daringly decides to leave her father's household and her brothers to return to Cholapatti and run her former house with the aid of Muchami. Sivakami's act is defiant against her family and stresses once again the protagonist's constant negotiation between a role that has been imposed on her and one that she in turn imposes upon herself, a strict traditionalism in combat with modern allowances for change.

Rememoriation: Feminist Mirrors, Hybrid Narratives, Spaces, and Histories

Feminist change in the woman's historical novel can be understood in women's genealogies as "politically activated countermemories" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 105). Hochberg adds that:

> With all the official evidence and records erased, it is the telling and re-telling of these memories alone that testifies to this painful past and keeps its memory alive … The act of passing down the memories is therefore a unidirectional process of creating knowledge, for it makes the past 'known' to both the teller and the receiver. (4)

In Viswanathan's novel, Sivakami's, the matriarch's, story is told in chronological order. Beginning with Sivakami as a ten-year-old Brahmin bride in the village of Cholapatti, India, the work ends with Sivakami's anonymous great-granddaughter retelling her own life in Canada and Sivakami's death in Pandiyoor, India (post British colonialism), 1966. The maternal genealogical link is made clear when the narrator reflects that "the tale has transmuted, passed from my great-grandmother into my mother into me, from old world into new" (Viswanathan 616). While Viswanathan's novel is multi-vocal, it is told from a third-person perspective until the Epilogue when the narrator speaks in the first person. She writes, "my story, too, may no longer exist for those who lived it, because it is in English and they knew only Tamil, maybe some Sanskrit … So it is that I sit here with you, the book of our lives between us, telling my story, and my people's, in lands and languages I know but that are not my own" (616). In

Toss of a Lemon, geographical/linguistic/religious distances separate the women and the narrator is a Canadian immigrant.

Duong's heroine, Simone, is a refugee having fled the political and economic circumstances of her Vietnamese homeland in the 1970s to the Americas. As Renny Christopher notes, refugees:

> Came to it [the new country] not necessarily because of its own allure, but to escape often life-threatening circumstances, usually political or military, in the home country. Unlike immigrants, refugees perceive themselves as temporary residents in the new country waiting for the opportunity to return home. (70)

Simone's experiences as a refugee entail a looking back to her homeland and Vietnamese past while simultaneously living her present in the United States; in this way, the novel's crossing of time and geography creates a dynamic dialogue and transcultural bridge. Simone's memory plays an integral part in her life and narrative, as it does in all of the novels.

Christopher identifies that the trope of haunting is an important aspect of memory in Vietnamese and Vietnamese American literature (77). Referencing Kathleen Brogan, Christopher writes that "ghosts serve a different function than those in traditional Gothic narratives: working toward the 'recuperation of a people's history,' they register 'a widespread concern with questions of ethnic identity and cultural transmission" (77). Clearly, the past and the wars of the past haunt Simone, but she attempts to reconstruct her identity by confronting her

shared past by physically returning to Vietnam, her motherland, at the end of the novel and enacting a rememoriation of her female ancestors.

Simone's desire to create a maternal genealogy adheres to what Hochberg describes as a form of resymbolization. The tracing back in Duong's work is achieved by analyzing, first, the 'uncomfortable' marriage of Simone's great-grandmother to the King of Annam and her affair with the French Resident Superior, Sylvan Foucault. The novel, then, traces Simone's relationship with Foucault's grandson Andre and her marriage to Christopher, an American journalist.

A recurring dream prompts Simone to realize that "it must be my cultural subconscious mind that created those dreams and all my nostalgia … I bear in me the collective subconsciousness of an extinct culture, with all its tragedy" (17). Christopher reminds Simone that it is not just this interpretation that explains her unhappiness as a war refugee-American immigrant but also the always present prehistory of a Vietnamese duchess who was "sold off in exchange for the Cham's lands" (Duong 17).[15] The importance of memory (in this case, a memory of historical-mythical women), in the feminist novel is manifest; just as Sivakami and the women in her family are imagined in her great-granddaughter's story, Simone establishes a generational and historical connection between herself and the Vietnamese women in her family, beginning with her great-grandmother the Mystique Concubine.

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[15] Duong writes, "before the fifteenth century, central Vietnam used to be the Kingdom of Champa" (17).

Returning to mythology, the purpose of Duong's work, like Irigaray's, is "not in order to recover a lost, authentic, feminocentric 'origin' which lies behind and before patriarchal appropriations of myths but in order to reread, to (re)invent and reappropriate" (Haigh 63). The Mystique Concubine, Simone's great grandmother, is formerly known as Huyen Phi, an orphan making her living by paddling passengers across the River Huong. Huyen Phi relates how "we, the Chams, are the disappearing Hindu minorities of central Vietnam (Duong 41). Her family, originally traders in cinnamon and ginseng (later the names for her children), was forced to relinquish their living with the advent of French colonialism. Beginning a new way of life as a river paddler, Huyen Phi rationalizes her art as being tied to the loss of her Champa Kingdom and learning the folk songs of her people. The Champa Queen, in particular, holds significance for Huyen Phi:

> The Viets captured the queen of Champa and transported her by boat back to the north. The exodus began in the rivers of our kingdom. Under a full moon, the captured queen, crying for the defeated, jumped into the river and drowned herself. The surviving Chams called out to after her, Mee-Ey, Mee-Ey, meaning 'that noble woman.' The sound Mee-Ey entered history and was mistaken as the name of the Champa Queen … The Chams believed Mee-Ey's soul never left the water. (42)

The River Huong is connected to the maternal lineage and matriarchal figure evident in the novel's title *Daughters of the River Huong* and subtitle: *A Vietnamese royal concubine and her descendants*.

The River Huong, located in Hue, Vietnam, is described by Duong in maternal terms. It is personified as a woman, a Spirit (Duong 33) whose perfume or scent–the literal translation of the word "Huong" (25)–lingers. The river, also, serves as a motherland in the text. Huyen Phi, the Cham descendent who earns a living like her ancestors paddling passengers across the river (41), meets her future husband in this manner. She ferries him from shore to shore whilst singing the songs of her people and past. Enamoured by her charm, the King of Annam quickly marries her and settles her in the Royal Palace. The Mystique Concubine (1895-1930) and the River Huong meld together, expressing a fluidity of identity, and create a matriarchal figure and setting for the novel. Huyen Phi's eunuch servant, Son La, tells his new mistress that "Cham societies are matriarchal, my Lady. The Cham woman takes control of her household" (73). His claim reverberates in the novel cross-generationally.

Simone's memories of her great-grandmother carry over to her "real" memories of her grandmother Que (Cinnamon) who, during the period of civil war, runs the family's silk business. The business, the reader learns, was started by Huyen Phi and her royal chambermaid Mai, after the King Annam abdicated and was exiled. Cast out by the French and forced to make a living, the women's struggles mirror Simone's for financial/emotional independence following the war with America. Simone begins and ends the novel with her memoirs as a

lawyer living in New York 1985 and New Jersey 1994 respectively. Unlike canonical historical novels, many women's historical novels containing maternal genealogies are not chronological and they begin in the living time of the author. Duong's is one example, and Soueif's novel is another.

Amal, the co-protagonist in *The Map of Love*, a position she shares with Anna Winterbourne, lives in Cairo while her brother Omar, a famous playboy conductor, diaspora intellectual, and Palestinian supporter (Omar is commonly believed to be a portrait of postcolonial theorist Edward Said), lives in the United States with his on-again-off-again girl-friend Isabel. Similar to Duong's and Viswanathan's novels, the narrative switches between past and present in retelling two simultaneous cyclical tales: Amal's own contemporary life in the twentieth century and the story of her British-Egyptian great-aunt Anna Winterbourne in the nineteenth century. Fulfilling what Suzanne Keen identifies as a "romance of the archive," the novel's plot unfolds when Isabel brings Amal her great-grandmother's trunk. It is Amal's job as quasi-detective to unravel the family's secrets by piecing together her relative's life from the contents of the trunk as/since many pieces are written in Arabic; as translator, Amal's "'research features as a kernel plot action, resulting in a strong closure, with climatic discoveries and rewards" (Keen, *Romances* 35). Amal's actions, likewise, evoke history by "looking back from a post-imperial context" and put into question methodologies for accessing the past (35). The novel is very much an explication of a transnational past and family.

Waïl S. Hassan, in his discussion of translation theory, notes the similarities between the converging plots:

> The British military occupation of Egypt (1882–1956) and, later, United States foreign policy and its self-serving advocacy of free-market globalization. Each story involves an Egyptian political activist and a woman—English and American, respectively—who travels to Egypt. The 1990s lovers, Omar al-Ghamrawi and Isabel Parkman, discover their kinship to the 1900s couple, Sharif al-Baroudi and Anna Winterbourne. Thus, the principal characters represent branches of a multinational family that extends from Egypt to England, France, and the United States, undercutting the myth of autonomous national or cultural identities. (757)

Hassan, however, fails to point out the 'incest' of this kinship in the novel, which winds around the family.

Omar, after having a sexual relationship with Isabel in New York, is revealed also to have had a sexual relationship with her mother, Jasmine, many years ago. The novel is unclear as to the possibility that Omar may, in fact, be Isabel's father. The possibility of incest complicates the dynamics of the family, particularly when Isabel gives birth to Omar's son, Sharif (Soueif 468). Perhaps the implication in the novel is that politics and family are intertwined and anchored in history more than we typically imagine; therefore, the mater-familial saga suggests before a nation's politics can change, a re-examination of the family is necessary.

Important within Soueif's transnational family is multi-lingualism. Both Anna and Isabel begin to learn Arabic, Amal and Omar speak Arabic, Anna and Sharif each speak French (this is initially how they communicate), and Isabel, Omar, and Amal converse in English. The learning of an other's language is a path towards understanding in the text and extends to the reader. Soueif provides a ten-page glossary (a common form of paratext in women's historical novels) at the back of the novel highlighting for the reader textual references to Arabic idioms and vocabulary. It is a means for culturally linking the novel to the reader and the life of the protagonist Anna Winterbourne in Egypt. Anna makes the shift in the novel from the position of, what seems at first, the straightforward travel narrative of a colonizer and English widow (her husband Edward, horrified by his fighting in Sudan, dies), to the anti-colonial wife of an Arabic man and active participant in Egypt's political scene, including the fight for independence.

Hassan also connects with the act of translation Anna's cross-dressing (Soueif 761). Anna, in order to escape the enclave and insularity of the British in Cairo, dresses as a man so that she may explore the city.[16] This unique vantage point allows her access into a world in which she would normally be forbidden. The dangers of this masquerading, however, culminate when she is mistakenly taken prisoner as a British officer by Egyptian nationalists. The kidnapping does, however, warrant her first occasion for meeting a native Egyptian woman, Layla al-Barudi (Amal's maternal grandmother), and her brother Sharif. Meeting the brother and sister allows Anna entrance into an unfamiliar world, including the

[16] I discuss the woman as cross-dresser more fully in the next chapter.

harem, and a personally guided trip to Mt. Sinai, where she falls in love with Sharif. Yet, as Hassan argues, “they pay a price for carving out this transgressive, translational space in the ideologically stratified world of empire: her compatriots shun her, and his suspect him of collaborating with the occupation; this suspicion leads to his assassination” (762). The other aspect of Sharif’s campaign that causes much controversy and hatred is his advocating for female education, perhaps showing that cultural influence is a two-way street in that Anna is a highly educated woman.

Anna’s journal, also a sign of her education, serves as a way for Soueif to dispel Orientalist myths and imagery associated with Egypt (see Kate Pullinger’s novel *Mistress of Nothing* (2010)–a chronicle of Lady Duff Gordon’s journey to Egypt from the perspective of her underappreciated servant Sally, who is later ousted by Duff Gordon for becoming pregnant by an Egyptian servant named Omar, for comparison), particularly the stereotype of the repressed/oppressed harem woman, an image that initially seduces Anna into travelling to Egypt in the first place. Catherine Wynne writes that:

> Soueif's text reappraises the Victorian female traveller in the context of empire and as such mirrors current feminist approaches to women's travel writing. Sara Mills argues that the writings of female travellers do not fit neatly into an Orientalist framework and often seem to 'constitute an undermining voice' within the colonial discourse. (61)

By realizing the complexity of historical realities during British occupation and national instability, at the end, Anna fulfills Sharif's deathbed request that she return to England with their daughter Nur (Soueif 513). Just as Sivakami rationalizes that a woman alone is a vulnerable target (the title of chapter 10 (1908) (98)), Sharif expresses the same sentiment.

In all of these novels, there is a firm resistance to perpetuating the painful past. Hochberg notes that "as long as the centrality of mother (as a source of one's name, past, identity, genealogy) is based on the commitment to a past of suffering, loss, and exclusion, it keeps women attached to the place of the wound" (6). There is the need for return, knowing that one cannot ever truly return, in order for there to be departure; as the narrative must move beyond its confines, so, too, must the status of women in the mater-familial saga. Anna's departure for England, thus, need not be interpreted as a failure or a regressive return to colonial times. She finally returns 'home' changed, and with her entire knowledge system altered and shaken. The novel is a way for Soueif to suggest that history is repetitive if we want it to be, but it can also be altered. By layering Amal's story with Anna's, there are clearly textual overlaps, but also there are divergences. If Soueif's novel is to be trusted, she suggests that current day tensions between the Arabic and Western worlds can be disrupted and intervened upon most effectively by women. Women are the key in remapping these new relations and serve important roles as cultural mediators, translators, and interlocutors.

The past serves a reflective basis for the reader, writer, and protagonist to shape her identity, suggesting identity (and a sense of self) is fluid and always in transition. The authors in this chapter suggest the use of mirrors is foundational in women's historical novels. Mirrors effectively blend or blur fiction and fact as well as the past and present. Like Malinalli, who in Esquivel's *Malinche*, regrets defining herself through Cortés's image of her, transnational family sagas emphasize a maternal lineage both within and outside of the text by explicitly linking the past to the present, often to the effect of obscuration. Though there are concurrent narratives in the same novel, the overall whole is one of layered unity.

In Duong's novel, Simone's affairs with the Frenchman Andre and the American journalist Christopher mirror the Mystique Concubine's illicit affair with Sylvan Foucault, the Frenchman proclaimed Vietnam's enemy. When looking at exotic-erotic postcards of her great-grandmother, Simone notes, "I recognized myself in those photographs. It was also the face. The woman had the same face as mine, as though I were in the portrait" (Duong 218). When she sees her grandmother Que and great-aunt Ginseng sitting on Foucault's lap, she remarks, "I saw again, my own face on the two little girls" (219). Simone's reflections occur just prior to her return to Vietnam, whereby she hopes to re-establish the family and give legal aid to poor Vietnamese. Duong's technique of blurring one life with another resonates with Irigaray's thinking in *This Sex Which is Not One*, wherein she articulates that a recognition and separation between women is necessary:

> Contiguity was the figure for mother and daughter: the two lips represented (among other things) the two women continually in touch with each other. But even then, Irigaray was warning that contiguity in patriarchy could mean fusion and confusion of identity between women, and thus the impossibility of relationships between them (since they were not separate enough for the 'between' to exist), and the impossibility of a maternal genealogy. (Whitford, "Section III" 161)

The strategy of mirroring found in Simone's reading of her great-grandmother's journal, as recorded by Son-La, also occurs in Soueif's novel when Amal reads Anna's journal.

Mirroring is evident as Amal traces her life back to her British ancestor Anna and the spaces the novel occupies. Just as Tita and Sivakami negotiate designated woman's spaces, "through the representation of the harem as desirable domestic space Soueif's revisionist project advances a positive vision of nineteenth-century Arab-Muslim domesticity and culture" (Wynne 56-7). Anna's experiences with Layla, who authors some of the letters Amal reads, convey a sense of mirrors and space. When Sharif invites to his home a number of prominent political leaders in support of ending the Occupation, they quickly turn to discussing what Anna spells as "*Al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah*, 'The New Woman'" (Soueif 374). Layla, ecstatic about how quickly Anna is learning Arabic, asks her to translate by changing two diacritics. The word is "Mir-aah," which Anna recognizes after a gesture to a large mirror. She asks, "why are the

words so close? … 'Woman' and 'mirror'" (375). The answer is accounted for in the novel, but also suggests Soueif's linking of woman with visibility and woman as a reflection of society.

One of Sharif's compatriots has recently argued for women to be educated the same as men and to have a choice whether or not to wear the veil. In order to listen to the conversation more closely, Anna and Layla enter in a small box behind heavily drawn curtains, "in front of them the mashrabiyya that looks down to the salamlek" (Soueif 377). Soueif relates this secret space back to her description of the question of the New Woman and the veil. Layla and Anna, much like when they wear the veil, have the power to see men without being seen. Mariadele Boccardi writes that Anna takes "on the very characteristics with which 'the classic scene of [western] travel literature' invested the Orient in an 'unexpected reversal of the gaze'" (109). A view from within, rather than outside the harem, which is the common western viewpoint, is "made possible by the fact that Soueif's protagonist is a woman" (Boccardi 110). Boccardi adds that "the harem occupied a privileged place in the Western imaginary as the epitome of all that is most desirable because forbidden, exotic because socially most different … about the Orient" (110). The veil women wear is, by extension, like the harem, a sign of the exotic and the forbidden for westerners.

Anna, a British woman married to an Egyptian and living in Egypt, views her compatriots from within the harem and normalizes this space. Imparting her own gaze, she also blurs the boundaries between "Orientalism" and "Occidentalism" and gender objectification. This unfamiliar act/space also

reminds her of being in an Italian church confessional, again emphasizing the clandestine, sacred, and forbidden. With Anna, there is an ongoing exchange of her Victorian social code transferred-translated into an Egyptian one with different constraints, such as the haremlek. Though Amal's contemporary tale no longer invokes the harem Anna experiences, Wynne suggests that Soueif does create "a female-centred, hybrid family in which the child promises regeneration at least within a familial context" (64) and concludes that "*The Map of Love*'s return to domesticity and family provides only transient respite from the relentless political exclusivity of East and West" (65). Soueif's linguistic connection between "woman" and "mirror" in the novel, once again, implies that women are the mirrors of social ills and national tensions, and that the domestic, whether formally/officially divided or not, is never separate from the political.

Politics of Exile; Nostalgia

The nostalgic longing for home the heroines experience is manifested symbolically, psychically, and physically in these transnational mater-familial sagas. For example, Sivakami, the matriarch in *Toss of a Lemon*, in the most important episode in Viswanathan's novel, is banished by her son Vairum from his house because she cannot accept his modern ways (for instance eating dinner with non-Brahmins (544)). Sivakami initially travelled to Vairum's grand city-house in Madras because Vani, his wife, by means of a miracle in the eyes of the family, is pregnant. Sivakami, like many of the women discussed in this work, is

known as a skilled mid-wife and for her luck with births; thus, Vani, who views Sivakamias a mother, summons her (Viswanathan 534).

After a lengthy period of time during which Vani has still not given birth, Sivakami, finally, confronts Vairum. Unwilling to discuss the matter, he commands her to “go” (Viswanathan 546). Viswanathan writes, “this is the first time in sixty years that she has gone anywhere alone. She feels naked, invisible, petrified” (547). Though nighttime, Sivakami makes her way to the train station and onto a train. The space typically granted to a Brahmin-widow is a fantasy and she is forced to stand pressed against the bodies of others. Her inexperience with travelling also shows. In the early morning she makes her stop at Kottai to change trains, but is robbed while washing her face: “Her bundle is gone – her money, her ticket, her Kamba-Ramayanam” (551). Viswanathan suggests that traditional Brahmins must confront a changing India–it is a time when a Brahmin widow will be robbed, have their sacred texts stolen, and Brahmin sons will kick their own mothers out of their homes.

Sivakami’s journey is a forced journey and she must find her own way home to Cholapatti without any money, provisions, or urban awareness. Attempting to grasp her bearings, she decides to find her grand-daughter’s Saradha’s house in Thiruchi, reasoning that her best bet is to follow the train along the railway tracks, symbolizing modernity and the break down of the rigid caste system in India as well as the woman who has lived within this socio-framework. Sivakami is an aging woman; like the inevitably aging body and the crumbling shrine to Ganesha Sivakami prays to on her journey, Viswanathan

suggests change in a new India cannot be stopped. This is evident in several places in the novel, but notably in the celebrity success of Bharati, Goli's illegitimate daughter, who becomes a movie star. Despite Bharati's stardom, Sivakami refuses to acknowledge her. Even after she is invited by Vairum, to the horrors of all the others, to eat in Sivakami's home, at the end of the novel, in Sivakami's eyes, this means; "the house is defiled" (Viswanathan 609).

Changes continue to rapidly occur, amoung which are increasing violence against Brahmins (582-3) and Janaki, the most traditional of the grandchildren, moves into her own household instead of living with the family under one roof. Viswanathan writes: "It is mid-August when finally the two couples move into their own homes, the week India gains independence and Pakistan splits off: a country born, a country split, parturition and partition. Northern corridors run with blood – families abandon homes, families abandon families" (570). As in so many women's historical novels, the disintegration of the family mirrors the fragmentation of traditional Indian values and social codes. The trek, like most (including Sivakami's final choice not to hurl herself under an oncoming train), prompts her existentially questioning her own purpose and lifestyle: "she has always thought of her life as a series of submissions to God. What if she has been making her own decisions all along?" (Viswanathan 556). She finally arrives, confused, at Saradha's house, who, stupefied by her appearance, takes her in, allows her to recover, and has her escorted back "home" again–like Anna's return to England, and Tita's from Dr. Brown's

house, and Simone's decision to relocate back to Vietnam, a forever changed woman.

Samantha Haigh writes:

> The quest for Motherland embarked upon by the narrator … becomes a continuation of that attempt to articulate an undefinable 'homesickness' ... This homesickness, emblematic of women's social and symbolic dereliction, can be articulated only through a (re)invention of the maternal genealogy, that broken line of mothers and daughters which the narrator is here attempting to restore. (69)

The transnational mater-familial saga suggests the refugee-immigrant's deep desire to always return to the birth nation (evident, even if romantically, by the future generation no longer living in its maternal ancestor's homeland, i.e., the Canadian narrator in Viswanathan's novel) and the difficulty or impossibility in truly ever being able to fully culturally assimilate to the culture or nation of an other.

Once returned to her home, Sivakami's final transformation occurs. Bharati and Goli, the father no one has seen in years, are invited to eat by Vairum. Vairum beckons Sivakami to cross the main hall in the same manner as Hanumarathnam had perviously, only this time she concedes:

> No Brahmin widow walks through her main hall in front of guests. How the neighbours would talk! But Sivakami is not the woman she used to be. Her house is not defiled– this is not her house [it is technically Vairum's]. And she left her fear walking a train track

> near Thurichi. She can't lose her son the way she lost her husband: without a word. She goes to Vairum. (Viswanathan 611)

The result of Vairum forcing his mother to face Goli and his illegitimate child is Muchami and Sivakami simultaneously suffering strokes. They are, literally, paralyzed and the maternal bond between Sivakami and Vairum is forever severed.

"Magical Feminist" Objects and Spiritual History[17]

Integral to exploring the potential of women's domestic spaces and forming a maternal genealogy in the woman's historical novel is identifying the importance of magical heirlooms or objects connected with the mother or the motherland. Hochberg stresses the liberating potential of the maternal ability:

> Not only to remember but also to invent stories about the past, both the immediate and the mythical, as a way to transcend the horrors of women's daily existence. Imagination, storytelling, and magic, rather than 'real memory,' seem to be the means through which women … [can] strive to displace, or at least to survive, history. (8)

Though typically associated with Latin American historical novelists, magical realism or magical feminism occurs in many women's historical novels. Antonio Planells argues "magical realism" is "*una categoría de la literatura fantastic a que reacciona contra el realism literario*" 'a category of fantastic literature that reacts against realist literature' (9). Fusing fantasy or magic with accepted

[17] Magical feminist" is the title of an Interview between Allende, Jennifer Benjamin and Sally Engelfried (1994).

reality, feminist novels like Esquivel's or Allende's have prominently shaped historical fiction, though they are often overshadowed by male authors like Gabriel García Márquez.

Caroline Bennett expresses the limitation of this view point: "Latin American fiction in the magical realist style, despite its authors' expressed desire to find a voice for oppressed people, frequently adopts a patriarchal tone, ignoring the role of women in society" (171). Thus, feminist writers attempt "to redress the balance by exploring women's colonization and repression by patriarchy, and the means by which they endeavor to resist the oppressive, dominant ideologies in which they are inscribed" (Bennett 171). Patricia Hart defines magic feminism as a "femino-centric magic realism" (105):

> Magic feminism occurs in works in which real and impossible (or wildly improbable) events are juxtaposed, when this juxtaposition is narrated matter-of-factly, and when the telling of the apparently impossible events leads to the understanding of deeper truths that hold outside of the text. In addition, conventional notions of time, place, matter, identity, or logical cause and effect are often challenged. The result of reading this may very well be to change the reader's perceptions of what reality is or should be. When these processes occur in a feminocentric work, a work centered on women, their status, and their condition, we may speak of magic feminism. (105-106)

In Duong's *Daughters of the River Huong*, it is the "four symbols of her heritage–the jade phoenix, the two ivory plaques, and the lacquer divan" of her great-grandmother–that fulfill this magical role (Duong 167).

Nguyễn Thị Hiền discusses the importance of spirituality and its relation to memory in Vietnam. She writes that "[f]olk beliefs were regarded as backward practices and were officially banned" (Hiền 544) from the time of 1946 to 1986 and explains Simone and Grandma Que's clandestine activity in visiting Mai, her former servant. Mai has an altar dedicated "to the female deities and goddesses of Vietnam" as she has "developed the psychic ability to communicate with the dead, review the past and foretell the future" (24). Engaging in a séance with Mai leaves Simone feeling embodied by the history of her ancestors: "that was how the Spirit of the River Huong first spoke to me in 1965, through Mey Mai's wrinkled mouth and eyes, in the clear voice of a young woman. The spirit told me that she resided in the river and would wait for me there. She went on to tell me her life story as the Mystique Concubine of the Violet City" (33). The importance of visionaries in Vietnam's history, Thị Hiền suggests, is the reason for the state, in 2004, finally recognizing that "'the activities of folk beliefs are activities representing the veneration of ancestors, commemoration and honouring of those who had great merit towards the country and people; the veneration of spirits, traditional symbols and other activities of folk beliefs which are typical for good values in history, culture and social ethics'" (547). Reappraising spirit-mediums and their undeniable influence on the Vietnamese psyche is, thus, one of the tasks Duong sets out to accomplish in her novel.

Spirituality also informs Viswanathan's *Toss of a Lemon* and the life of Sivakami. It is the ancient palm leaves of Hanumarathnam, the only man in any of the novels to truly work as a natural healer, that have "recorded mysteries of the universe" and her children's astral portraits" (Viswanathan 71). The importance of astrology is reflected in the novel's title as the toss of a lemon marks, for Hanumarathnam, the exact time a child is born; the midwife is to throw the lemon out of the window as a sign (23) so that he may record the child's future–which, of course, directly influences his own future (and forebears his eventual death).

One of the most symbolic items in Soueif's *The Map of Love* that carries this cultural weight is the tripartite panel Anna weaves. The tapestry of the ancient Egyptian Goddess Isis, her brother Osiris and "between them the infant Horus" (Soueif 403) is a symbol of Anna's "contribution to the Egyptian renaissance" (403). In the novel's present, Omar sends Amal his part of the panel, Isis, while Amal has Osiris. The third piece, however, is missing until Isabel declares she has magically found it in her bag (495). Isabel reasons that the missing panel was slipped into her bag when she paid a visit to the Baroudi's family residence in Tawasi (292). Making her way into a courtyard, Isabel, greeted by a woman, is led to a tomb guarded by a man wearing "the white turban of a sheikh" (294). The couple share a drink with Isabel and converse in Arabic before she leaves. When Amal and Isabel return to the house the next day, the shrine is locked: "[l]ocked and padlocked and covered in cobwebs as it had been before" (307). They are, likewise, informed that there is no sheikh in

charge of the place and there hasn't been one for over a year. Isabel, upon finding the missing panel in her bag months later, claims, "the woman in the mosque. Umm Aya. She put it there" (500). Amal denies this possibility and Soueif never provides a concrete answer for Amal's uncertainty, only that she, over a hundred years later, finally, has the complete panel.

Sharif's death signals the initial separation of the panel, it is reversed by the end of the novel with Omar's probable death. Osiris, in the Egyptian myth, is torn into pieces, has his body scattered by his brother Seth, and is gathered later by his faithful Isis, who searches for and collects his dismembered pieces. Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert suggest that "the traditional figure of Isis in search of Osiris is really a figure of Isis in search of herself" (99); in Soueif's novel, this symbolizes a new beginning, a new myth for Isabel (Isis) and her son fathered by Omar, Sharif (Horus). This resonates with the words of Mabrouka, the Baroudi's Ethiopian maid: "from the dead come the living, the branch is cut but the tree remains" (516). The family (possibly incestuous given Osiris and Isis were brother and sister and Omar could be Isabel's father) is, finally, reunited on the eve of the twenty-first century, suggesting, much like Esquivel's novel, a chance for rebirth.

In Esquivel's *Como Agua Para Chocolate*, special objects share specific meaning for women. Stephen Butler Murray notes that the Catholic faith and God play a minor role in Esquivel's novel due to the narrative importance of female ancestors such as Nacha, Mama Elena, and Luz del amanecer (John Brown's Kikapú grandmother) in the form of spirits (91). These spirits

meaningfully shape the physical world, which leads Murray to conclude that "the ending affirms that the spiritual legacy endures, informing the cultural inheritance and the artefact of the cookbook that bears them witness" (103). Thus, the cookbook is an artefact bestowed with spiritual meaning and serves as a sign of woman's cultural heritage.

Elisa Christie suggests that the "cookbook-journal is a physical archive for the gendered knowledge and culture of the kitchenspace" (113). An alternative archive to traditional history is offered; a maternal archive that caters to women's knowledge and experiences is passed down across generations, including after Tita's death. The only item to survive the fire, her cookbook becomes an invaluable source of inspiration and identification for her Chicana niece Esperanza and Esperanza's daughter, much like how Mexican/Chicana readers might identify with Esquivel's characters today.

Tita's nurturing relationship with food and cooking begins with Nacha. María Teresa Martínez-Ortiz writes that it is the "power of the 'curandera' (the female healer of the Mexican indigenous mythology), … who becomes her nurturer and spiritual guide from birth" (175). From Nacha, Tita learns that plants and vegetation have a dual purpose–consumption and healing–and, in life, women are responsible for knowledge of both. Tita preserves this episteme in her memory and in her associations of specific foods, including their smells, tastes, and touch, with specific memories. Efraín Garza believes that "*el personaje que más muestra esa capacidad de relacionar el presente con el pasado por medio de una perceptión olfativa es Tita* 'the character that best shows this capacity for

relating the present with the past through her olfactory perceptions is Tita' (9). Unable to translate the sensuality and sensory pleasure food awards her, Tita writes her recipes down. Is this why Gertrudis, whom Tita tells to follow the recipe exactly, cannot effectively make the cakes? Getrudis does not possess the kind of knowledge that only comes through culinary experience. Dobrian argues that "culinary activity involves not just the combination of prescribed ingredients, but something personal and creative emanating from the cook, a magical quality which transforms the food and grants it powerful properties that go beyond physical satisfaction to provide spiritual nourishment as well" (60). Sensuality is, also, an important aspect to cooking, and, as Rosaura's marriage to Pedro shows, requires more than mechanics.

For Tita, cooking and the spaces of *la cocina* offer an escape from her matriarchal mother. Christie suggests that "the gendered nature of the 'kitchenspace' and the gendered knowledge transmitted to younger generations within its realm are essential elements in the fictional and real world of Mexican society" (106). She further argues that "kitchenspace" becomes an important site for women "in establishing alliances and maintaining reciprocity networks" (Christie 108). The dynamics of the kitchenspace, embodied by women and constituted as feminine, are played out in Esquivel's novel; we see a variety of experiences and social hierarchies (a familial microcosm in the political macrocosm) within this domain ranging from Rosaura's and Getrudis' relative lack of skill and uncomfortability to Tita's and Nacha's expertise and sense of respite or refuge.

The objects in these novels not only connect back to a maternal source but also carry spiritual significance. The means to heal through food is central to Esquivel's novel, evident when the ghost of Luz del amanecer heals Tita after her nervous breakdown caused by the death of Roberto. John Brown, also, serves as a rare example of a male healer interested in traditional-indigenous methods inherited from his grandmother combined with his formal medical training. While healing, Tita confronts her mother in life, and she faces her mother's ghost. Tita tells Mama Elena she hates her, a sentiment that has the effect of both dismissing the ghost for good and causing Tita's menstruation to begin (after she was certain she was pregnant with Pedro's child). Mama Elena's final retaliation is to knock candles over, which burn Pedro severely, though Tita nurses him back to health with the aid of Nacha's herbal remedies.

The use of the supernatural in terms of objects and occurrences in conjunction with the experiential gendered knowledge the novels employ suggest what Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai refer to as the only possibility for the protagonists to create a sense of belonging or identity in a globalized world (22-23). The authors maintain that through the use of magical realism "the possibility of counter-hegemonic visions of social realities" can be imagined, thus, "the use of the supernatural here subverts dominant notions of reality in an unjust world, allowing minority visions and perspectives to be realized" (Butler and Desai 23) in addition to alternative epistemes. As is the cae for many protagonists in the mater-familial saga, Tita's relationship with her niece Esperanza supports Haigh's claims that "in order to find herself, she must first find her mother" (65).

The transnational mater-familial saga suggests that women must invent a future for themselves by revisiting and sharing the maternal past. In order to make this *affidamento* more than an imaginary space, Irigaray suggests that "women must love one another as mothers, with a maternal love, and as daughters, with a filial love" (*Ethics of Sexual Difference* 89). The woman's historical novel allows for a unique vantage point in critiquing matriarchal societies that are run and operated by women along patriarchal parameters and celebrating those which break with patriarchy in favour of symbolic relationships and exchanges by women between women.

Conclusion

This chapter explored, through the sub-themes of forbidden romances, rebellious sisters, rememoriation, exile, mirrors, and sacred objects, the role of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as complex matriarchs and the difficulty for women-as daughters in both distancing and recognizing themselves in their mothers. Esquivel, more so than other authors, shows the suffocating aspect of this family organization in *Como Agua Para Chocolate*. In Viswanathan's *Toss of a Lemon*, Sivakami copes as best she can with the matriarchal role in which she is thrust, though her son ultimately cuts the umbilical cord: "the first bond with the mother," "before any cutting, any cutting up of their lives into fragments" (Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader* 39). Though her daughter Thangham and her grandchildren respect and revere her, they, too, regard her Brahmin traditionalism as old-fashioned and not a way in which they want live. Both

Duong's *Daughters of the River Huong* and Soueif's *The Map of Love*, by contrast, emphasize the positive attributes of a matriarchal figure and pay particular homage to the maternal for their protagonists' own sense of identity, memories, and belonging. The novels share a questioning and searching for maternal origins within a transnational-transgenerational context, a search that bears directly on the present narrator-author as émigré-exile-refugee. There is the implicit argument that woman cannot move forward without negotiating and confronting her past, both in a shared and personal sense; thus, history plays an indispensable role as a critical mirror in these texts. Rethinking the mater-familial-saga as a means for creating communal ties with women, these novels take up the challenge of working towards feminist social change and are a promise for rebirth and reconnection with our maternal ancestors through writing our own lives through their lives.

CHAPTER THREE

ANCIENT HISTORY: MATERNAL TIME, GENDER, AND THE NATION

> This cathexis between mother and daughter–essential, distorted, misused–is the great unwritten story
> – Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*

Women's historical novels on premodern history began appearing for the first time in the 1970s; these works pertain almost exclusively to the lives of monarchs and the nobility from Greece, Rome, Egypt, Celtic lands, and the Middle East. Writing on known and lesser known figures from antiquity in unprecedented ways, this category breaks from the novels on prehistorical matriarchal societies identified in the previous chapter, like June Rachuy Brindel's *Ariadne* (1980), by focusing on an individual woman living in and confronting a patriarchal society. Such feminist works include Kerry Greenwood's reappraisal of Medea, Amanda Elyot's defenses of Helen of Troy, Laura Gill's recuperation of Helen's daughter, novels (Atwood's or Jane Rawling's) from the perspective of Odysseus' wife Penelope, Laurel Corona's take on Penelope's daughter, and Hilary Bailey's, amongst others', interpretation of the Trojan princess Cassandra. Other texts engaging with ancient history include Kate Quinn's *Mistress of Rome* trilogy, Antoinette May's recent portrayal of Pontis Pilate's wife Claudia, recuperations of the Celtic warrior-queen Boudicca (for example, Manda Scott's tetralogy), and Jules Watson's *The Raven Queen* (2011), which invents a life for the Irish Queen Maeve. Also popular are Moyra Caldecott's and Judith Tarr's works on the Egyptian Pharaoh

Hatshepsut, and narratives on Cleopatra, such as Martha Rofheart's, or Stephanie Dray's and Michelle Moran's depiction of Cleopatra's daughter, Selene. Finally, Elisabeth Roberts Craft's two novels *The Ambassador's Daughter: A Novel of Ancient Mesopotamia* (2007) and *In the Court of the Queen: A Novel of Mesopotamia* (2001) have added new feminist perspectives on the Middle East.

Filling in historical gaps, inventing, and imagining, all from a woman's point of view/voice, link these novels. The underlying concern is to make visible, via a literary context, what feminist scholars (Macurdy, McManus, Nakhai, Pomeroy, Skinner) argue has been missing from traditional studies on ancient history–woman's determination of the course of history (in daily life, both private and public). Making women's history visible requires rereading canonical literary texts, which have subordinated, polarized, moralized, and eroticized women, in favour of "symbolic elements working to idealize the masculine" (McManus 118). Constituting necessary feminist contributions to the genre, one of the most prolific of these writers, Margaret George, who has written on Cleopatra, Mary Magdalene, and Helen of Troy, claims that "[f]ollowing that [*The Autobiography of Henry VIII*] she's stuck with characters that she feels the public misunderstands … She enjoys letting them tell their stories and trying to set their records straight" ("About Margaret" n.pag.). In the novels surveyed in this chapter–Pauline Gedge's *Child of the Morning* (1977), Elisabeth Wolfe's *Boudicca* (1980), *Cassandra* (1983) by Christa Wolf, *The Memoirs of Cleopatra* (1997) by George, and *Nefertiti* (2007) by Michelle

Moran–the protagonist suffers a tragic fate and, with the possible exception of Boudicca, is a traitor and anti-hero.

These novels are a return to what Diana Wallace identifies in the 1930s woman's historical novel as "histories of the defeated" (*Woman's* 54). Involving women in conflicts "between two extremes," Wallace suggests these novels (Bentley's, Macaulay's, Brittain's, Woolf's) indicate "women's past defeats but [are] also a warning of future possible defeats" (*Woman's* 54). Facing postfeminist backlash today these novels can be read, as Winifred Holtby did of feminist ones in 1934, as a recognition "that 'the pendulum was already swinging backwards not only against feminism, but against democracy, liberty and reason'" (qtd. in Wallace, *Woman's* 55). Thus, these novels offer unconventional feminist perspectives on the nation, gender, and history as well as a woman's duty to each.

Like Anthony Smith, I contend that nations are not a recent phenomenon. Believing the nation emerges in modernity (Connor, Breuilly, Gellner) does not adequately encompass the political-cultural formations of antiquity (empire, city-state, and tribal confederation) (Smith, *Cultural Foundation* 50) that have a legitimate claim to nationhood. Smith proposes tracing the beginnings of nations to the political-cultural formations of antiquity, for example Israel and Egypt, in order to make sense of later political formations (48). For Smith, there is continuity between the nation from antiquity, modernity and our present, though not in a teleological sense (48). The nation is "a named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values,

and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture and observe shared customs and common laws" (19). An implicit aspect in Smith's definition (and is most relevant for this chapter) is the ruler determined by primogeniture. No nation exists without social hierarchies and/or an individual leader–in these novels, with the exception of Cassandra, the ruler is a woman.

John Frame, referencing Richard L. Pratt, devises five useful categories to in order to characterize premodernism in the woman's historical novel: truth, ultimate reality, seeker of truth, modes of communication, and finally historical progress. In premodern societies:

> 1) Truth is discerned primarily through religious institutions and mythology under the guidance of religious leaders, 2) Ultimate reality is spiritual and deeply influences events in the ephemeral physical world, 3) Individuality is discouraged and conformity to community traditions is highly prized, 4) There is a heavy reliance on oral, ritualized and iconographic communication due to widespread illiteracy and primitive publishing techniques, and finally, 5) Widespread mythic meta-narratives depict history in never-ending cycles. (Frame 28-9)

This chapter, therefore, puts 'progressive' or linear history into question, while, paradoxically, believing that political change for women is not only possible but also necessary.

In her Author's Note to *Boudica: Dreaming the Serpent Spear*, Scott asserts that "[i]t is too late to go back and remake history. It is not too late to go forward differently" (508). Change for women, however, is not possible without rethinking the meaning of the nation and gender. Seeking to establish a maternal rule that disrupts *patria*rchal nationalism, both past and present, the novels raise gender consciousness cross-culturally, historically, and transnationally; they, also, break traditional boundaries by putting forth maternal genealogies. Wallace writes that such "texts all privilege the female point of view and thus expose the subjective and phallocentric nature of mainstream historiography" (*Woman's* 206). Women's historical novels concentrating on gender, the nation, and history supplement archival omissions/erasures and, as such, are important feminist counter-novels to the accepted historical record and genre of historical fiction. This is evident when examining the following femino-centric topics: gender as masquerade, gender and sex, goddess worship, war, slavery, and establishing a matrilineage.

Gender as Masquerade

The complexity of gender in women's historical novels is highlighted by Gedge's, Moran's, and George's novels on Egyptian pharaohs. The heroines Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, and Cleopatra serve as extraordinary figures not only in Egyptian history but also, more specifically, women's history and women's historical novels. One of the unique features of these works is strategic cross-referencing, for example Hatshepsut is a pivotal figure in the lives of Nefertiti

and Cleopatra. Her life/rule is invoked in order to confirm the heroine's own legitimacy and claims to the throne (in as much as their father's family line and claim to the status of a God do). Gedge's novel opens with an older Hatshepsut in her private apartment reflecting on the loss of her rule as Pharaoh and her approaching death (she is usurped by her nephew Thutmose III). She remembers her "haughty chin holding the Paranoiac Beard … lifted high, the eyes steady and unyielding beneath the weight of the tall and regal Double Crown of Egypt" (Gedge 2). She claims, "So it was, and so it shall always be that I was King of Egypt, I, Daughter of Amun" (3). Hatshepsut, one of the first women to be Pharaoh in Egypt (Routledge 164-65), is accredited by Gedge for her ability to gender-bend. Hatshepsut portrays the constructed nature of gender by wearing the same kilts as men, excelling in hunting–the chariot and spear–and in her studies; "Nozme [the Royal Nurse] disapproved of any break with tradition, and the idea of girls, even royal girls, studying with boys was a continual source of irritation to her. But Pharaoh had spoken" (Gedge 11). Pharaoh continues his break with tradition by revering Hatshepsut, though she is a woman, as more than equal to her male contemporaries, including her half-brother Thothmose.

Recognizing her exceptional abilities, intelligence, and success in male roles, he declares:

> I will not have my brainless, soft, mother-loving son, to sit on my throne and govern my country into a shambles. And I will not put such a painful, irksome bridle such as he on my little Hat. The chains she shall wear shall be golden. She is Maat [Truth]. She,

> more than I, more than stupid Thothmose, is the Child of Amun. I will have her for Crown Prince. (Gedge 72)

In order for Hatshepsut to be Pharaoh she must be trained in male arts and take on the masculine appellation "Crown Prince" and later "King." Her role as Pharaoh requires her to suppress what are deemed feminine qualities (weakness, physical frailty, silence, emotions, peace-loving, and irrationality), wear the Paranoiac beard, and, paradoxically, uphold her status as the daughter of the god Amun, king of the gods and one of Egypt's eight primordial gods. Recognized as the child of Amun by the people and priests, Hatshepsut's success and political power are secured. For example, when Senmut, Hatshepsut's young chief architect, sees her playing her lute and singing, he remarks, "Indeed she was the Daughter of the God" (116). Convincing the people that she truly is the daughter of Amun and embodies her country is necessary for her to be Pharaoh; she marries herself with Egypt, her nation, when she spends the night in the Temple of Amun (138) before sailing with her father down the Nile.

Pharaoh's intentions to have Hatshepsut crowned his Heiress upon their return prompts her to ask, "Are you to wed me, father? Is there trouble because my mother is dead and to hold the throne you need a royal woman? … I have been told often enough by my tutors that to be Pharaoh one must marry the right blood, and since you, dear father, seem to be truly immortal, I assumed that you would marry me" (Gedge 129-30). Seen also in Soueif's *The Map of Love*, inter-familial marriages were common between royals in Ancient Egypt (Graves-Brown xvi). Modelled on the myth of the marriage between the god Osiris and

his goddess sister Isis, the Pharaohs of Egypt followed this custom. Novels on Egyptian pharaohs suggest that, for practical purposes, brother-sister marriages between members of the royal family symbolized incarnations of the gods and upheld beliefs that only gods could marry a goddess and vice versa. These marriages were also a means for keeping the power of Pharaoh localized. As Hatshepsut later makes clear to her husband-brother Pharaoh Thothmose the prospect of her giving birth to a son is that he will marry their daughter Neferura "my son and my daughter, gods together" (Gedge 261). This union is further confirmed when the young Hatshepsut asks her mother why her sister Neferu, (who later dies in adolescence), must marry her brother Thothmose.

Aahmose replies:

> Your immortal father was only a general in my father's army until my father decided to make him the next Pharaoh. But in order that he might be Pharaoh in truth, he had to marry me because it is in us, the royal women, that the God's blood flows. We carry the royal strain, and no man can be Pharaoh unless he marries a royal woman, one whose mother has the pure blood of kingship and whose father was Pharaoh in his turn. (Gedge 25)

Hatshepsut questions this claim, stating that if the women carry the royal bloodline, why must the women marry at all? Why can't women be Pharaoh's? (25). Dismayed by her mother's response that it is Maat and only men can rule, Hatshepsut defiantly declares that she will break this tradition: she will be Pharaoh (25, 130). Though, as Thothmose predicts (129), Hatshepsut is, like her

female successor Cleopatra, pressured by the priests and council into marrying her brother Thothmose after her father's death. This is the only way she keeps her dreams of becoming Pharaoh alive.

Upon her brother's death, Hatshepsut cries, "at last I am what my father intended me to be. There is no one in the whole of Egypt who can oppose me. Thothmose is gone … my destiny is fulfilled. I am stronger than ever, more beautiful and more powerful than ever, the first woman worthy to be Pharaoh" (Gedge 288). For her coronation Hatshepsut's head is ceremoniously shaven so that "with a scalp now clean she looked sexless" (288). Her gender transformation is also evident when she rides in her chariot through the streets, as "children threw flowers, and their parents kissed the paving stones before the God who seemed to have shed the softness of her womanhood and stood as tall and as lean as a young man" (289). With her new androgynous identity, she accepts the "smooth red and white Double Crown on her head and [takes] the Flail and golden Crook from Menena's hands, the fiery Uraeus, the cobra and the vulture of kingship" (289), announcing–in homage to Amun–amongst all the titles once held by her father, "I am Maat-Ka-Ra, Son of the Sun, Child of the Morning" (290).

Hatshepsut proves a formidable forerunner for Nefertiti in Moran's novel. Amunhotep IV is about to be made co-regent with his father and Nefertiti, a member of the royal family is chosen by her aunt, the Great Royal Wife Tiye, to be his Chief Wife. Nefertiti looks in the mirror claiming:

> 'I will be the greatest queen Egypt has ever known.' I [Mutnodjmet] scoffed. 'No queen will ever be greater than our aunt.' She whirled around. 'There was Hatshepsut. And our aunt doesn't wear the penchant crown.' 'Only a Pharaoh can wear it.' 'So while she commands the army and meets with foreign leaders, what does she get? *Nothing*. It is her husband who reaps the glory. When I am queen, it will be my name that lives in eternity.' (Moran 17-18)

Nefertiti's vision to surpass not only her aunt but also Hatshepsut, is proclaimed when Amunhotep becomes Pharaoh (203). Mutnodjmet, Nefertiti's younger sister and the narrator of the novel, reasons:

> 'Queen Tiye is Pharaoh in all but name.' 'Yes.' Nefertiti began brushing her hair vigorously, dismissing Merit and Ipu with a wave. 'In all but name. What more in life do we have but our name? What will be remembered in eternity? The gown I wore or the name I carried?' 'Your deeds. They will be remembered.' 'Will Tiye's deeds be remembered, or will they be recorded as her husband's?' 'Nefertiti.' I shook my head. She was aiming too high. 'What?' She tossed the brush aside, knowing that Merit would pick it up later. 'Hatshepsut was king. She had herself crowned.'(60)

As Chief Wife, Nefertiti is expected by her father Ay and aunt Tiye to diminish Amunhotep's passion for replacing the worship of Amun with his new and only God Aten.

According to the new Pharaoh, "'Amun-Ra is the god of the sun.' 'And Aten is the sun itself'" (Moran 10). Ruling Lower-Egypt from Memphis until his father's death, Amunhotep makes the decision to move the capital from Thebes to Armana and for Egypt to worship Aten (216). In celebration of her new status, Nefertiti fails to deter Amunhotep from Aten and, instead, has a new crown designed to symbolize her rule. In homage to Hatshepsut and the tradition of Pharaoh, Nefertiti has hair shaved off; she reinvents the crown of Egypt's Queen to be symbolized by an asp poised to spit poison (206), a sign of her own increasing political power. Mutnodjmet exclaims, "no one knew what my sister's crown meant. Was Nefertiti queen? A king-queen? A coregent?" (206). Mutnodjmet declares, "[i]f I had been a peasant in the fields, I would have thought I was staring into the face of a goddess" (206). In response to the crises and destruction of all the temples to Amun, Isis, and Hathor across Egypt, Mutnodjmet "trie[s] to imagine it: temples that had stood since the time of Hatshepsut boarded up and their holy waters left to dry" (216). Mutnodjmet's sentiment expresses Nefertiti's indebtedness to Hatshepsut as a woman with the greatest power in Egyptian history–"'Only Hatshepsut ever had such influence as I have" (321)–and legitimizes her own claims for the Double Crown, but she, like Egypt's past and the worship of Amun, will ultimately be transcended.

Nefertiti's ruling of Egypt reaches unfathomable heights when she is officially declared co-regent by Akhenaten. Standing in the Window of Appearances with Nefertiti, Akhenaten exclaims, "A Durbar for the greatest Pharaohs in Egypt … Pharaoh Akhenaten and the Pharaoh Neferneferuaten-

Nefertiti!" (Moran 395). Mutnodjmet tells Nefertiti's daughter, "'It means your mother shall do what no other queen has done before her. She's about to become Pharaoh and Coregent of Egypt.' It was unthinkable. For a queen to become a king. To be coregent with her husband" (395). Curiously, Mutnodjmet forgets the triumphs of Hatshepsut, perhaps suggesting a near future when Nefertiti will also be forgotten. Moran describes Nefertiti holding the ultimate sign of kingship, the crook and flail, in order to commence the Dubar (396), a right which no Pharaoh had granted before to a woman (398).

Moran and Gedge offer contrasting feminist perspectives on gender. Hatshepsut as Pharaoh embodies what Krista Scott-Dixon refers to as "a non-normative gender space" (13); she cross-dresses, wearing men's short kilts and the Paranoiac beard, though her sexuality is portrayed by Gedge as heterosexual. Nefertiti, by contrast, reinforces heterosexual normativity by using her feminine image–her image is everywhere (298). She is beautiful, feminine, and displays explicitly her maternal bond with her children, her domesticity, and seemingly authentic love for her husband. Both women inspire questions on gender equality that remain unresolved in the twenty-first century. Hatshepsut, by saming herself to masculinity and men (including leading the army in lieu of Thothmose to victory against the Nubians (Gedge 194-226), adheres to a definition of feminist equality whereby women are deemed equal to men in all areas of public life. Nefertiti, on the other hand, embraces the accepted gender codes of her time, including rigid feminine qualities, but, Moran argues, she achieves the same political equality as Hatshepsut. Are femininity and feminism compatible? Luce

Irigaray's corpus suggests thinking the question differently. According to Irigaray's arguments on sexual difference, both Hatshepsut in her equation with masculine attributes and Nefertiti's equation with the ideal feminine beauty embody patriarchal gender definitions based on a binary of masculinity associated with men and femininity equated with women. Both novels challenge the notion of an authentic gender, implicit heterosexual normativity, and the appropriateness of defining gender in terms of masculinity and femininity and the assignment of those attributes according to one's sex.

History as Sex; Gender as Fiction

The woman's historical novel not only grapples with the relation between fact and narrative, or history and fiction, which is inherent in the genre but also with a definition of gender. Within feminist theory and historiography, to reiterate, there is debate between strategies. Some historians of women's lives argue for the necessity of inserting women into the past, uncovering voices and experiences, and challenging the conceptual absence of women from our historical accounts (an example is Allende's *Inés of My Soul)*. Others, historians of gender, focus on the meaning and discourse of being a woman rather than authentic experience and voice: "The categories woman and man are not viewed as fixed identities or natural entities but as constructions of gender with variable meanings across cultures and time" (Haggis 46). An understanding of gender as constructed is supported by Wallace, who writes that:

> One of the central reasons women writers have turned to the historical novel ... is that a temporal viewpoint allows us to see that gender is historically contingent rather than essential. If gender roles are subject to change over time then they are clearly socially and culturally constructed and open to the possibility of further change. (*Woman's* 8)

Wallace does not explicitly make the comparison or connection between fact as sex and fiction as gender, but this is a worthwhile line of thinking.

Historical novels, such as Woolf's *Orlando*, often criticized for inventing history or lacking in historical truth, suggest the distinction between fiction and history is irrelevant; it is viewed entirely as fiction. Similarly, Judith Butler radically asserts that "[i]f the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (10-11). Facts, like sex or history, are discursively performed according to prescriptive norms and, therefore, have no greater a claim to 'Reality' than contingent gender roles.

For many women's historical novels, like *Child of the Morning*, it is precisely the gap in the historical record, between the history and fiction and the gender and sex, that is being questioned and explored. Wallace argues that the postmodernist woman's novel highlights not only "the constructed and multiple nature of history" but also the historical construction and multiplicity of gender (*Woman's* 203-4). A return to Hutcheon's definition of postmodern historical

fiction and her argument that our only access to the historical past is via narrative (114) supports Butler's claims that our only access to 'sex' is through its texts and that sex itself becomes a text determined by interconnecting/intersubjective matrices of power. Thus, in order to make sense of the past or materiality/corporeality, we impose a linguistic shape or sex/gender upon that which inherently has no shape or sex or gender (Butler 17). In Manzoni's terms, this means putting the flesh that is fiction back on the skeleton that is fact (17), or, rather, gender putting the flesh back on the bones of 'sex.'

Rethinking sex in relation to fact acknowledges history as a series of accepted human made-facts and a useful construction for functioning in the everyday. For example, if a bus schedule says the bus will arrive at 1pm, it is true because time is standardized. Just as the bus in a years' time may change its route or schedule, the meanings of sex and gender are capable of change. Historical facts, like sex and gender, are not in and of themselves necessarily true for all time, but they are true within their own socio-historical period and can be verified; thus, we believe in objective facts in order to function on a daily basis: filling in one's sex on a passport is similar to catching the bus at 1 pm. Spivak's phrase "strategic essentialism" suggests that, rather than take an either/or position between essentialism and sex and gender as a social construct, feminists adopt the strategy of unity for political purposes: "The strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 3).

The prevalence of cross-dressing in women's historical novels, also relates, to a consideration of sex and gender. Wallace argues that cross-dressing is a means for women writers to "cross-write as men" and to imagine "the girl masquerading as a boy" (*Woman's* 209), found, for example, in texts such as Patricia Duncker's *The Doctor* (1999), in which the renowned British military surgeon James Miranda Stuart Barry (1789 -1865) is secretly a woman. Similarily, Lau A-yin is a cross-dressing immigrant who transforms into the Chinese Mr. Lowe in Jamaica in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998) as well as others like Gedge's, D'eaubonne's, Longfellow's, Piat's and so on, all focus on cross-dressing. Cross-dressing/crossing genders, in all of these novels, proves, on one hand, to be a practical necessity for survival and, on the other, a liberating experience to masquerade under a different identity.

Nevertheless, women's historical novels do not readily conform to Butler's claims on the mutability of sex. With, perhaps, the exception of Woolf's *Orlando*, an important precursor to Justine Saracen's *Sarah, Son of God* (2011) because of its transsexual, transgenre, transhistorical, and transnational nature, sex remains a fixed category in women's historical novels. Woolf and Saracen both parody biological sex (Orlando is a man in the first half of the novel and then wakes up a woman) and history (the novel spans over the life of Orlando's 400 years); Saracen's novel narrates a lesbian love affair between a transgendered woman (Sarah, who used to be Tadzio) and Joanna, an academic who employs Sarah to help uncover the truth about both the author and the

author's gender of a book published in Renaissance Venice and another woman's long-lost diary recounting Christ's final days.

Aside from these examples, however, sex is a stable category in historical novels. Butler's thinking, nonetheless, is an instructive, if not provoking, source for rethinking the historical past as a myriad of both fact and fiction, whereby one can begin to develop a feminist strategy for questioning gender and sex as mutually social construction and materiality/corporeality. Thus, the parody we see in Woolf's, Butler's, and Hutcheon's position is potentially political and strategic for women in terms of transforming rigid ideologies of femininity, sexuality, and social roles, but, nevertheless, still risks the fragmentation and loss of any identity or referent for feminism.

In Moran's novel, this becomes clear when reconciliation with the long standing enemies, the Hittites, occurs and they are welcomed to the Durbar. The Hittites instigate a wave of Black Plague that takes the life of Akhenaten, amongst others in the palace (Moran 431). The Pharaoh's death means the destruction and final abandonment of Armana and Aten. Contrary to mainstream history, Moran reimagines Nefertiti reigning as Pharaoh and attempting to undo the work of her heretic husband–she promises to restore Amun, Egypt's lost lands, and to reinstate Thebes as the political seat of Pharaoh's power. Symbolically, she anoints herself under the name Smenkhare–"*Strong is the Soul of Ra*" (438)–in order to separate herself from a connection or equation with Aten and to strengthen her bond with the god Ra. In only four short years under Nefertiti's power, conflicts, however, between the people's love for Amun and

the priests of Aten come to a head. Nefertiti and her eldest daughter Meritaten are murdered by Aten priests (452). Mutnodjmet laments, “She was their queen, their Pharaoh of Egypt. She had restored Thebes to them and had rebuilt the shining temples of Amun” (454). Thus, Moran rewrites what she argues patriarchal accounts have attempted to erase or chisel away from history, Nefertiti’s rule as Pharaoh.

Nefertiti’s and Hatshepsut’s lives suggest that gender, if not sex, is unstable. Both women are excellent examples of how patriarchal gender expectations seemingly lock women into subordinate positions. Subverting the inferior positions of women by laying claim to political power traditionally reserved for men, Nefertiti and Hatshepsut, however, ultimately reinforce and buttress patriarchal ideals of gender. Neither is able to find a place for women outside of or beyond the constructed binaries of gender-sex. Audrey Macklin writes that not only are borders gendered, but that “gender is bordered” and she notes that an “enforcement of the boundaries of gender identity is sufficiently strict that crossing borders is not called migration, but transgression” (276). Nefertiti and Hatshepsut, and perhaps all women, are inscribed in discourses of gender and sex to the extent that they strive to fulfill ideals of masculinity and femininity, which in everyday lived experience can never be obtained or sustained and are indefinitely and inevitably transgressed.

Hope Jennings writes that we must:

> Think through the problems that arise when women attempt to assert a specifically feminine/sexual subject while continuing to

> define themselves according to male representations or symbols of femininity. She reminds us of the risks that accompany a female imaginary when it fails to remain self-conscious or critical of the position and/or premises from which it speaks; when contesting the myths of patriarchy, a feminist discourse must avoid the trap of falling for its own myths that it appropriates or sets up. (82)

If sexual difference is the question of our age (Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference* 5), the woman's historical novel proves a fruitful genre by asking what it means for men and women to be equals and how, if at all, equality can be defined?

For Irigaray, equality between the sexes does not mean women conforming to the lives and ways of men (*Irigaray Reader* 207) since "the human race is divided into *two genres* which ensure its production and reproduction. Trying to suppress sexual difference is to invite a genocide more radical than any destruction that has ever existed in History. What is important, on the other hand, is defining values of belonging to a sex-specific *genre*" (32).When women imitate men, man remains the ideal standard and norm (education, wage, public position, vote etc.) (32). Naomi Schor clarifies: "If othering involves attributing to the objectified other a difference that serves to legitimate her oppression, saming denies the objectified other the right to her difference, submitting the other to laws of phallic specularity" (48). Irigaray's work suggests that feminist literature has the potential to be the ground from which new definitions of equality can be unearthed, one that understands woman

in relation to man differently, and one in which woman is neither reduced (saming) nor opposed (othering) to man as the ideal.

The End of History; the Throne of a Maternal Goddess

George's Cleopatra is a mix of both Hatshepsut and Nefertiti, particularly in terms of her gender, because, like Hatshepsut, she travels extensively through the Egyptian countryside via the Nile, visits sacred temples and pyramids, marries her brothers Ptolemy XIII and XIV according to Egyptian tradition (3, 58), and engages in war. Like Nefertiti, she is also portrayed as romantic, feminine, and a loving mother. Essential to Cleopatra's construction of identity, like her forerunners, are the roles and functions of the gods in legitimizing Pharaoh's life in the present, the afterlife, and Egypt's future. This is most evident in Cleopatra's identification with and portrayal of herself either as the maternal Isis–the goddess of "womanhood, wifehood, [and] motherhood" (George 36)–or Isis' daughter. The Prologue is dedicated to the goddess: "To Isis, my mother, my refuge, my compassionate companion and keeper all the days of my life … I commit these writings, a record of my days on earth. You, who granted them to me, will guard and preserve them, and look kindly and with favor upon their author, your daughter." The novel, then, switches to Cleopatra's earliest memory, her mother drowning and her nurse taking her to Isis' temple. The nurse informs her that "[Isis] is [your] mother now" (2) and Cleopatra affirms this: "So, Isis, it is thus, and on that day, I became your daughter" (2). Though

Isis' role in Nefertiti's and Hatshesput's lives is minimal, her role in the life of Cleopatra is unrivalled and reaches its highest accolades.

Unlike Hatshepsut and Nefertiti, Cleopatra is not Egyptian; she is of Greek descent: "I was not born of Egyptian blood, yet I was Queen of Egypt" (George 665). Her lineage dates to 332 BCE when Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, founded the great city of Alexandria, and, upon his death, left his general Ptolemy, a member of the Macedonian Greek royal family, to rule; Ptolemy later, acquired the title of Pharaoh (3). Cleopatra VII is the last member of the Ptolemaic dynasty to rule as Pharaoh over an independent Egypt. Having Greek roots and ruling from Alexandria, Cleopatra seeks to bridge the gap between her ancestry and Egypt's traditional history.

When Cleopatra's father Ptolemy XII dies (George 61), she is crowned as Pharaoh alongside her brother in both Alexandria and Memphis (the capital according to Egyptian custom) (62). Alexandria is "a Greek head on an Egyptian body" and Cleopatra believes that, outside it, "the 'real' Egypt exists" (662).The contradiction Cleopatra faces is a question of authenticity: what makes a Greek ruled Egypt more legitimate than a Roman ruled Egypt? Perhaps one distinguishing factor is Cleopatra's commitment to Egypt, such as learning new languages and literatures so she can read the love poetry and history of Egypt prior to Alexander (64). Literature, as Greek history has already accomplished, opens up an entirely new Egypt for her. Upon her coronation, she declares: "This was my true wedding day, my wedding day to that which, if it lay within my power, would live forever: Egypt. I have saved my diadems from those

ceremonies, and the gowns. My four marriages to earthly men have not survived, because nothing that is human can last. But Egypt …" (64). Like her maternal predecessors, Cleopatra understands Egypt to be a fragile nation/land, but an everlasting spouse. Asserting her rule, Cleopatra performs traditional ceremonial rites in Memphis (receiving the crook and flail, robes, scepter and *uraeus*) and, with her brother-husband Ptolemy XIII, takes further vows in Isis' temple.

Isis, further, plays a symbolic role in the temple of Re. Later in her life, Cleopatra is shown the altar dedicated to her, her father, and her son with the Roman general/statesman Julius Caesar, Caesarion (Caesar also has a statue of Cleopatra depicted as Venus-Isis erected next to his own in his new Forum in Rome) (George 249). Much like Anna, in Soueif's novel *The Map of Love*, symbolically shows her child depicted as Horus in her tripartite tapestry, Caesarion, Cleopatra's heir, is also shown on special coins nursing from Cleopatra, a tribute to Isis and Horus (155). Mary Hamer suggests that these images reinforce Cleopatra's role as a divine single mother, like the goddess Isis. Annual rituals supported "[t]he notion of mother/goddess who lived in separation from the god [Osiris] who was the father of her son, just as Cleopatra lived divided from Caesar" (Hamer 16), Caesarion's father. Hamer continues:

> Queen and goddess alike ruled without benefit of a consort's presence: the need for the validation of a male co-regent is confronted and set aside by appeal to divine precedent; the absence of Caesarion's father is transformed into a positive asset, since it

> both confirms the parallel between the divine pair and the royal one. (16).

As a daughter of Re, Cleopatra is portrayed, like Isis, with “a snake coiled around one of her arms” (George 664) that symbolizes immortality.

When Cleopatra meets Ipuwer, the wisest man in Egypt and dweller in the temple, he states, “they are creatures of Isis, dear to her. And they confer immortality on her chosen ones” (George 668). Ipuwer reveals that he knows from the stars that his “life would last until [he] beheld the Pharaoh who is also Isis. Now [he] ha[s]. It is today” (668). Dying in front of Cleopatra and carried out of the temple, a priest declares: “I did not know when Anubis would summon him! I only knew he wished to live until the woman Pharaoh, the daughter of Isis, would rule. He spoke of it, how she would crown the line of Pharaoh’s, and e–glorify them” (670). Cleopatra, perceptive enough to know that the prophecy decrees she will *end*, not glorify, the line of Pharaohs: the gods of Egypt will be silent after her death. This prophecy strengthens the link between gods and Pharaohs and a sense of Egyptian identity as defined simultaneously by both.

This scene in the temple foreshadows the ending of the novel–Cleopatra’s sense of her impending death and the defeat of Egypt. Following her and her Roman lover Marc Antony’s (by this time Caesar is long dead) defeat by Octavian, Cleopatra is taken prisoner. She gains permission to attend the tomb of Marc Antony, who had commited suicide (George 915), in the mausoleum (941). The headdress she wears, showing her divinity and queenship, “is shaped like a

vulture, the protective goddess of Upper Egypt, and the feathers spread out over [her] head, encasing it. The wings make shields around [her] cheeks. On [her] brow is a wide *uraeus*, the sacred cobra of Lower Egypt, hood spread, ready to strike" (941). Though designed to strike fear into her enemies, like Nefertiti's crown, the asp, ultimately, poetically poisons its owner. This suggests the queen is her own enemy; her identity is fragmented. Symbolically and literally, Cleopatra poisons herself with the bite of the sacred asp as she prepares herself for reaching Isis (944).

When Olympus, her trusted friend and physician, arrives, he sees Cleopatra "lying there on the wide lid of [her] sarcophagus, as still as stone, wearing [her] royal robes and crown, [her] arms crossed, with the crook and flail folded over [her] breast" (George 946). Upon her last orders, Olympus takes the Queen's scrolls to the great Temple of Isis in Philae. It is the island where Isis is believed to have entrusted her and Osiris' divine son Horus for protection after Osiris' death; it is, also, where Cleopatra once brought Caesar. Olympus notes of the priest: "he shows me his treasure: a statue of you, carved of tamarisk … he tells me he is covering it with sheets of gold, so that it may last for centuries, and you may be worshipped alongside Isis … You are transformed into a goddess … You will never die, folded here in the embrace of Isis" (957). George's novel, like Michèle Roberts' *In the Red Kitchen* (1990) or Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Malinche* (2006), ruptures history as linearity by returning to maternal origins.

Unlike "time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival-in other words, the time of history" (Kristeva 17), the maternal time in the woman's historical novel is cyclical. Geraldine Pinch describes Egyptian time in cyclical terms as decay, death and rebirth (89); it is "a symbol of eternity [and signifies] the capacity of the universe to perpetually renew itself, so that every end could also be a beginning" (Pinch 90). The inauguration of a new king re-enacted "the creation of the world and the reign of the sun god as well as the establishment of the 'living Horus' on the throne of his father" (90). In pre-Greco Egypt, this tradition portrayed rebirth as masculine and as happening to a male assisted by sexualized females (Cooney 2-5). Kathyln M. Cooney argues that "the Egyptian woman's only real chance to be reborn was to take on the male gender" (6). By contrast, these novelists envision a creative female rebirth, "not a cyclical view of history–self-defeating 'world cycles' … but a possibility of future intervention" (Wallace *Woman's* 60). Cleopatra's death is part of a matrilineage embodied by "the unrealised possibilities of the past" (Radford, qtd. in Wallace, *Woman's* 61) manifest in an alternative maternal time.

George's invocation of cyclical maternal time is contrasted by the silence of Cleopatra's maternal predecessors in the text. Explicit references to Hatshepsut and Nefertiti are not forthcoming, but, implicitly, the past dictates and shapes Cleopatra's present and future. For example, when Cleopatra sets sail to Hermonthis in order to initiate the installation of a new sacred bull, she passes the pyramids and Memphis, seeing the ruins of "the city of the heretic Pharaoh"

(George 72). Cleopatra exclaims, “Akhenaten! I knew a little about him, about his breaking with the old gods attempting to found a new religion based on a worship of Aten as one god. The priests of Amun at Thebes had made short work of him. We were gliding past all that remained of his life and work. (72). No mention of Nefertiti is made; George suggests that at this time in Egyptian history she is forgotten; a subversive and playful point made by Moran’s subtitle: *Queen of Egypt, Daughter of Eternity*. Hatshepsut fairs little better and is mentioned only twice in George’s entire narrative. The final time is when, in Rome as Caesar’s lover and guest, Cleopatra attends a costume party. Her lack of disguise surprises Octavian, who says, ‘But no, you cannot be Cleopatra during Saturnalia. You must be someone else–take another name.’ ‘Oh, very well,’ I said. ‘I shall be … Queen Hatshepsut’” (306). Implicitly Cleopatra identifies herself, her fate, as interchangeable with Hatshepsut’s and signifies that she, too, will only be a distant name in Egypt’s future.

This conception of history is reinforced when, upon approaching Thebes, Cleopatra declares: “Across from Thebes itself lay the desolate, baking cliffs and valley where the royal tombs were sculpted out of living rock. Here Queen Hatshepsut had set up her mortuary temple, a long, horizontal series of terraces and chambers built into the hard, bone-dry cliffs. Now her myrrh trees and fountains had turned to dust” (George 73). The myrrh trees that Cleopatra sees are the result of Hatshepsut’s own desire to broaden Egypt’s horizons and borders by arranging an expedition to the fabled land of Punt to bring Egypt unthinkable riches. Like Nefertiti, who Moran portrays as seeking with her

husband to reimagine Egypt's capital in Armana, both historic events have now been all but erased from Egyptian history and memory, though it is unclear if Cleopatra recognizes her own life and reign may be subject to the same fate. This is particularly evident when George depicts Cleopatra, similar to Hatshepsut with her myrrh, going to Heliopolis to inspect her balsam plantings from Jericho (661), which are expected to bring her enormous riches.

Heliopolis, the sacred City of the Sun, houses the only complete record of the Pharaohs (George 661). Cleopatra recalls how the first Ptolemy ordered the priest of Heliopolis to write a history of Egypt because:

> Knowledge of the past was fading even then; its roots were still vigorous in the ancient holy cities, but its branches elsewhere were nearly bare. Fewer and fewer people could read the sacred writings; fewer and fewer people cared; ancient Egypt was already receding into a mist of the fabulous, the make believe. … But the past was too strong to evaporate, instead it dyed the new conquerors [Persians, then Greeks] in its colors. (662)

Thus, taking it upon herself to recuperate Egypt's authentic past, Cleopatra puts into question the complex relation between native/immigrant-foreigner in terms of defining one's self and one's history/nationality. It is further complicated when she breaks tradition by marrying Roman men and having children by both Caesar and Marc Antony.

Though, after Alexander the Great's death, Egypt remained independent under the Ptolemy's, this will not be the case under Roman rule. Egypt will

become a Roman province, despite Cleopatra's belief that "[e]ven in a larger empire, Egypt would still be uniquely herself. That was the vision [Marc] Antony and I could offer, rather than the Roman idea of transforming the rest of the world into another Rome" (George 662). Cleopatra, unable to critique her own desire for expanding Egypt's borders, cannot see the similarities between her nationalistic actions and those of the Romans. Instead, she calls on Egyptians' sense of nationalist pride to form a unified front against impending Rome.

No longer insulated but accessible to the wider world, Cleopatra realizes:

> Long ago, Egypt had been protected by its deserts on the east and west. We had lain in our Nile valley out of reach of the rest of the world. But Bedouins on camels had breached our western frontiers, and armies could mark overland, through Syria, to our eastern borders now. We were part of a larger world, and what happened elsewhere affected us directly. (George 69)

The transnational connection between Egypt, which is vulnerable in relation to Rome, the economic, military, territorial, and dominant cultural force, mirrors twenty-first century concerns about loss of identity.

In George's *Memoirs of Cleopatra*, Gedge's *Child of the Morning*, and Moran's *Nefertiti*, feminist recuperations and revisionist writings of women rulers from Egypt's premodern history reveal a distinct feminist genealogy and counter-discourse to hegemonic history. These narratives contradict notions of the nation as a stable entity (including and despite the protagonist's own

thinking). Analyzing the novels individually does not allow for this unique vantage point–it is only when read together and relationally that a conception of identity defined in terms of nationality, history, and gender is visible as fluid, constructed, and transnational.

“She Who Entangles Men”: The Power of War

Upon Egypt’s defeat, Cleopatra, in George’s novel, avoids becoming Octavian’s Roman slave and spoils of war by committing suicide beside Marc Antony’s tomb. The lives of Cassandra and Boudicca, likewise, emphasize the impact of war on the lives of women, particularly in terms of alienation, displacement, captivity, and assimilation. Christa Wolf imagines the narrative of the Trojan princess Cassandra, famed for her ability to prophesize, including her own death at the hands of Clytemnestra, her Mycenaean captor’s wife. *Boudicca* by Elizabeth Wolfe describes the famous Celtic warrior who is taken prisoner by the Romans but eventually manages to return to Britain in order to raise a revolt; however, she, like Cleopatra, does take her own life upon facing imminent defeat.

Unlike the other narratives, *Cassandra* is written in a style of flashbacks and fragmentary snapshots–the plot shifts in and out of the past and the present. On the first page, a present-day female narrator reflects on how “these stone lions looked at her; now they no longer have heads” (Wolf 3). She fuses her own life with Cassandra’s tale, a mythic voice, which has, against all odds, found a way to travel 3,000 years. Cassandra’s life is an early example of a mytho-

literary-historical pacifist and, after having lost, she, just as every other protagonist in this chapter, is murdered or a victim of suicide. The narrative shows this by switching to Cassandra's memories of her life as a powerful priestess prior to the Trojan War, a power she later criticizes as selfish and naïve. Wolf, next, recounts Cassandra's journey to Mycenae as Agamemnon's captive and her prophecy–she and Agamemnon will die at the hands of Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra's primary motivation for revenge is Agamemnon's murdering of their daughter Iphigenia, who served as a sacrifice to the gods so the Greeks could go with blessings to war on Troy (Weingartz 50).

Anita Bunyan argues that, rather than an assured stable subject, Wolf's Cassandra is "a female protagonist riddled by doubts and prone to crises. … She recalls the past through a series of flashbacks. This ambivalence in the novel questions and reflects on the relationship between the individual and society and is open to the complexity of human experience" (179). *Cassandra* exemplifies a disconnect between political ideals and their reality as "the novel demonstrates that the present cannot be subordinated to a hypothetical future" (Bunyan 179). A hypothetical future, however, should not be abandoned–women's historical novels like George's or Wolf's suggest that an intrinsic aspect of feminist writing back through our mothers is that there is always a utopian future on the horizon. An imagined *matria* inspires anti-patriarchal discourses. Cassandra's voices are a powerful counter narrative to the dominant Trojan War (the glorifying and immortalizing of war mongers such as Achilles, Odysseus and

Aeneas) and the textinherently is an anti-war novel written for a contemporary audience.

Bunyan states that "Wolf links the threat of nuclear war [in the twentieth century] to an analysis of gender relations which points to male pride as the cause of war and posits an alternative vision of female resistance. This is not unproblematic, however, because it runs the risk of absolving women of political culpability" (184). This claim links with Bennett's thoughts on the nature of patriarchy; she re-defends the shared experience of patriarchy by women, including naming women as often complicit within this power structure ("Feminism and History" 67). Boudicca, for instance, is an active political participant in the wars against the Romans; she symbolizes the quintessential Celtic warrior queen.

Similar to Hatshepsut, Iona, later renamed Boudicca when she becomes queen (Wolfe 72), is adept in activities that are necessary to survival, such as hunting. Of all the queens discussed in this chapter, Boudicca endures the least resistance from her tribe when she is proclaimed queen; her gender is not considered an obstacle to her success. Beginning when Iona is a young girl and the Iceni army is fighting a neighbouring tribe, the Coritani, over the thieving of oxen, Wolfe highlights Iona's naivety about the nature of war but also its importance in Celtic life: "No Celt can live unconcerned with war, untouched by blood. The fate of the Iceni, all Celtic peoples, was written in blood long ago. And there is no escaping such a heritage" (2). The war against the Coritani pales in comparison with the arrival and military threat of the Romans (39). The

discipline and sophistication of the Roman soldiers is juxtaposed by the Celt's notion of war: "War was no game to this Roman machine, but a challenge to be met and overwhelmed without regard to chivalry. There was no heroic act, no bravery, but the weight of the mass. The victory was won for the generals, for the emperor, not for the individual combatant" (41). Facing defeat by the Romans in battle, Iona's father Atthair calls for a retreat, the first his peoples can remember.

Wolfe, reflecting on Iona's state of mind, writes:

> To the young the very conception that all of their world might collapse is appalling; yet worlds have always collapsed: civilizations disappear without a trace, tongues are forgotten. Conqueror upon conqueror moves across this earth in man's eternal foray against himself. To believe at any time that it has finally ended is to be subdued by blithe ignorance. (49)

Wolfe's critique of linear history–a history of patriarchal war without end–resonates with the prospect of a maternal cyclical history endorsed by George in *Memoirs of Cleopatra.*

In the Celtic world, however, blood and kin are intertwined. Atthair, after losing another battle to the Romans, is killed according to tribal custom (Wolfe 66). The priest Thrueldan declares that Iona must now lead the tribe "[f]or so it was written in [her] father's blood, so it is beseeched by the common blood of [their] tribe" (67). Boudicca strategizes to change the traditional Celt war tactics, which she recognizes as "false pride" for "the sake of manhood" (76). She prays

"against war, domination by one people of another, blood which ran to no end, to no purpose, but passed into time like the waters of the river; all swallowed by the sea, an eternal, unknowable sea which rolled endlessly on" (337-8). Boudicca's recognition of patriarchy as the cause of war only extends so far–she criticizes male pride for standing in the way of the Iceni forming an alliance with the other Celt tribes, but she doesn't recognize, the way Cassandra does, that the patriarchal structuring of her society is responsible for the wars over Celtic lands and the death of her nation and peoples.

Unlike Cleopatra who believes that there will always be Egypt, Boudicca foresees that "'[t]here will be no Viron … Time will destroy it. … Viron will never survive. It will lie burned in the mud and ash of time. And we with it' … The time had now come–the end of Celtic time, the end of the nation" (Wolfe 367). Her own involvement in the wars is, therefore, one of both resistance and complicity with patriarchy; Boudicca becomes a national hero because she and her people "will die as warriors, not as slaves" (366), whereas Cassandra is considered ambivalently because she refuses to fight against the Greeks, but is also ignored when she foresees the destruction of the Trojans by the Trojan Horse (Wolf 11). In both instances, Wolf and Wolfe ask if there is any choice open to the heroine given the patriarchal worlds each inhabits.

(Neo) Slave-trade

Focusing on the woman as slave, women's historical novels like Wolf's and Wolfe's take up the challenge of asking whether a legitimate choice by women

in a patriarchal society is possible. Boudicca, perhaps, is too exalted and romanticized by Wolfe, but, like Cassandra, she is determined to fight for social change and to transform patriarchal systems. Boudicca finds herself a slave in Rome because of her truce with the Romans in Briton. The Roman General Marcus Atreus consents to a treaty which will guarantee an independent state (Wolfe 363) upon the condition that Boudicca and some of her greatest warriors become slaves (158). For Boudicca, this personal sacrifice is necessary; it means that "the people must not bleed, must not fade from the earth. Our nation will survive the Roman occupation…. Let them stay their hour; we will stay our eternity" (160). Taken in a Roman slave ship, fed a thin gruel once a day, and locked beneath the deck with other Celts (166, 167), Wolfe writes that "war is not the only setting for heroic acts; it is far braver to suffer dark, silent solitude and keep the light of the soul alive" (170). As slave-women, Boudicca and Cassandra bravely endure similar conditions.

Wolf highlights the contradictions and complexity of war, including its economic underpinnings, which Chris Weedon argues "are as relevant to the present as to the fictional Troy of the novel" (236) and that "the abduction of women by men lies at the root of war" (237). Related to this war is also the construction and falisification of truth and gender, for example in the novel Helen of Troy never steps foot on Trojan soil but is actually in Egypt. Out of male pride, the Trojans refuse to admit that Helen is not in Troy. Wolf writes, "in the Helen we had invented, we were defending everything that we no longer had" (85). Wolf, points to the construction of sacrifice for the sake of the state,

including the creation of false binaries (good versus evil, enemy versus ally, warrior versus traitor) through a play with doubles or mirrors in the text.

Cassandra is not only imprisoned by Agamemnon, the war-lord enemy, but also by her father, Priam. The Trojans devise a plan for Polyxena (Cassandra's sister) to "lure Achilles into our temple … under the pretext of wanting to marry him" (Wolf 125); her brother Paris will hide behind a God and strike Achilles with an arrow in his vulnerable heel (125). Cassandra rejects the plan on the grounds that her sister is being used as a decoy. Priam counters that "[s]he's eager for it. A real Trojan woman" (126). Cassandra's questioning of the patriarchal parameters of war marks her, by contrast to her sister, a traitor to her nation and her peoples; she refuses to consent to the plan and to keep silent. Gisela Weingartz suggests that Cassandra faces a paradox between her familial and her civic duties. As a priestess, "not a mother or wife" (Weingartz 41), Cassandra's duties to "expose the failures of monarchy [conflict with] the royal princess who is committed to the denial of such failure" (Weingartz 47). Cassandra can only serve her nation and her family, defined in *patria*rchal parameters, if she remains silent. To contradict the father-king is unthinkable and, thus, when she refuses to be silent, she is condemned by Priam and imprisoned in a wicker cage in an abandoned section of the fortress (Wolf 127, 128) (Agamemnon also keeps her in a wicker cage when sailing from Troy). It is not until after an unspecified period of time spent in darkness, madness, and solitude that the sword-belt of the Greek hero Achilles, proof of his death, is thrown through her trap door and she is released (132).

After her period of darkness, Iona, in Wolfe's text, arrives in Rome and is sent to a slave sorting-house (178). She is chosen to be paraded amongst fifty other conquered women as the Emperor Claudius' prizes of war (Wolfe 190, 198). Forced to fight against male slaves before the Emperor in the Games of the Coliseum (195), Boudicca imagines these strangers as Romans in order to kill them (201). Wolfe describes Boudicca as reduced to a "fever of animal combat" (202). Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry write that "for Romans, it benefited them to establish her as terrifying and monstrous … [emphasizing] the savage and unwomanly brutality of her actions" (39). Following her unlikely survival, Boudicca is thrown into a dungeon where she meets a Roman prisoner named Sophia who teaches her Latin and Roman history (Wolfe 209). Like all of the protagonists in this chapter, Boudicca is described as unusually intelligent and with a gift for languages, which stresses the use of the historical novel by women writers in order to show the importance of communication as a tool for survival.

After serving time in the dungeon, Boudicca is sold at the slave market to Andrea (Wolfe 219), who buys her for the brothel owner, Lucius Burrus (225). Like Inés in Allende's novel, Boudicca kills her master after he attempts to rape her (237). A run-away slave, Wolfe imagines that Boudicca eventually finds herself the lover of her former enemy, Marcus Atreus. Unlike traditional romances, Wolfe's Boudicca is a warrior whose ending comes in the form not of submission to domestic tranquility, but of dying as a hero on the battlefield. The novel is more of an erotic-historical because of its explicit sexual content and "rather than focusing on the heroine's domestic captivity" the novel depicts an

independent “heroine who travels across a broad … landscape” (Wallace, *Woman’s* 142). Wolfe, nevertheless, transforms the traditional erotic historical by refusing to valorize or normalize female sexual suffering and victimhood (191). Instead, Boudicca is adventurous, violent, brave, and a sexually desiring subject.

An alternative to the stereotype of heartless and hardened Romans, Boudicca, like Cleopatra, faces the legality of marrying transnationally. Marriages to non-Roman citizens were not recognized by the Republic. When Atreus desires to wed Boudicca (Wolfe 292), she realizes that she must become a Roman citizen (292). Upon petitioning the emperor to grant this request, Atreus is deceived into serving more time in the military. Returning from battle in Alexandria, he is murdered by the guards of the new emperor Nero (322). Wolfe highlights how Atreus, in his petitions to marry Boudicca, a murderess and Celtic enemy, is portrayed as committing treason (320) and Boudicca, by wanting to marry him, also commits treason against her Celtic homeland, of which she was once queen. Only after learning of Atreus’ death does Boudicca return to Viron.

A Dynasty of Daughters

Congruencies between women’s historical novels on early monarchs include the way in which each heroine’s life tragically ends with the lack of a male heir and the erasure of a maternal legacy. Not having children, particularly sons, creates several challenges for the heroines. Hatshepsut, who has two girls, Neferura and

Meryet, desires to name her eldest daughter heir. To her nephew Thutmose she quips: “What is to stop me getting rid of you? Then Neferura could indeed wear the Double Crown” (Gedge 328). When Neferura is poisoned, she laments that “all her hopes for a new line of female Kings had been pinned on Neferura” (353). Essentially, Hatshepsut sees her own death with the death of her daughter–she knows that now history will erase their lives. With the death of Neferura, power shifts increasingly in favour of Thothmose; he has her friends, advisers, and her lover Senmut murdered before claiming himself Pharaoh. Gedge’s novel ends with Hatshepsut knowingly drinking poison (403), but it is ambiguous whether this is an order from Thothmose or her own choice. Just as Hatshepsut’s line ends because she has not produced a son, so too does Nefertiti’s.

Nefertiti desires to make heir her eldest of six daughters, Meritaten, the only one after her father’s death and at the request of Nefertiti who keeps the original “aten” in her name (Moran 383, 389). She tells the priest, “Not Meritaten. She will rule with me. She will be my consort and reminder of our past. Anoint her Meritaten, Queen of Egypt” (438). Reminders of the past, however, often pose threats to the present; thus, Meritaten is murdered at the same time as Nefertiti, and Mutnodjmet realizes that “the reign of Nefertiti was finished. She was gone from Egypt” (452). Cleopatra’s heir is also murdered shortly after her own suicide. The only protagonist who has sons, one by Caesar and a daughter and two sons by Marc Antony, Cleopatra’s children are considered illegitimate by the Romans. After Caesar’s assassination, Caesarion

is left out of his will, but Antony takes up his cause against Octavian (George 856). With his life endangered, Cleopatra sends Caesarion to Coptos (859) but, following her defeat and death, Octavian's forces find and murder him (949). Her remaining children, including her daughter Selene, are walked in chains in Octavian's victory parade in Rome (950, 952) before being taken back into his household.

Boudicca's marriage to Prasutag, the King of the Iceni (340), produces two daughters (Wolfe 345). The poverty and reduced status of the Celts, including not being allowed to speak their own language in the cities, is disheartening. Pragmatically, Prasutag leaves half of his wealth to Nero and the other half to his daughters (353) following his death. The collection of his goods is undertaken by Roman soldiers, however, who breaking the peace treaty, rape Boudicca's daughters and whip Boudicca to near death (363). In a last effort, Boudicca tells her daughters to run as far south as they can and she organizes a Celtic alliance. Wolfe's narrative ends where Wolf's novel begins.

Cassandra faces death with her twins in the territory of her enemy (Wolf 41). The father of Cassandra's children is ambiguous because, after her confinement, she is 'forced' by Priam into marrying Eurypylos (78, 133). When he dies, Cassandra returns to Mount Ida to live in a matriarchal community of women actively resisting patriarchal rule. Weingartz suggests this utopian community "is an alternative way of living, apart from patriarchal brutality" (56), but, at the end of the novel, the matriarchal society is destroyed. However, Wolf the author, her narrator, and Cassandra indicate subversive political means

are always available; for example, when Cassandra's twins are born she cries out "to the goddess: 'Cybele, help!' –they had many mothers. And Aeneas was their father" (Wolf 134). Wolf implies Aeneas is the children's father, both biologically and symbolically, but the women she lives with in Mount Ida and the forbidden goddesses they worship, like Cybele, are all mothers.

According to Cynthia Eller, Wolf's novel, like Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1983), encourages problematic stereotypes about women such as "the valorization of motherhood, particularly of childbearing … [and the] characterization of women as innately intuitive, emotional, and nurturing, and of men as deficient in these qualities" (qtd. in Kraemer 242).[18] Heide Goettner-Abendroth, like Wolf, nevertheless, endorses a social organization around motherhood:

> At the social level, matriarchal societies are founded on motherhood and are based on the clan. Motherhood is the most important function in each society, for mothering creates the new generations that are the future of society … In matriarchies, it is not necessary to be a biological mother in order to be acknowledged as a mother, because matriarchies practice the common motherhood of a group of sisters. Each individual sister does not necessarily have children, but together they are all 'mothers' of any children that any of them have. This motherhood is founded on the freedom of

[18] Christine Hoff Kraemer refutes Eller's claims; she argues that women's historical novels focusing on goddess worshipping constitute a feminist revisioning of prehistory, which is important for feminist spiritualism today (242).

> women to decide on their own about whether or not to have biological children. (50)

The portrayal of motherhood in the plural in contrast to fatherhood in the singular, Wolf suggests, undermines patriarchal authority over the family.

The complexity of the family is seen, again, when, in preparing to escape from Troy. Aeneas tells Cassandra “take our children–… *our* children! –and leave the city” (Wolf 137). After refusing to leave and being raped by Ajax the Lesser (40, 137), Cassandra watches her homeland and Troy burn before being seized by the Greeks, suggesting her loyalty to her peoples and land or her foreboding of a future imperial Rome where Aeneas is heralded as ancestor. In contrast to Cassandra, who stays, Aeneas flees. Boudicca, too, is watching a city burn, but it is the city of her enemy, Londonium. The Imperial Roman capital burns to the ground in a final uprising by the Celts (Wolfe 368-9). In a brief Author’s Note, Wolfe explains that Boudicca, after the success of the uprising, takes poison and is buried secretly (Wolfe speculates the location is in the grove of kings beside her father) (369). Boudicca, like Cleopatra, prefers suicide over living in servitude and sacrificing her identity as a Celt. With her death, her lineage ends.

Conclusion

Revisiting the 1930s’ “histories of the defeated,” contemporary women’s historical novels on premodern monarchs and nobility suggest this time really gave birth to woman as a powerful political actor, if not national leader, and the

notion that a woman's life could forever shape and change the course of history (for better or for worse). In the novels in this chapter, each woman's power is conferred by her father, whom she often reveres and respects e.g., Boudicca's reverence for her Celtic King-father, Atthair. The heroine, nonetheless, temporarily disrupts his law, which is evident when analyzing the femino-centric topics of gender as masquerade, gender and sex, history, goddess identification, war, slavery, and establishing a matrilineage. In the end, however, the father's line proves persistent and unalterable; *patria*rchal foundations are never fully replaced or ended. A daughter or another woman is never permitted to follow as the next ruler or heir to her mother's nation, despite her mother's desire for this to be the case. While not continuing a maternal line directly, these inspiring political figures do have daughters, manifest in transnational feminist writers and daughters. Rejecting misogynistic historical and literary portrayals, the novelists here give each protagonist a voice and a chance for her to tell her own side of the story that, up until recently, has been silenced.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MIDDLE AGES: DIVINING MOTHERS

> Our culture is based upon the murder of the mother
> – Luce Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader*

In the woman's historical novel, early works on royal and noble women in the European and Byzantium middle ages (500-1453)[19] remain popular: e.g., Naomi Mitchison's, *Anna Comnena* (1928), and Zofia Kossak-Szczucka's first novel in her trilogy *The Crusaders* (1935) narrate the story of Emperor Alexius's gifted daughter Anna Comnena, who authored her father's biography in eleventh century Constantinople; Anya Seton's still much-loved *Katherine* (1954), which narrates Katherine Swynford's love affair with John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and her claims as the maternal line of the future Tudors; Norah Loft's *Queen in Waiting* (1955), which traces the life of Eleanor of Acquitaine, (queen of France first and later wife of England's Henry the II (son of Empress Matilda who battled her cousin Stephen for regency of England as seen in contemporary novels like Elizabeth Chadwick's, *Lady of the English* (2011)); and novels on the Scandinavian Vikings such as Sigrid Undset's *Gunnar's Daughter* (1909), which details Vigdis' incredible revenge after being raped by an Icelandic warrior, and giving birth to his child. Religion plays a prominent role in understanding the maternal during this time and influences a distinctive post 1970s feminist writing on this topic.

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[19] These dates mark the birth of Theodora, the future Empress of the Roman Empire, and the fall of the Byzantium Empire in 1453, which is also the year the Hundred Years War ended.

There is dissatisfaction with religion and the church defined and organized according to patriarchal parameters. There is a search for God and spiritual meaning through an alternative maternal genealogy of divine history, for example, a female prophet is imagined in Stevie Davies' *Impassioned Clay* (1999). Irigaray suggests that women must reject patriarchal religions that determine "the gender of God, the guardian of every subject and discourse, [as] always *paternal and masculine*, in the west" (*Irigaray Reader*, 186). Such discourses deny the existence of a "Mother God" (186) and reduce women to silence (166).

Like historians working on gender in medieval religious life (Barbara Newman, Ann Matter, Caroline Walker Bynum, and Julie Hassel to name a few), Irigaray argues that women must reinvent the divine through "body and soul, sexuality and spirituality" (*Irigaray Reader* 173), and insists that "the maternal should have a spiritual and divine dimension, and not be relegated to the merely carnal, leaving the divine to the genealogy of the father" (Whitford, "Section III" 159). Thus, "the divine and the maternal genealogy" together have the radical potential of "ending women's status as sacrificial objects" (159). As discussed in chapter one, feminist rewrites of early Christian women is now emerging, for example, Ki Longfellow's novel on Mary Magdalene. Reclaiming women's religious contributions and lives during the middle ages is also occuring, and many figures are being imagined for the first time (for example, novels on A'isha, the wife of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, include Sherry Jones's *The Jewel of Medina* (2008) and Kamran Pasha's *Mother of the Believers* (2009).

As this chapter shows, Diana Wallace's identification of two central themes in the 1990s British woman's historical novel continue to be relevant transnationally: "the first is a concern with religion as a narrative which imposes meaning on history, particularly through the notion of an apocalypse or a Second Coming" (*Woman's* 206); the second is "the concern with spectrality and spiritualism, and with the medium as a figure who connects past and present" (206). Wallace suggests that "the female medium becomes a suggestive figure for the historical novelist herself, ventriloquizing the voices of the past" (208). Drawing on A.Y. Byatt's *Angels and Insects* (1992), Michèle Roberts' *In the Red Kitchen* (1990), and Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999), Wallace believes the historical novel is unique in that the female medium is able to resurrect and give voice to the dead (209); in the works I discuss, however, the women are not mediums for the dead but for God.

The common theme in these novels is that the protagonist is chosen by God–God reveals himself to her and she becomes his messenger. Joelle Mellon writes:

> Mystics were supposedly able to move out of the realm of bodily life and into a purely spiritual world. … During the Middle Ages, women who were acknowledged by Church authorities enjoyed unequalled social privilege. They traveled with impunity to holy sites around the world, gave their advice to grateful bishops and kings, and were frequently canonized as saints after their deaths. (132).

Known, historically, as a time in Europe marked by feudalism, manorialism, the Vikings, Norman Conquests, Crusades, Black Death, 100 Years War, Mongol invasions/Empire, Peasant's Revolt, and the fall of the Byzantium Empire, the woman's historical novel suggests that the lives of women in the middle ages were in transition.

Personal transformation (social, sexual, national, class, religious) was not only possible but desirable. A woman, in a sense, could be reborn and her past life forgiven or forgotten if she was willing to take the necessary religious steps; thus, the emphasis on the maternal in these works, more often than not, is not realized through biological mothering, but through symbolic mothering, exemplified by the Virgin Mary, a mother through divine intervention. Julie Hassel, drawing on the *Hali Meiðhad*, a medieval sermon written on encouraging virgins to remain so, writes that "a medieval woman's autonomy–a life of quiet prayer and study, free from the distractions and inconveniences of tending to a husband or child" (36) was possible. This is evident in the novels discussed in this chapter, which include *The Journal of Hildegard of Bingen* by Barbara Lachman (1993), Gabriella Brooke's work *The Words of Bernfrieda* (1999), which takes place just prior to the Norman Conquest (1067), Shan Sa's *Impératrice* [*Empress*] (2003),[20] Stella Duffy's *Theodora* (2010), and *The Maid* (2011) by Kimberly Cutter. The topics I discuss include the rise to Empress, visions and virginity, women in war, and women's writing in the convent.

From Concubine to Empress

[20] I am using Adriana Hunter's English translation of the original written in French.

The woman's social rise to Empress, Sa's and Duffy's works suggest, runs parallel to a disavowal of female sexuality and a subsequent closeness with God. Sa's *Empress*, the only novel discussed that does not take up Christianity, focuses on the importance of religion (Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism) in a Chinese ruler's longevity. Sa's novel opens with the disappointment of Governor Delegate Wu Shi Yue upon the unnamed protagonist's birth, because she is a girl (Sa 3, 5). Recognized for having an unusual nature, like Hatshepsut, the girl is raised as a boy and given a first-class education (5, 7). When her father unexpectedly dies (15), however, the family is forced to return to his village in Wu. Following the funeral, the protagonist, along with her mother and sister, must live with her father's sons from his previous marriage and the rest of the Wu clan, whom confiscate the inheritance of the family (17). As the master of ceremonies for the elaborate funeral, her father's friend General Li makes the acquaintance of the child, now known as Heavenlight. Impressed by her extraordinariness, he proclaims, "[I will] take responsibility for your destiny" (26). Reduced to poverty and near servitude while living in Wu, Heavenlight reacts to the taunts of the local children who claim her father was merely a glorified commoner by drawing on her maternal heritage for legitimacy: "My grandfather and my maternal uncle were Great Ministers. My mother is the Emperor's cousin" (28-29). The child responds, "The maternal line counts for nothing" (29). This moment in the novel is not given great weight, but its impact on Heavenlight is such that it changes her life and suggests that the role of the maternal is the central theme of the novel. Change comes when General Li

intervenes and she is issued a decree from the Emperor to serve as a concubine in the Forbidden City (32) (a clear foremother to Tzu Hsi (1835-1908) whose biography was fictionalized by Pearl S. Buck in *Imperial Woman: The Last Empress of China* (1956)).

Sa writes, “Going to the kingdom of the divine Emperor would be a one-way journey; I was giving up the outside world forever” (33). When the envoy arrives, Heavenlight is informed that her new rank will be above her brothers, that she will be Talented One of the fifth rank (Sa 34). Two locks of hair from her mother and youngest sister braided together (35) are her only reminder of her past and reemphasize her bond with the women in her family; after all, she “[has] always venerated Mother as an idol” (133). Thus, the Emperor may be politically divine, but Heavenlight’s mother is also divine–a lesson she later applies to her own life by combining the two divinities into her person as a mother and Empress.

In the Forbidden City, Heavenlight’s life takes a dramatic turn when the Princess Sun of Jin and the King of Jin, also known as Little Phoenix, see her breaking in a difficult horse (Sa 65). The royals offer their compliments and the three develop a friendship. Unexpectedly, the Emperor declares Little Phoenix his heir and Supreme Son (76). When the Emperor dies, his wives and concubines are discarded (86). It is considered incestuous and taboo for the new Emperor to keep his father’s women. Heavenlight notes that “every woman in the Forbidden City–beautiful or ugly, intelligent or foolish, refined or vulgar–was fragrant dust. The whirlwind of history would carry them away, making no

distinctions" (86-7). Searching for spiritual meaning, Heavenlight returns to the life she began before entering the Forbidden City: when she was seven, she became an apprentice nun and entered a monastery (87). Precedent is broken, however, when the new Emperor Little Phoenix summons her return to court. It is clear he loves her, but he is also a weak leader and increasingly relies on her political advice, her mastering of State reports, and her gift for commentaries (106). Heavenlight quickly becomes a formidable and ruthless leader.

She secures her climb to the position of Empress by giving birth to six children, four of whom are sons. Having an heir to the throne permits Heavenlight to usurp the Empress Wang and the Emperor's favourite, the Resplendent Wife Xiao, by having them beaten and imprisoned (Sa 121). Recognizing her political talent, the Emperor hands over to Heavenlight all of his affairs (145). Heavenlight, reflecting in maternal terms believes "[t]he millions of souls in the Empire had become a huge family in which [she] was the embodiment of energetic and authoritarian mother" (155). Under her husband's name, Heavenlight effectively rules the empire, which experiences unprecedented wealth and prosperity. Inspired by her commoner father's climb to power from humble beginnings, she dismantles many of the old social hierarchies and allows merchant traders to flourish with the cultivation of silk. Confucianism and Chinese are spread by founding academies (157-59). Education is also offered to those of lowly birth (161). When her army defeats Korea (163), however, this is considered a major triumph, one deserving of a visit to Tai Mountain.

The pilgrimage to Tai Mountain is only undertaken by Emperors who "accomplished some extraordinary earthly feat" (Sa 164). Not willing to let her husband steal her glory, Heavenlight petitions to climb with him (166): "It is true that, in China's history, no woman has ever been admitted to the supreme Service of the Empire" (166-7). Little Phoenix, of course, grants Heavenlight the great honour of accompanying him and participating in the ceremony. Due to her husband's failing health, the gauze screening her seat behind the throne is removed and, like Nefertiti who is given equal power, the two thrones now sit side by side: "My power was no longer contested" (176). When Little Phoenix dies (183), her son Miracle reluctantly takes the throne (192). At the same time, Heavenlight is given the new title of Supreme Empress and Mother Regent, who has the ability to issue decrees (188). Like his father before him, Miracle has no interest in ruling the Empire and all of the political affairs are delegated to his mother.

Heavenlight inaugurates the "Era of Lowered Arms and Joined Hands" (Sa 226) to symbolize her desire for China's peace and moves the capital to Luoyang (232). In Luoyang, she rebuilds the previous temples and buildings to a renewed sense of glory. The power of the oracle ultimately secures her power. Heavenlight knows, like Hatshepsut and Cleopatra, that defining herself as a reincarnated god is paramount for her earthly legitimacy and success as a ruler. Sa writes:

> During the morning audience, ministers and soothsayers deciphered the oracle and translated these characters: "DIVINE MOTHER ON

> THIS EARTH, THROUGH HER, THE EMPORER'S REIGN SHALL BE PROSPEROUS AND EVERLASTING." For the first time since the world sprang from chaos, the gods were identifying a woman as the human sovereign! (236)

Befittingly, she is given the new title uniting both masculinity and femininity: "Divine Mother Sacred Emperor" (237). Raising a great imperial parade to celebrate her success and breaking "the ancestral law that forbade women to officiate in the rites of celebration," Heavenlight observes the completion of the Temple of Clarity (238).

In the most impressive temple in the Empire, Heavenlight sits on the throne for the first time, draped in sunlight. The ministers and kings declare, "The Sacred Emperor is truly a divinity!" (Sa 239). Breaking with tradition, yet again, Heavenlight, much like Hatshepsut, dons:

> The ink-red emperor's tunics and men's style shoes. On [her] man's topknot, [she] wore [her] husband's crown decorated with twenty-four tiers of jade pearls. With the jade scepter in [her] hand … [Heavenlight] stepped into the heart of the Temple of the Ten Thousand Elements and communed with Heaven and the spirit of the ancestors. (240)

She is proclaimed Buddha's celestial daughter named Purity of Heavenlight (241). Chosen by the people, Heavenlight becomes the first woman emperor of China and replaces the old Tang dynasty and the calendar from the ancient Xia dynasty with her own Zhou dynasty in 690 AD. The Zhou dynasty "shall bear

the maternal name!" (245) be "the root that would become a tree in the centuries to come" (246) and be"based on peace, compassion, and divine justice" (243). Like the protagonists discussed in the previous and succeeding chapter, Heavenlight's wish for the maternal to flourish is ultimately refused and rejected.

The absence of a male heir should not plague the life of the Empress, but death (Splendor), usurping and suicide (Wisdom), exile (Future), and abdication (Miracle), leaves her without one. Heavenlight muses, "I had renounced the affection of my sons long ago and concentrated all my maternal passions on her [Moon]. She was erudite, intelligent, and blessed with the scope for politics that was lacking in the male members of both clans. But this princess would never be heir to the throne. The ministers would never let her reign" (Sa 267-8). The lack of heir proves detrimental to Heavenlight, who undertakes a monumental visit to Mount Song to perform the Sanctification of Heaven (274). Seeking a sign from the Supreme Being, she is dismayed that "the god was deaf to [her] prayers … [Moonlight] had fashioned the divine will to take the reigns from men's hands. But God had not appointed a woman to rule the world. [She] was just a usurper, and this is why [she] had no heir!" (275). Weeping in silence, the sun floods the temple and embraces her body, which she interprets as approval from God and as a sign of eternal life and energy (276). After this pilgrimage, Heavenlight recalls her son Future from exile to be heir (285).

When Future takes the throne (Sa 307), much like the protagonists in the previous novels, Heavenlight's Zhou dynasty comes to an end (309). Future re-instates the Tang dynasty (307) and changes Heavenlight's will after she dies

(312). He withdraws her title of “Emperor” and replaces it with “August Empress of Celestial Law” (312), “the wife and mother of Tang dynasty sovereigns” (315). Her epitaph, a commemorative hymn on her reign, is also rejected and, because the Court cannot agree on what to write, remains blank (316). Sa suggests that Heavenlight, her empire, her dynasty, her capital cities, and all of her building projects have been all but erased from history: “all that remains of [her] discredited name and [her] forgotten dynasty is [her] [blank] stela,” (318). In a sense, Heavenlight’s stela becomes a symbol of the women’s historical novel; it demonstrates that the genre is a suitable feminist medium for authors reimagining women’s silenced voices and their negligent erasures from history.

Duffy’s novel on Theodora, the sixth century Empress of the Roman Empire, like Sa’s work, traces her protagonist’s rise to power through religion. Growing up in Constantinople, “the centre of the new Rome” (3), Duffy describes the religious schism during this time as between “the prevailing Western orthodoxy that the Christ was two in one, both fully divine and fully human; the Emperor Anastasius on the other hand, along with many key figures of faith in the Eastern branches of the Church was confident in his belief that whatever humanity the Christ had possessed was subsumed by his more vital divinity” (4). Within this religious context, Duffy describes the early life of Theodora, the daughter of a bear trainer, with her sisters and mother as a dancer and actress in the Hippodrome. With a daring spirit, like Heavenlight, Theodora

learns to master her audience and attract attention–she also loves the Hagia Sophia.

Duffy writes that “always in this building, Theodora felt other people’s pain and shook it off to concentrate on her own need; now she climbed on shaking legs, with stiff muscles, to the gallery, the place of women, unlit and quiet” (17). Theodora’s mother Hypatia ensures her daughters’ education so that they will not become actresses, because “at least then she will be able to find husbands for them, marry them legally, marry them out of the stink of the theatre” (Duffy 19). This wish, however, is never realized and, while her eldest daughter Comito finds success as a singer, twelve year old Theodora is forced to become a prostitute as “girls who joined the Hippodrome and Kynegion companies, as dancers and performers, also went in as whores” (38). Prostitution allows Theodora to financially support her family but forfeits her chance to ever legally marry (104).

Finding success as a stage actress, Theodora also gives birth at fourteen to an unwanted daughter named Ana (Duffy 57): “No natural mother, she took the child home and left her there” (57) to be raised by her mother Hypatia. Theodora’s life changes when she meets Hecebolus and, sacrificing her career, runs away with him to Apollonia to become his mistress (68-9). Theodora’s relationship with Hecebolus becomes problematic when she desires he marry her, believing that, as an ex-actress, if she repents enough “a woman might redeem herself enough for marriage” (105). Theodora never has a chance to prove this, however, as she realizes Hecebolus has another lover who is pregnant

with his child and is forced to leave. Duffy articulates that "as a mistress, she was neither whore nor wife, and as such, the Church could not help her" (116).

Fleeing Apollonia, Theodora arrives in Alexandria where she learns that if she wants to return to Constantinople, without having to sell her body, she can join a monastery in the desert. The Patriarch plans to send some of its converts to the city to found a new community of women (Duffy 137). Theodora consents, knowing she will have to play the role of the true penitent and will be under Brother Severus' laws, a man deposed by the Emporer Justin (155). Only after Severus believes she has truly repented her sins will she be free to go with the Patriarch's blessing.

Alone in the desert, exiled as Christ was, for forty days and nights, Theodora experiences her true spiritual awakening and conversion (Duffy 161). According to Duffy, "a presumably barren ex-dancer, who'd slept with far too many men, not all of them for money, but not many for free, … had found a new life as an anti-Chalcedonian believer at a time when there were even more attacks on that group than before" (177). As a new convert, Theodora is given a mission to return to the city and garner sympathy for the Anti-Chalcedonian cause with the Empire's highest officials, primarily Justinian, the Emperor's heir (203, 226). Reformed and reinvented, Theodora is summoned to the palace to help Justinian plan a special consular celebration (241) and impresses him so much that he gives "her a small suite of rooms in the Palace" (242). Realizing the advantage of a reformed beloved star actress at his side, in touch with the people, a follower of the Alexandrian Patriarch, a Constantinopolitan, and a

brilliant companion, Justinian declares his desire to marry Theodora (263). He will change the law so that a repentant actress who renounces her former life and seeks forgiveness and redemption, "with the correct teaching, penance, guidance" (266), is deemed suitable for marriage; she will be reborn as a "virgin bride" (287). Thus, Theodora's rise to power from a commoner to an Empress, like Heavenlight's, is intimately linked with her religious conversion and her ability to bring peace to the warring religious factions in the Empire. In a poetic twist, Theodora marries Justinian in the Church of Hagia Sophia (297). Duffy writes, "her church, the place she had felt safest as a child, the cool marble that had given solace to her aching flesh, the chanting and praying and liturgy that had provided the background for her dreams of escape, were now the foreground of her very real wedding ceremony" (297).

Visions and Virginity: Medieval Sibyls

Religious visions constitute an important part of women's lives during the middle ages. Paralleling the genealogy of prophecies by Cassandra in Wolf's work, Mary Magdalene's visions in Longfellow's novel, Claudia's gift of foresight in May's novel *Pilate's Wife* (2006), Theodora's conversion while in the midst of the desert in Duffy's work, and Julian of Norwich's visions in Seton's *Katherine* (1954), Cutter's and Lachman's novels bring this topic to the forefront in their texts on virgins that are later historically venerated as saints.

Lachman's text, an imagined diary, chronicles the monastic life of Hildegard of Bingen from the end of 1151 to the beginning of 1153. This year

marks an important time for Hildegard, a highly regarded author of books on visions such as the *Scivias* (Lachman 4), as she has just moved because of a vision (36, 123) to Rupertsberg, Germany to build an independent convent and serve as abbess. She describes herself in maternal terms:

> So it is that I have been given birth to not one child but twenty-four daughters, unruly, untaught, variously gifted in beauty, in music, in visual and manual dexterity, disobedient nearly all of them, some amenable to learning letters and copying, others trainable enough in needlework or preparation of medicinals, all of them looking to me with mixed emotions as their mother abbess. (42)

Praying to the Virgin Mary to watch over her women, Hildegard is tasked with organizing the convent's music, over which she has complete autonomy and creative license. The occasion is the Feast of St. Ursula (a Christian princess who, delaying marriage for three years, set out by order of God with her group of virgin followers on a pilgrimage to Rome; this "truly royal contingent of holy women" were martyred in Cologne by attacking Huns (16)). Like Heavenlight, who is the first woman to undertake the spiritual pilgrimage to Tai Mountain, Hildegard encourages exceptional women to take up the pilgrimage to Rome (150) and is the subject matter in *The Book of the Maidservant* (2009) by Rebecca Barnhouse, which details a servant's pilgrimage from England to Rome with Dame Margery Kempe, famed for her religious calling and personal conversations with God.

Ursula's death is central for Hildegard in her own life as a virgin. Virginity is linked with divinity. Experiencing menstruation is likened to martyrdom with "their own life-giving blood" (Lachman 146); Lachman writes that, for the virgin, "her womanly blood shed out of love for Christ endows her with a kind of divine and immortal protection against evil" (34). In honour of "Ursula herself who so inspires [her]" (16) and the relic of her convent houses (113), Hildegard confesses her desire to receive her visions for directing her music and hymn; she attributes her visions as coming from the Voice of Wisdom, who is personified as a woman (82). Lachman, quoting Hildegard in her paratext, writes:

> Truly I saw these visions not in dreams, neither in sleep nor in ecstatic trance, neither with human bodily eyes or external ears, nor did I sense them by withdrawing myself into hidden places; rather did I willingly receive them–vigilantly, considering them carefully, in clear thought according to the will of God, in open, accessible places with my human interior eyes and ears. (5)

Hildegard's visions–privately experienced and publicized through speech and writing–-also come, like the mystic Lady Julian's of Norwich in Seton's work, during times of illness.

Interspersed with Hildegard's visions, Lachman writes the everyday running of her convent, her illnesses and treatment of others' ailments, and her creative outpourings. She, also, comments on her personal relationships, such as

passionately missing her beloved Rikkarda who, she believes, betrayed her by going to another nunnery (Lachman 145). Rikkarda's death in the new nunnery also causes Hildegard inconsolable grief (132). While Hildegard refers to herself as mother and Rikkarda as daughter (67), there are sexual undertones to her sentiments and visions. Lachman explains that Hildegard believes herself to be a suitable medium for visions because she is a woman: "she is used as an instrument of the divine in all her human, womanly, bodily weakness" (48, 100). This sentiment is echoed by Jehanne in Cutter's novel on possibly the most widely written about figure from this time, Jehanne d'Arc.

Cutter offers, like Pamela Marcantel's *An Army of Angels* (1997), a psychological and personal portrait of Jehanne. Cutter writes, "was twelve the first time she heard the voices. It was in the garden in Domrémy, behind her parents' house" (4). Like Hildegard, Jehanne is inspired by Christian virgin martyrs, particularly Catherine, an early Christian in Roman times (Cutter 4). The voice tells Jehanne that she is "*my virgin, Maid of France*" (6) and fills Jehanne with a deep blinding light inside. Cutter rationalizes Jehanne's visions as a means for dealing with her tumultuous childhood; her father has been disabused of his lands by the English–"most of northern France had gone over to the English side" (10) because the queen, on her husband's death, "married her daughter to their [English] King, Henry V, and denounced her own son, Charles VII, the true heir to the throne, as illegitimate, a bastard" (20). Also, Jehanne's fatherseverely beats her, the Burgundians and Goddons are ravaging the

countryside (and kill her pregnant sister), and she is to be married to a boy she despises (27).

It is during this time that Jehanne prays for long hours and is visited in visions bythe Archangel Michael and the two virgin saints, Catherine and Margaret (Cutter 13). Her refuge comes when she hears the prophecy that "France will be ruined by a woman and restored by a virgin from the forests of Lorraine" (21). Cutter juxtaposes the queen's sexuality as monstrous, a destructive womb, with the purity of the virgin, who is untainted. Hildegard holds a similar belief when she claims: "In Christ is neither male nor female; therefore our practice of perpetual virginity sets us apart from women in the world. Our vows should accord us certain strengths and privileges, opportunities for education, and appreciation of beauty" (150). However, she also believes that "women are weaker than men" (152); and that "we [women] are set apart in the religious life. Our vows protect us. We [women] are not subjected to the rule of husbands, the mortal dangers of childbirth, or the physical terrors I see reflected in the frightened eyes of the townswomen of Bingen" (152). Hassel clarifies that the rhetoric of virginity describes "an enviable relationship that exists between virgins and Christ … in contrast to a marriage to a man, the virgin's relationship to Christ is one of freedom, in which her self-interest is fully realized" (34). The virgin woman not only has a more loving marriage to Christ, but also never suffers bodily (childbirth, miscarriage, pregnancy, domestic violence, rape) as a woman might when married to an earthly man.

In a sense, the virgin becomes a "consort to a great man" and "will experience an autonomy that is unimaginable for all but the highest-ranking of noble women, an enviable state entirely contingent upon her marriage to Christ (Hassel 35). Though Theodora in Duffy's novel is not truly a virgin, she is repentant and suggests that her new marriage to Christ the son of God, prepares her for and makes her suitable to marry an earthly Emperor, Justinian. For Jehanne, however, her mission as a virgin is clear: "*You must raise an army and drive the English from France. Take the Dauphin to be crowned King at Reims. This is God's command*" (Cutter 27). Jehanne confides her visions to her pious uncle Durand (42) and convinces him of their authenticity and of her destiny to fulfill the prophecy about the virgin from Lorraine (44).

Aided by her uncle, she sits outside Sir Robert's château awaiting an audience. In contrast to Hildegard, who holds social status, Jehanne knows:

> If she'd been rich, maybe, or a nun, educated and proper, they would not have laughed at her. Everyone knew and respected the visions of Colette de Corbie and Marie Robine of Avignon. Marie, who'd prophesized that a virgin from Lorraine would appear on horseback and bear arms to deliver France from its enemies. But they were learned holy women, friends of the aristocracy. Not a dirty unlearned peasant from the cow pastures of Domrémy. (Cutter 51)

Despite Jehanne's class-social disadvantage (like Theodora's and Heavenlight's), her sexuality, like Hildegard's, ensures her believability–her purity and truthfulness.

While waiting for Sir Robert to answer her demands to send her to the King, she declares:

> *It was in Vancouleurs that I became the Virgin. La Pucelle. Whatvever was left of Jehannette, the cowardly daughter of Jacques d'Arc, died during those long winter months of waiting for Sir Robert's support. Slipped away and fell to the ground in a little pile of dry skin … I became something else altogether.… For a virgin is not quite human. A virgin can walk through door the others cannot. Her hand is a skeleton key.… Believe that you are the Maid of Lorraine, the voices said. Know that you have always been the Maid of Lorraine*. (Cutter 54)

Jehanne's reincarnation and embodiment of the Virgin, however, entails that she become a "soldier of God" (74), a warrior for France.

The Woman Warrior

Jehanne finds the role of warrior thrust upon her by God. After dreaming about the defeat of the French at Orléans, she begs for Sir Robert to send her to Chinon (Cutter 77). Essential to Jehanne's transformation is, not her sexuality, but her appearance. Attracting some believers from the nobility, Jehanne is taught how to fight (67) and begins dressing "as a member of the opposite sex" (70), though

"expressly forbidden by the Bible. A sin punishable by death" (70). Her new clothes "made her into someone else, a creature of her own invention. Not Jehanne, daughter of Jacques and Zabillet d'Arc of Domrémy, but Jeanne the Virgin, Child of God. And it seemed to her that she had crossed a bridge of some kind. Left one world behind and moved forward into another" (71). Her final alteration comes when she cuts her long dark hair, justifying her actions by saying that God has sanctioned and approved these decisions (71). Thus, Jehanne justifies her mission and her cross-dressing and murdering of soldiers as unfortunate but necessary acts in order to restore France's glory–as God's missionary she is absolved from sin. On route to Chinon, Jehanne physically feels Michael whispering, "*You must hurry now, little one. There isn't much time…. You'll be dead in two years*" (91). When her men see Jehanne talking to Michael, "they thought to themselves, *She is sent by God! She is going to save France!*" (93), and a renewed fervour for the cause erupts.

Upon reaching the king, Jehanne tells him her mission is to have him crowned in Reims (Cutter 96). Much to his surprise, she tells him that she will fight in the battles: "I will do whatever God tells me to do. I know He will have me out on the battlefield" (123). The custom made armor, Cutter describes, as transformative: "*it's not just that it protects you. It changes you, separates you from the world. From other people. Puts you on a different level…. you fight. And sometimes you kill*" (126). Complete with the hero Charles Martel's sword, Jehanne, destined by "the will of God" (173), leads the King's army to victory in a series of battles, including Orléans (197). Her victory at Orléans convinces the

King that she “truly must be the Daughter of God” (203) and hundreds of peasants shout “Pucelle! Pucelle! Pucelle!” (203) in celebration. After the King’s coronation (210), rather than engaging Burgundy in battle over Paris, the king negotiates a series of truces. For Jehanne, this hesitation and deliberate stalling signals her doom (216) and the silence of her voices.

Facing imminent defeat in Paris without the King’s army, Jehanne knows her time for defeat has come and is forced into retreat. Sensing Jehanne’s restlessness, the King is eager to rid himself of her; he rewards her and her family by ennobling them and tells her there are some towns along the Loire he’d like her to recapture (Cutter 239). Though Jehanne’s visions tell her she will not come back alive, she accepts the mission and is prepared to die for her faith. Taken prisoner by the Burgundians (243) and sold to the English (250), she stands on trial for treason and is discredited as a mystic (Cutter also narrates times when Jehanne must undergo gynecological examinations by church officials to confirm she is not inhabited by the devil and that she is truely the virgin she claims to be). Separating the will of God from the organization of the church, Jehanne invokes appreciating “the unique spirituality of women as a force beyond the pale of the institution of the Church, a true alternative spirituality” (Hassel 8). Undermining the patriarchal church and the authority of “their position as representatives of God on earth” (Wallace, *Woman’s* 122), Jehanne is condemned by the church and her body is burnt three times (Cutter 279).

In Brooke's novel *The Words of Bernfrieda*, the woman warrior does not figure prominently until after Tancred, Fredesenda's Norman husband, dies in Hauteville in 1057 (144). Similar to Rebecca Barnhouse's *The Book of the Maidservant* (2009), Brooke's work is written using Bernfrieda's voice narrating her half-sister and mistress Fredesenda's life. Usurped from her prominent position, Fredesenda, now a widow, decides that she and Bernfrieda will join her son Rogier and go to Apulia, Italy, where her son Robert rules. Bernfrieda makes the transnational journey, knowing "[she] would never see Hauteville again" (Brooke 146). Initially allies, Senda's sons successfully fight the Saracens in Sicily (162), but "then they drew swords against each other three years ago because Robert insisted on paying for Rogier's help with gold rather than land" (167). Rogier needs the land to fulfil his promise to his new bride, Judith, requiring, as per custom, that she receive a morning gift of new land (171).

Distressed by her sons' feud, Senda declares, "this time one of them will die, Bernfrieda" (Brooke 169) and so feels compelled to intervene. Lying about her son's paternity (188), suggesting the power of the maternal, Fredesenda convinces her son Robert to give in or else she will disclose his illegitimacy to the Pope. Robert's attempts to send messengers to Rogier, however, go unanswered, prompting Fredesenda to go to the battle site herself (200).

With Bernfrieda by her side, Fredesenda is met at Robert's camp by Gaita, his wife. Brooke writes:

> Tall, as any of the handful of Norman soldiers that instantly surrounded her, Robert's wife took a few steps and stood in front of

> Senda. Gaita was a big woman, but pleasingly proportioned. She wore a short linen tunic over a mail coat that reached her knees, split in the middle to allow her to ride. Mail leggings and a huge sword completed her attire. Her braided blond hair, her one concession to her womanhood, hung well past her waist in a thick rope. Otherwise she could have been a soldier. (204)

Like Jehanne, Gaita lives as a warrior in a sparse tent with her battle gear in the corner (Brooke 204). With Gaita and her mother-in-law now in agreement to end the fighting, the trio of women travel to Mileto to convince Rogier's wife Judith to end the war.

Judith, considering making peace, regards Gaita suspiciously. Senda responds that "Gaita fights as a man, but she joins in this for Robert" (Brooke 208). Poignantly describing the juxtaposition in the depiction of women in the woman's historical novel set in this time, Brooke writes that "*[t]hey are so different, the Norman Princess and the Lombard one. One raised at Saint Evroult, surrounded by monks, the other trained on the battlefield, surrounded by enemies*" (208). Brooke suggests that both women, in their respective ways, are warriors; both are brave and courageous, as Fredensenda herself is in risking her life for peace. Showing women in the role of peace negotiators and, ultimately, orchestrating the war, Brooke describes Fredesenda and her women kin entering Rogier's tent (214). Demanding Rogier to order Robert's release, Fredensenda, though seriously ill, goes to extreme lengths to ensure her sons make peace (225) and finally collapses when they do. Within a week, she suffers

from a stroke and dies (233). Brooke confirms that Fredesenda is a casualty of patriarchal war, caught in the middle between her sons as family members and between her sons as political rivals.

Convent Culture and Women's Writing

The centrality of the convent in the woman's historical novel is clear, particularly as we see a transformation from illiteracy to literacy. Mary Carruthers argues that "writing itself was judged to be an ethical activity in monastic culture" (195) and, thus, the medieval woman writing had the rare "opportunity for public discourse within the normative tradition of hagiography" (Zimbalist 107). Mellon adds that:

> Chastity and isolation, also made it possible for medieval nuns , undistracted by the demands of family life, to create art, literature, and music, much of which reflected their devotion to the Virgin. The cloister was almost the only place in medieval life where scholarship for women was encouraged. Nuns were instructed to follow the example of the Virgin Mary in this, who was frequently depicted in medieval art with a book in her hand. Imagery of the time showed Mary as a serious scholar. (123-4)

Though Jehanne is illiterate and not a nun (which was almost always a prerequisite for being considered a legitimate mystic (Mellon 133)), in Cutter's novel her interpretation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria finds resonance with Clemence of Barking's twelfth century historical work *Life of Saint Catherine*.

Barbara Zimbalist explains:

> In keeping with hagiographic convention, Clemence depicts Catherine's *vita and passio* as a close imitation of Christ's. Catherine performs *imitation Christi* when speaking publicly and praying privately; in her speeches, she publicly proclaims faith, converts pagans to Christianity, proclaims herself an eternal intercessor, models devotional practices such as prayer and praise, and performs the ultimate *imitation* of matrydom. All of the speech acts imitate those in Christ's *vita* and *passio*. (113)

Zimbalist argues that "when Clemence imitates Catherine, who is in turn imitating Christ, imitation functions as both the content and the form of the text. Clemence's retelling of Catherine's life provides the model for her imitation of Catherine" (112). A similar process occurs in Cutter's work, which also invokes imitation in her retelling of Jehanne's life.

According to Zimbalist's formulation, Cutter employs a powerful feminist literary technique through imitation when she emulates Jehanne through the medium of her novel and, within the novel, Jehanne not only imitates Catherine but also Christ. Brad Herzog clarifies that "even the act of writing a hagiography can substitute for martyrdom as a Christian labor or devotional exercise validating a holy life" (222). Unlike Jehanne who writes none of her own words, in Lachman's and Brooke's novels we are privileged with the protagonist as writer. Contrary to Mellon's claims, however, Hildegard expresses what Gubar and Gilbert call a female "anxiety of authorship" (49), and

Bernfrieda in Brooke's work continuously fights for her permission to write, possibly because her work conforms little with theological expectations and parameters on what type of writing women were permitted to undertake.

Unique to Lachman's Hildegard is that she, unlike the "prophets of the Old Testament," (Lachman 83) who were not required to write their visions, is compelled to write. Lachman explains that, despite no formal schooling (80, 83) and being raised as a child in a hermitage, Hildegard "was summoned in a vision to 'tell and write' what she 'saw and heard' in her visions" (xiii). Lachman further notes that "Hildegard, in a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, sought confirmation of the prophetic call that prompted her to write" (xiii). In a sense, Hildegard seeks permission from the patriarchy to take up a practice ordinarily reserved for men. She muses on the "particular demands for writing things down that God placed [her] through the Voice of Wisdom" (83). Hildegard also questions how it is that God wants her to write her visions when "as a woman [she] was expressly forbidden to teach publicly, even if [her] visions and prophecies were a gift from God" (83). If God has ordained her writing, much like Jehanne believes God has given her permission to break patriarchal laws about cross-dressing and killing the English, then she can justify her creative outpourings and overcome the official rulethat states a woman must "keep the prophecy close to her heart and in silence" (84). Hassel suggests that female mystics and their "mystical experience countered clerical authority, allowing women a place from which to speak in a male clerical culture" (5). Referring to Bynum's readings, Hassel continues: "in their focus on the Eucharist, their

mystical visions served to delineate further the different, and unequally esteemed, spiritual capacities of priests and women. ... Mystical devotion to the Eucharist enhanced the ecclesiastical primacy of the priest" (7-8); thus, a male priest is seen as necessary to mediate between a woman and her contact with God (Hassel 8). The Pope, always a man (except in Donna Woolfolk Cross's controversial feminist novel *Pope Joan* (1996) that claims a medieval woman disguising herself as the monk John Anglicus reigned as Pope John VIII until her pregnancy when she was discovered and murdered), allows Hildegard, in conjunction with her visions, to establish her own convent (Lachman 2).

In addition, the context of the convent permits Hildegard to preserve her works for others and to argue for women's education, particularly because of their inherent weaknesses (Lachman 150, 152). This weakness, for Hassel, perhaps signals a "modesty topos" for someone so accomplished, but it might, also, signify "the power of the role of weakness in a Christian worldview. Jesus himself was meek" (5-6). Though she has recorded many songs in her *Scivias*, Hildegard claims, "I hadn't really thought much about the possibility of writing down the melodies as well as the texts until yesterday, when, for the entire time between Prime and Terce, Basel, Volmar [her scribe], and I discussed reasons for continuing to write things down" (Lachman 81). Her writings include showing how her Benedictine community differs from others in France and England and how her work allow others to learn her music in praise of St. Ursula and most importanty "how we praise God in this convent" (81). Hildegard views herself "growing so fond of the fruits of scribal records" because they detail women's

lives which had "never been lodged in their own records or choir books" before (115). The archives of the convent and its scriptorium provide insight into women's lives in an innovative way that traditional historical accounts did not authorize. The establishment of these archives further serve as important precursors for such works as Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*.

The authority of the convent archive which dominates works like Mitchinson's *Anna Comnena*, in which the princess retires to a monastery with her mother, the Empress Irene, and writes her biography on her father, is also seen in Brooke's *The Words of Bernfrieda*. After the death of Fredesenda's husband Tancred, she moves to Italy and, with her servant and half-sister Bernfrieda, enters the Abbey of Santa Eufemia. The novel opens with Bernfrieda describing herself learning to write, working in the scriptorium (Brooke 3) on precious parchments and detailing Senda's life. Mentioned fleetingly in historical records such as in Brother Amatus of Monte Cassino's chronicle (10), Senda is known only as the "mother of Robert Guiscard, Duke of Apulia" (4). Bernfrieda, inspired by "Queen Emma's Missal" in Saint Evroult, sets out to counter Brother Amatus' chronicle by writing in her own words her mistress' and kin's life. In a fashion similar to Judith Merkle Riley's *A Vision of Light: A Margaret of Ashbury Novel* (2006), in which the illiterate Margaret, inspired by a vision, persists in having her voice and life written by the scribe Brother Gregory, Bernfrieda asks, "how can Amatus record the truth if he only hears Robert's side?" (11). The response is that "if a chronicle is written by a man of

the cloth and if its subject is a man devout to our Holy Church like Duke Robert is, how can the truth elude the chronicler?" (11-12).

Bernfrieda's questioning of the chronicler's bias leads her teacher to conclude "women should leave the written word alone. For what good are reading and writing without a mind capable of discerning what is important from what isn't?" (Brooke 12). For this reason, Bernfrieda writes her own chronicle in secret. She knows the "events momentous only to women's lives, mine and Senda's" would never be recorded in the official record (15). Continuing to challenge her teacher, however, she asks if Senda's life will be included in Amatus' work. Brother Gaufredus's response is that "'what can a mother teach a male child?' He gestured toward the bleeding Agatha. 'Did your Lady perform saintly deeds? Has she been a paragon of piety? What can a woman do that her children's children would want to read about?'" (18). Rejecting the accepted traditional method for women to tell stories, the tapestry, Bernfrieda asks, "How can I portray the haughtiness of Senda's mother, Lady Mathilda, on cloth? How can I describe with thread what I felt when I saw her ride by father's side? No, not with a needle but with my quill I will record Senda's story!" (18). Fredesenda acknowledges, like Hildegard, that, according to patriarchal society, God never intended women to write" (19), so she writes her manuscript secretly.

The manuscript, however, not only is a testament to her mistress' life but also chronicles Bernfrieda's life in the process–Brooke suggests the archivist can never distance herself completely from the record and, to some extent, in telling another's tale, we are always telling our own. For, if this is truly Senda's story

alone, the reader would never learn about Bernfrieda's mother, Alsinda, who is displaced by her lover Mauger when he marries Senda's mother, Mathilda (Brooke 25). Luce Irigaray writes that "[a] man can have mistresses or go with prostitutes … he needs a legitimate wife. A wife-mother. A body-object which is there, which does not move, which he can go back to whenever he likes. A legitimate wife as a guarantee of the maternal corporeal" (*Irigaray Reader* 49). The new bride, after the birth of Fredensenda, "summoned Mother and [Bernfrieda] to the keep to serve her" (Brooke 27). Separated from her mother, who is set to doing chores, Bernfrieda comes to serve Fredesenda and, essentially, takes up the role of mothering her. In contrast to the other protagonists, Bernfrieda has no connection or love for religion– instead she sees it as that which condemns her unmarried, adulteress mother. She remarks, "I grew up hating the priest and all he stood for. God was an alien being who hated my mother and was going to let her burn for eternity. How could I love Him?" (29). Bernfrieda's mother experiences a painful death in childbirth, caused, Bernfrieda implicitly suggests, by being forced by Matilda to do the laundry in freezing water (31).

Just as religion has little merit in Bernfrieda's life, she resolves to never love a man and remains unmarried and childless, having learned the lessons of her "sinful" mother's life, death, and subsequent burial in an unmarked grave. Senda's sister declares, "Mother said that was the reason your mother could not bring forth another live child. Her death was a punishment for her sins, and she is burning in hell" (Brooke 34). Without any prospect of marrying, Bernfrieda, as

her half-sister's handmaid, accompanies Fredesenda after her marriage to Tancred and her move to Hauteville. Only after her move to Italy and the Abbey of Santa Eufemia, in which Bernfrieda begins to write, does she, also, begin to talk to God (163). Thus, Brooke links women's writing with the divine. Bernfrieda's peace comes from working in the scriptorium and she declares, "*My truce with God is so recent and before then, prayer meant nothing to me. I lived without God for so long. As a young girl I shut Him out because He did not care for the suffering of my mother's*" (208). Bernfrieda explains, however, that she has always feigned to be religious for social acceptance: "I did not want to be an outcast, as Mother had been" (208). After living in the Abbey, "[she] began to rethink the past and write my [her] chronicle, [she] also began to realize that I [she] had survived!" (209). Brooke writes, "For the first time I talked to God as if he listened. I never recite prayers I was taught in my youth. They still mean nothing to me. But I have learned to tell God what is on my mind" (209). For Bernfrieda, like Hildegard, there is a relation between writing and an awakening of the divine. Following Fredesenda's death, Bernfrieda finishes the work by moving with Brother Gaufredus to the Abbey of Santa Agatha, where she continues to labour happily in the scriptorium. Receiving approval to aid Brother Gaufredus with writing his chronicle, she remarks, "I do not feel alone. The written word has gifted me the past and now it will gift me the future. Peaceful years within the cloister in Catania, quiet hours filled with writing, open doors, and friendship" (247). Though Bernfrieda and Hildegard are able to leave their

own words as records and Jehanne's trial was well documented, Heavenlight's desire to enter into history's annals is thwarted.

In Sa's novel, Heavenlight's only break from the court's boredom is attending lectures in "literature, philosophy, history, geography, astrology, and mathematics" given by eunuchs in the Inner Institute of Letters (Sa 50). She claims, "books became my wings that bore me far away from the Palace. The annals of former dynasties tore me from the immobility of the present. I lived in those vanished kingdoms and I took part in plots, galloped across battlefields, and shared in the rise and fall of heroes" (50). It is this sense of history that fuels her ambition for a life beyond her simple station in the Forbidden City. The text books she finds offer little emotional comfort. Sa writes: "Our ancestors had built a civilization where affection and tenderness were prohibited" (54). Like Cleopatra who finds meaning in Egyptian poetry, Heavenlight remarks, "luckily there were the poets whose words travelled across time and poured limpid delight into my heart" (54). Christa Wolf in *Cassandra* makes a similar complaint against the coldness of history when she writes of Cassandra's love for Aeneas. Aeneas throws a ring, a symbol of his love that he offers Cassandra, into the sea. Cassandra comments, "No one will ever learn these all-important things about us. The scribes' tablets, baked in flames of Troy, transmit the palace accounts, the records of grain, urns, weapons, prisoners. There are no signs for pain, happiness, love. This seems to me an extreme misfortune" (Wolf 78). Woman's historical novels like Sa's stress that emotions are as worthy of history as traditional facts and offer a unique insight into feelings associated with the

feminine. Thus, the novels imaginatively fill in what history has neglected and simultaneously challenge our notion of history and what actions/whose actions warrant historical status.

Conclusion

Religion is fundamental in understanding the maternal during the Middle Ages and is reflected in the woman's historical novel post 1970. These transnational novels emphasize women's anxieties both then and now with patriarchal religion and the need to rethink women's relation to the divine. All the protagonists discussed are specifically chosen by God to be messengers on earth, again, suggesting a powerful role for women. Biological motherhood is not a primary focus or concern; instead virginity, misogamy, and the convent are considered better options for women who want to write and study, to be free of the dangers associated with marriage (death in childbirth, violence, widowhood), and who desire to achieve a more prominent role in society. Maternal roles are taken up, but through alternative means–in the case of Heavenlight and Theodora, we sense very little of a maternal instinct and in Hildegard, Bernfrieda, and Jehanne, the maternal is sublimated into the position of abbess, half-sister and handmaiden, and God's warrior. There is, also, a tension in the veneration of these women, both in their lives and after their deaths–for instance, though Jehanne was burnt at the stake, she is now considered a saint and, though the Empress was a divine mother on earth, her stela still remains blank. There is a further desire to create a maternal genealogy of the divine, which influences the

rule of women in the following era of modernity. Constance Jordan writes that "woman's spiritual equality is seen to entail a correlative political status" (5); therefore, the kind of pre-ordained rule of Hatshepsut in Egypt and Heavenlight in China is found, again, in works of modernity, whereby the individual ruler, a woman, is chosen by divine law. Gynocracies during modernity, thus, lead to a serious questioning of divine and natural law, both of which traditionally "forbade government by a woman" (Jordan 128).

CHAPTER FIVE

MODERNITY: GYNOCRACY AND MATROPHOBIA

> A dominant male culture has intervened between mother and daughter and broken off a loving and symbolic exchange
> – Luce Irigaray, *I love to you*

Women's historical novels centered on modernity (1500 to 1789) typically concentrate, like those of premodernity, on monarchs and nobility.[21] This focus can be attributed to the fact that it heralds another historical renaissance of women ruling the nation during transnational times. Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock believe that, though there was a gender hierarchy in place, "early-modern patriarchy was flexible and could exalt individual women above men where necessary to underpin further the whole social organization of power" (325).The post 1970s woman's historical novel takes up these atypical women and responds to the works of notable forerunners such as Finnish writer Kaari Utrio's romantic historical novel *Kartanonherra ja kaunis Kirstin* (1968) on Kristina of Sweden, Norah Lofts' *The Lost Ones* (1969) that chronicles the fragile psyche of Queen Caroline Matilda in eighteenth century Denmark, Jean Plaidy's trilogies on Catherine de Medici and Spain's Isabella of Castille, Evelyn Anthony's 1950s Romanov trilogy on Catherine the Great's rise to power as Empress of Russia, and Margaret Irwin's successful trilogy on the most often represented woman in women's historical fiction, Elizabeth I. There are, also, a plethora of works devoted to two queens executed for treason and adultery:

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[21] Merry Wiesner-Hanks suggests "the break between medieval and early modern is generally set at 1500" (14).

Elizabeth I's rival–the "foreign regnant queen," (Allinson 104)–Mary, Queen of Scots (see, for example, Elizabeth Byrd's *Immortal Queen: Mary Queen of Scots* (1956)) and Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn (for instance E. Barrington's *Anne Boleyn* (1932)).

In addition to rewriting the above popular figures (Alison Weir, for example, offers a less emotional and romantic version of Elizabeth I than Irwin), the lives of queens outside the European-Christian tradition–e.g., Jyoti Jafa's *Nurjaha* (1979) or Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008)– expand and amend the genealogy. Indu Sundaresan explains her motivation for her Taj Mahal trilogy: "there are few mentions of the women these kings [six main Mughal Emperors] married or of the power they exercised. *The Twentieth Wife* seeks to fill that gap" (383). The emphasis in earlier works on women exercising power and desire (including a preoccupation with adultery, desire for the mother, and sexual desire, best seen in the 1940s British woman's novel (Wallace, *Woman's* 85) remains intact.

A concern with sexual desire in the 1940s further connects with the "captive wife," which previously expressed women's fears in 1960s Britain of "being recaptured and imprisoned within home and family – in short being forced to repeat her mother's life" (Wallace, *Woman's* 140). Diana Wallace writes that "these texts engage with the ideology which condemns female adultery, but they also express the understanding that marriage and traditional gender roles may entrap and stifle women's sense of their own identity" (86). The novels I survey–*Moi, Kristine Reine de Suède* by Françoise D'Eaubonne

(1979), Helene Lehr's *Star of the North* (1990), Elena Maria Vidal's *Trianon* (1997), Sundaresan's *The Twentieth Wife* (2002), Christina Hernando's *Isabel la Católica* (2007) and lastly Weir's *The Lady Elizabeth* (2008)–narrate the personal lives of rebellious, independent, learned, and unconventional daughters determined to break the cycle of becoming their mothers. Adrienne Rich refers to this as "matrophobia" because it is "fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming* one's *mother*" (*Of Woman Born* 235-6).[22] For this reason, the daughter often identifies with the father while, paradoxically, sympathizing with her mother and blaming her father for her mother's misfortune (Wallace, *Woman's* 135).

In contemporary works, "the erasure of her [daughter's] matrilineage" (Wallace, *Woman's* 98) is caused by a mother portrayed as a traitor, mad, weak, powerless, and/or neglectful and absent in her life; she becomes the vilified-victimized mother figure. Rejecting her mother, the heroine daughter either becomes extremely maternal (loving, nurturing, self-sacrificing) (Isabel, Mehrunnisa, Marie-Antoinette) or rejects out right this role (Elizabeth, Kristine, Catherine). Susan C. Staub notes that, in this early modern period, "sexuality is not separate from motherhood but is actually the locus of maternal anxiety" (18); thus, women were viewed as possessing:

> '[A] powerful, potentially disruptive sexuality requiring control through rigid social institutions and carefully nurtured inhibitions within the woman herself.' One way to control that sexuality was to valorize motherhood, encouraging women to marry and have

[22] Rich expands upon this term from the work of Lynn Sukenick.

> children; another was to demonize it, transforming mothers into 'anti-mothers,' whether as witches or seductresses. (Staub18)

Staub identifies the anxieties about mothering as correlating to anxieties about female power (19). Marianne Hirsch, however, reminds us that the daughter's narrative subjectivity comes at the price of her mother's: "To speak for the mother, as many of the daughters … do, is at once to give voice to her discourse *and* to silence and marginalize her" (16). For Hirsch, the daughter's narrative perpetuates the objectification of the mother and continues the tradition of mothers and daughters "becoming objects of the desire of/for the father," meaning an authentic desire of/for the mother is never realized (Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader* 52).

Focusing on familiar political figures in mainstream historiography (primary sources such as letters or visual representations of the protagonist exist), the novels in this chapter relate the unknown aspects of their personal lives; the "subject's inner life [depicted] through realistic fictional strategies" (Rozett 123) emerges, and indicates a complex relationship with the character and her mother and/or her experiences as a mother.

While recuperating the 1940s preoccupation with maternal sexuality and exploring 1960s women's fears of being imprisoned in the family, the novels approach the question of what/who constitutes an acceptable mother slightly differently. They suggest a contemporary fear and preoccupation with the dissolution of the nuclear family and the mother's traditional maternal role. Prevalent transnational themes include the mother as immigrant, mothers living

separate from their families, mothers marrying foreigners, mothers abandoning their children, and women losing their status as mothers. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas refers to these issues as the new reality of many families who are transnational (80) and for whom "mothering from a distance" is now common (116). Thus, there is a contemporary resurrection of a relevant transnational maternal past. The femino-centric topics I explicate include: hysteria, separation, betrayal, surrogacy, foreigners, and the relation between motherhood and queenship. An important aspect in the novels that cannot be ignored is woman as mother and the nation as mothered.

Within modernism, an evolving and more secular consciousness of nations and nationalism emerges, social mobility becomes possible, and even gender roles–particularly rethinking the definition of motherhood–becomes negotiable. John Frame, once again referencing Richard L. Pratt, defines modernity as:

> 1) Truth is discerned primarily through rational and scientific investigation under the guidance of rationalistic philosophers and scientists, 2) Ultimate reality is the physical world. If a spiritual world exists at all, it is ephemeral and uninvolved in the events of the physical world. This is also a period for intense religious reformation, 3) Individuality of the independent objective scholar (transcendent subject) is prized over conformity to received traditions, 4) Heavy reliance on written communication, especially paper, due to rising literacy and publishing technologies (printing

> press), 5) Widespread rational and scientific meta-narrative depict history as progressing toward utopia. (28-9)

The novels, moreover, suggest that not only queens but also women in their everyday lives (consumerism, trade, mercantilism, guilds, church, writing, family and so on) contribute to our understanding of this period.

Thus, on the one hand, modernity is depicted in these times and places as golden ages of empire i.e., the Mughal Empire in *The Twentieth Wife*. There is cultural flourishing with the invention of the Gutenberg Press during the Elizabethan Age and when Kristine crowns Sweden the “Versailles of the North;” Kristine’s tolerance for diverse religions during a time of religious reformation is similarly atypical and her conversion to Catholicism and abdication caused a scandal. Scientific discovery and territorial-transnational trade and expansion are also seen in Christopher Columbus’ voyages, patronized by Isabel, to the new world.

One the other hand, this time in history saw increased slavery, such as in the New World, and increased serfdom during Catherine the Great’s reign. Religious persecution-conversion and territorial wars are equally evident in Isabel’s conquest of Grenada by defeating and expelling the Muslim ruler Boabdil. Emphasizing a racial hierarchy, Isabel orders the Muslims and Jews to either convert to Catholicism or suffer the consequences, thus, leading to the infamous Spanish Inquisition that Inés recounts in Allende’s novel *Inés of my Soul*. Vidal’s novel on Marie-Antoinette narrates the end of this modern period

with the French Revolution and Marie-Antoinette's murder by guillotine in 1793.

According to Anthony Smith, one cannot underestimate the role of the French Revolution "as a *nationalist* (and not simply a bourgeois) revolution (*Nationalism and Modernism* 126). For Lukács, too, the French Revolution is a pivotal event in both history and the origins of the historical novel genre. During the French Revolution, the masses experienced a historical awakening and, Lukács insists, in such key moments, the people realize "that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual" (23). Philosophers like Hegel sought to prove the "historical necessity" of this event and suggested that "history is [and must be] the bearer and realizer of human progress" (Lukács 27). Lukács' Marxist approach, which emphasizes the role of the individual through class struggles and in being shaped/shaping the course of history, is comparable and compatible with a feminist perspective that centers on the awakening of a gender consciousness, but cautions against an uncritical mass consciousness as evidenced in Vidal's sympathetic portrayal of Marie-Antoinette as a mother devoted to her family.

Unfit Mothers, Hysteria and Separation

Unlike Vidal's portrayal of a dutiful mother in her novel on Marie-Antoinette, Hernando and D'Eaubonne describe the process in which mothers are deemed hysteric and unsuitable and, consequently, are separated from their daughters.

Irigaray suggests that "if a woman cannot express her relation to her mother and to other women, she may become 'hysterical'" (Whitford, "Section II" 77).Contrary to accepted belief, "there is a revolutionary potential in hysteria" because the hysteric, always a woman, exhibits "a movement of revolt and refusal, a desire for/of the living mother who would be more than a reproductive body in the pay of the polis, a living, loving woman" (*Irigaray Reader* 47). The hysteric, for Irigaray, is a woman imprisoned in a patriarchal society, and, thus, a "re-evaluation of hysteria as the unheard voice of the woman who can only speak through somatic symptoms" is necessary (Whitford, "Section I" 26). Hernando's novel achieves this rereading of hysteria; it opens in 1451 with Isabel de Portugal giving birth to her daughter Isabel. Isabel de Portugal is Juan II's second wife (14), as, Hernando argues, the king's most trusted advisor don Álvaro de Luna poisoned his first wife, María de Aragón (17, 51). Paranoid of suffering the same fate, Isabel demands that her husband imprison his loyal friend. The imprisonment and execution of de Luna, however, causes the king's health to decline and he dies a few months later (Hernando 52). Isabel of Portugal, thus, "*ella se creía la única responsable de la muerte de don Álvaro y más tarde, de su esposo Juan II de Castilla*" 'believed herself responsible for the death of don Álvaro and later, her husband Juan II of Castile' (52). Isabel de Portugal's vulnerability after the death of her husband becomes clear.

Following Juan II's death, his son Prince Enrique by the late María de Aragón becomes King Enrique IV of Castilla and León (Hernando 23). Hernando writes, "*Su primera orden fue muy clara: Isabel de Portugal, junto a*

sus dos hijos, debía abandoner su residencia de Madrigal de las Altas Torres y dirigirse a Arévalo" 'His first order was very clear: Isabel of Portugal and her two children must leave their home in Madrigal de las Altas Torres and relocate in Arévalo' (23). Irigaray describes this process of banishment as "women 'in exile', 'like ghosts' in the masculine phallic imaginary" (*Irigaray Reader* 72). Losing her status and forced into exile, Hernando describes Isabel's early childhood as austere and tinged with the sadness of her mother, who frequently walks aimlessly in the night and interrupts the children's games by shouting " Don Álvaro, don Álvaro" (28, 47).

She realizes "*mi madre está cada vez más cerca de perder la razón, pero nadie parece querer hablar del tema*" 'my mother is increasingly nearer to losing her mind, but no one seems to want to speak about it' (Hernando 32). Insisting that her governess doña Beatriz de Bobadilla disclose Isabel's family's history, she is told who don Álvaro was, how he died, and why her mother cannot live with her guilt (32-33). When Enrique IV divorces Blanca de Navarra and marries Juana de Portugal, he summons Isabel and her younger brother Alfonso back to court (54). Isabel de Portugal is helpless: "*Yo, que hace siete años era la reina de Castilla y podia ordenar cuanto se me antojarse… ahora no puedo impeder que os arranquen de mi lado… ni aun suplicando de rodillas.¡Ay, mis niños!*" 'I was for seven years the queen of Castilla and could order when it suited me …now I cannot even order to keep my children by my side …. Not even begging on my knees. Oh, my children!' (54). Ultimately, Enrique IV's motives for having Isabel and Alfonso near him are to protect the interests of

Juana, his future daughter, her claims to the throne, and to suppress any uprisings in favour of his step-brother and step-sister (55). On travelling back to the court, the *infanta* Isabel questions how the new queen Juana de Portugal, expecting her own baby, "*era capaz de separar a unos hijos de su madre, ni entendía cómo las mujeres regias jugaban un papel tan pobre*" 'was capable of separating children from their mother, nor could she understand how royal women could set so poor an example' (55). The displacement of her mother, according to Hernando, deeply affects Isabel and, after this initial separation, she only sees her mother once more, six years later (85), just prior to Alfonso's suspicious death (91). Similar to Isabel who lacks a maternal figure, Kristine also suffers a forced separation from her mother due to her father's death.

D'Eaubonne's novel *Moi, Kristine Reine de Suède*, is the only work in this chapter written in the style of a memoir. Like Sigrid Grabner's *Christina von Schweden: Die rebellische Konigin* (1992), D'Eaubonne begins with a dying Kristine who, through a series of flashbacks, recounts her life as the former Queen of Sweden. Kristine, akin to Marie-Antoinette, is unique because, unlike the other monarchs who have ambitions to be queen, Kristine abdicates her throne. Her decision to denounce her throne is not only tied to her wish to convert to Catholicism but also to her maternal heritage and, essentially, is an act of abdicating from motherhood.

Kristine is described as having a great love for her father Gustave-Adolphe. D'Eaubonne, portraying him in relation to Kristine's mother, writes, "*L'ombre insignifiante de ma mère disparaissait auprès d'un tel soleil*" 'the

insignificant shadow of my mother disappeared under such a sun' (D'Eaubonne 19). When Kristine is six years old, her father, famous for his success on the battlefield, is called by the Protestants to come to their aid in the Thirty Years War (19).[23] Upon his departure, he makes arrangements so that if he dies Kristine will be left in the care of his chancellor Oxienstern and his sister Katrine, not her mother, Marie-Éléonore (20). Kristine, also, is to be educated and raised as a boy. The novel, then, shifts to Gustave-Adolphe's death and Kristine remembering seeing her mother again. Much like Isabel, she fears her mother is losing her mind (22). Following her husband's death, Marie-Éléonore uncharacteristically channels her energies and interests to Kristine: "*ce débordement de passion maternelle, au lieu de m'attendrir, me glaçait*" 'this overflowing maternal passion, instead of softening me, froze me' (23). Denying her husband's death, Marie-Éléonore has Gustave-Adolphe embalmed and "*avait placé son coeur dans une urne d'argent*" 'his heart placed in a silver urn' (24). She, also, brings Kristine to live with her in Nykoping.

Kristine witnesses her mother praying, crying, and wandering from room to room like a ghost (D'Eaubonne 25-26). In her older age, however, Kristine reflects that now she is able to relate to the pain of her mother:

> *Á l'heure de mon agonie, j'évoque sans doute mon passé de la même façon que jadis Marie-Éléonore dans les nuits blanches de Nykoping. Je sais, grâce aux récits de mon cousin Charles-Gustave (qui les tenait de son père) quelle fut la trame pathétique et*

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[23] The war ended with the Treaty of Westphalia, signed by Kristine in 1648 (D'Eaubonne 89, 117)

> *agaçante de la jeunesse, du roman d'amour et du marriage de ma pauvre Allemande de mère*"
>
> In the hour of my agony, I evoke without doubt my past much in the same way that Marie-Éléonore did in the white nights of Nykoping. I know, thanks to the stories from my cousin Charles-Gustave (who had them from his father) which was the pathetic template and annoyance of youth, the romance and the marriage of my poor German mother. (27)

Irigaray believes that when daughters realize they "must liberate themselves *with their mothers*" (Whitford, "Section I" 26), it marks a crucial point in a woman's life; Kristine realizes this claim when she relates the early life of her own mother and the heated arguments surrounding her marriage as a Prussian Calvinist to the Swedish King, a Lutheran whose territorial wars over Poland were criticized.

Despite her mother's, Anne de Brandenburg's, wishes (who also claims Elizabeth of England is promised to marry Gustave-Adolphe (D'Eaubonne 23)), Marie-Éléonore marries Gustave-Adolphe. The difference in ideologies, however, affects Kristine's own interpretation of her country. When Oxenstiern, Kristine's governor, comes to Nykoping, he learns of the cloistered existence Kristine has been living, much like Isabel, (42). She is removed from her mother and taken, as promised, to her aunt Katrine in Upsal (42). D'Eaubonne writes, "*En vain ma mère se frappe la gorge en poussant des cris de sarcelle atteinte d'une flèche; en vain elle s'indigna de connaître que l'éducation de sa fille serait remise, entre autres mains*" 'In vain my mother hit her throat, squawking like a

duck stricken by an arrow; in vain she was outraged to know that the education of her daughter would be in the hands of others' (43). In exchange for Kristine's transference, Marie-Éléonore is compensated monetarily and allowed to see her daughter for a few minutes three times a year (43). Marie-Éléonore's influence in the text, like the other mother figures discussed, is highlightedprimarily by her absence in her daughter's life.

Kristine attributes her anti-Swedish feelings to her mother's complaints (D'Eaubonne 61). In acknowledging her mother, she does not forget her father's greatness nor that he was a Vasa. She declares, "*il faut pourtant me souvenir à l'heure de la vérité que j'ai aussi ce sang-là [de ma mère] dans les veines*" 'I must remember at this time of truth that I also have that blood [my mother's] in my veins' (61). Thus, Kristine writes:

> *J'essayais de tout coeur de m'attacher à ce people que le hasard de ma naissance m'avait appellée à gouvener. Je déplorais la médiocrité du commerce, l'absence de toute société cultivée et policée, le faible développement des manufactures d'armes dans un pays célèbre sur tous les champs de bataille d'Europe.*
>
> I tried with all my heart to attach myself to my people, who by chance of my birth, called upon me to rule. I deplored the mediocrity of trade, the absence of all cultivated and ordered society, the poor development of the manufacturing of weapons in a country celebrated throughout all the battlefields of Europe. (63)

Kristine's feelings for Sweden are, thus, conflicted due to her maternal heritage.

When her mother unexpectedly visits her in Stockholm (D'Eaubonne 65), seemingly having cast off her dedication to mourning Gustave-Adolphe, she shows her daughter "*beaucoup d'affection*" 'a lot of affection' and a new robust appearance (65). Oxenstiern informs Kristine that her mother has been corresponding with Sweden's enemy, Kristian IV, King of Denmark (66). Marie-Éléonore's affair with the Danish king–"*notre ennemi héréditaire et son amoureux transit*" 'our hereditary enemy and her fond lover' (66)–ends with her being humiliated and handed back to her family in Brandenburg (67). Feeling betrayed by her mother's affair, Kristine recalls her mother from her relatives, gives her money, and sends her back to Nykoping with the right to die slowly. As if speaking to her mother, Kristine writes that she confines her mother, "*sur cette terre suédoise que tu détestait mais qui avait au moins l'avantage de t'éloigner des tiens*" 'on that Swedish land that you hated but which had the advantage of keeping you away from your kin' (68). Banished, this time by her matrophobic daughter, Marie-Éléonore figures little in the novel until Kristine's abdication (one of the focuses of Teresa Moure's *Hierba Mora* (2008)) because René Descartes, Kristine's tutor, dies in her court during this time, as do her mother and Oxenstiern (165).

Betrayal, Mothers as Traitors

Similar to Kristine's mother, who has a forbidden affair with the King of Denmark, Elizabeth I's mother Ann Boleyn is accused of marital infidelity and treason. As daughters of adulteress mothers, Kristine and Elizabeth are forced to

distance themselves from their matrilineage. Irigaray writes, desire for her, her desire, that is what is forbidden by the law of the father, of all fathers:

> Fathers of families, fathers of nations, religious fathers, professor-fathers doctor –fathers, lover-fathers, etc. Moral or immoral, they always intervene to censor, to repress the desire of/for the mother. For them that constitutes as good sense and good health. (*Irigaray Reader* 36)

Weir's novel begins with Elizabeth's half-sister Mary (the daughter of Catherine of Aragon and the granddaughter of Isabel la Católica) arriving at Hatfield under their father King Henry VIII of England's orders to deliver the news of Boleyn's death.

Mary asks the governess Lady Bryan what she believes the three year olds' reaction will be and if the child knew her mother well. Lady Bryan replies, "I'm afraid she did. Her Grace–I mean the lady her mother–kept the child with her, more than was seemly for a queen. If you remember, she even refused to have a wet nurse" (Weir 5). Boleyn is portrayed as monstrous because of her maternal desire and her pleasure in a corporeal connection with Elizabeth. Mary's feelings toward Elizabeth, however, are complex: "because of Elizabeth's mother, that great whore, Anne Boleyn … Mary had lost all that she held dear in life: her own mother, the late sainted Queen Katherine, her rank, her prospects of a throne and marriage, and the love of her father the King" (5). Weir's work ultimately recounts the loss of both daughters' respective mothers. It is a novel of matricides and, with the recent death of her mother, Elizabeth's

fortunes and Mary's futures are now the same; both are considered illegitimate, despite the fact that Henry "had been king of England for twenty-seven years, … [he] still had no son to succeed him" (14). She is no longer Lady Princess, but simply Lady Elizabeth (6, 7).

In Elizabeth's earliest memories, she sees a special occasion celebrated by both her parents because "some old harridan was dead" (Weir 11). The "harridan" is, of course, Mary's mother (14). All three are dressed in yellow and Elizabeth remembers her mother's beauty (11). Weir writes that "[t]o Elizabeth, her mother was the ideal queen, beautiful, poised, and kind, and her love was tinged with reverence and awe" (11). Her next memory is a fight between her parents. Held in her mother's arms, she hears her father "calling her mother a witch, among other unkind names" (12). The result of the argument is that Boleyn lifts Elizabeth up, forcing the King to acknowledge that she is his daughter and heir (12), and Elizabeth is returned to Hatfield with "a new doll in her arm–a parting gift from her mother" (13). Weir, then, picks up the narrative with Mary's memories of Boleyn and the accusations of her affairs, one of which was with a lute player named Mark Smeaton (14), whom some at court believe to be Elizabeth's father.

Signalling Elizabeth's illegitimacy, Mary identifies the unmistakable physical likeness of Elizabeth to her mother. She tells Elizabeth that "[her] mother committed treason against the King [their] father, and she has suffered the punishment. She has been put to death" (16). Recovering from this painful news, Elizabeth is informed that she is to have a new stepmother, Jane Seymour

(18). This new marriage entails that, at court, Mary must face the humiliation of denouncing her mother Katherine of Aragon as rightful queen, a position Katherine, in life, refused. She must:

> Accede that her mother's marriage had been incestuous and unlawful, and that she herself was therefore a bastard, but she also acknowledged her father the King to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England under Christ … she had abandoned all the principles she and her mother had held most dear. (18-19)

Thus, Mary is forced to erase her matrilineage and Elizabeth must, like Isabel at a young age, rely on clandestine information to piece together her mother's past.

Elizabeth asks Mary to divulge her mother's crimes and how she was killed. Matter-of-factly, she tells Elizabeth that her mother was unfaithful to the King, plotted to murder him, and, in return, was put to death by the sword (Weir 19). Throughout the novel, Boleyn's absence marks her as an important protagonist, one who influences much of not only Elizabeth's but also Mary's decisions. Striving to replace her mother, Elizabeth latches onto her sister Mary, her governess, and her new step-mother Jane Seymour.

Henry VIII's marriage to Seymour, nonetheless, is short-lived because she dies after giving birth to a son, Edward (Weir 33). Lady Bryan is ordered to take care of the prince and Elizabeth sees likens resultant absence to the loss of her mother: "In all but blood, she had been a mother to her, the person who had cared for her, nurtured her, comforted her, and disciplined her" (44). Elizabeth, however, realizes that the decision to move Lady Bryan is not only her father's,

but also Lady Bryan's: "once again, the universe had shifted, as it had done violently when she had learned of the awful fate of her mother, and less so when Queen Jane had died" (44). Elizabeth, "made motherless several times over," begins to piece together a constructed definition of motherhood, one that is unstable, contingent, and full of pain and loss (Wallace, *Woman's* 98).

The new governess, Mistress Champernowne, called Kat, however, proves an admirable replacement as a maternal figure in Elizabeth's life. A distant cousin of Elizabeth's "through [her] lady mother's family" (Weir 46), Kat believes in Boleyn's innocence and takes Elizabeth to Hertford to view a portrait. Upon seeing the painting, Elizabeth thought, "So *this* was her mother. She had never seen a picture of her, had only the dimmest memory, and had often wondered what she looked like" (72). Seeing that she resembles her mother– "only her red hair marked her as a Tudor" (72), Elizabeth secretly takes the painting as she has no other keepsake. In her Author's Note, Weir comments that "Elizabeth's admiration for her father and reverence for his memory are also well attested. However, we have virtually no evidence for her feelings about her mother, and no means of knowing if she believed Anne Boleyn to be innocent or guilty" (477). The lack of historical record allows Weir to invent this missing mother-daughter relationship and weave together, like in Robin Maxwell's *The Secret Diary of Anne Boleyn* (1998), Elizabeth's feelings toward her mother. For Martha Tuck Rozett, this constitutes "a revisionist account written to contest the politically motivated Tudor history that represents Anne as a wanton woman and adulteress" (127). Elizabeth, drawing upon memory and silences (for "it is only

in/through her silences that she circulates" (Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader* 60)), renegotiates a maternal relationship through historical places/objects associated with Boleyn.

After Henry VIII's annulment from his fourth wife Anne of Cleves, the former Queen invites Elizabeth to her new home in Hever Castle. When Elizabeth sees another portrait of her mother in the long gallery (Weir 76), she is informed that this was her mother's childhood home. Weir writes, "Wherever Elizabeth went at Hever, there were reminders of her mother. Her memory was there in every room, every garden walk, every shady arbor" (78). Piecing together a counter history of her mother, through memory and her mother's objects, with that of the 'official' history of her father and court, Elizabeth declares, "When I grow up, I am going to be like her!" (78). As if responding to her daughter, at the end of her Hever visit, Elizabeth sees a vision of Boleyn's ghost (79): "'Mother?' she whispered, trying out the sweet, unfamiliar word on her tongue. The irresistible conclusion, the only one she wanted to believe, was that Anne Boleyn's shade had come to her" (80). Weir, also, reinvents Elizabeth's relationship with her deceased mother when she is at court.

Like Isabel who must defeat the supporters of her niece Juana for the throne of Castile following the death of her brother-king Enrique, tensions between Elizabeth and her sister Mary intensify after Henry VIII's death as Edward, the heir, has died. Mary, a staunch Catholic, rises to the throne, but Protestant supporters, who first put Jane Grey, Elizabeth's cousin and a popular personae in women's historical fiction, on the throne (afterwhich she is quickly

imprisoned and executed), soon after favour Elizabeth. This results in charges against Elizabeth for conspiring with the enemy and committing treason against not only a sister, her family, but also her queen and her nation (Weir 366). Mary sentences Elizabeth to the Tower, "[j]ust as her mother had [been], all those years ago. And Anne Boleyn had not left it alive, had instead suffered the agonies of confinement and faced a terrible death" (367). Accordingly, Elizabeth is imprisoned in the same rooms where her mother was kept prior to her death (375). Weir writes, "It was like having a ghost standing just behind her. It has been surprisingly easy seeking out memories of her mother in the lush, leafy paradise at Hever, Anne's former home; but here, where she had met her fate, the very stones spoke of tragedy and doom" (377). During Elizabeth's first restless night in the chamber, her mother's ghost appears once again (378). Elizabeth believes that "her mother Anne [has] come to give her comfort and strength in her ordeal" (378). In a sense, Elizabeth asks, "so what is a mother? Someone who makes the stereotypical gestures she is told to make, who has no personal language and who has no identity. But, how as daughters, can we have a personal relationship with or construct a personal identity in relation to someone who is no more than a function?" (Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader* 50). Boleyn's presence as a maternal link in her daughter's life enables Elizabeth to become a great queen. Unlike her mother, Elizabeth is pardoned by Mary and, as the only surviving Tudor, is named Queen upon Mary's death (Weir 473). Queen Elizabeth restores the country to the Protestantism inaugurated by her father, not necessarily out of love for him, but because it would allow her mother to marry legally. Thus,

Elizabeth suggests that a subversive "daughter/mother relationship [which] constitutes a highly explosive nucleus" has the power to emancipate women "from the authority of fathers" (Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader* 50).

A perceived betrayal of patriarchal nationhood and motherhood is also prominent in Lehr's novel *Star of the North*. The Russian Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, daughter of the Great Tsar Peter, is examining a portrait of the Prussian and Lutheran princess Sophie Augusta Fredericka of Anhalt-Zerbst as a potential match for her nephew Peter Fedorovich, the Grand Duke of Holstein and heir to the throne. Much to the dismay of Count Bestuzhev, who would prefer "his sovereign to choose the Princess of Saxony, to choose anyone, for that matter, except a Prussian" (Lehr 10), the Empress summons the German princess for the sole purpose of producing an heir: "She was young and, from all accounts, healthy; no doubt she would easily produce children. And that, after all, was the only reason for this union" (11). Part One of the novel, titled "The Girl, 1744," marks the arrival of the fourteen year old destined to be the grand duchess, summoned by her marriage to her cousin the grand duke (the only living male Romanov). Yet, unlike Peter who stands firm in his preference for Prussia, Catherine quickly adopts Russia as her mother-country.

Her devotion is quickly tested, however, when it is discovered that her mother has been sending secret letters to the enemy, King Frederick of Prussia (Lehr 19, 22). The Empress asks her if she wishes to return home with her mother, reiterating to the newly titled grand duchess Catherine Alexeivna (15) that her duty is to marry and have sons (23). Believing Catherine innocent in her

mother’s betrayal, considered here as a maternal betrayal, the Empress demands that Catherine’s mother return home immediately after the wedding. With the symbolic loss of Catherine’s blood mother, she gains the Empress, Russia’s ‘Little Mother,’ as her new mother. Adopted by the Empress as her daughter and heir, she is essentially considered Russian, thus, reifying a preoccupation in these works with the interconnection between nationhood and motherhood.

Surrogate Mothers: The Contest of Custody

In Lehr’s novel, the contest over the custody of children is political. When Count Bestuzhev insinuates that Catherine is still a virgin (Lehr 79), the Empress, desperate for an heir (for by now six years of marriage have passed), arranges for Catherine to be seduced by Serge Saltikov, a handsome, married aristocrat. The Empress states that “there must be a child, ... by any means available” (83), suggesting that an illegitimate heir is better than none at all. Catherine’s failure to reproduce sons is unacceptable and could result in her dismissal from Russia. Fulfilling her marital/national duties, Catherine at last gives birth; the Empress exclaims “A son! ... Peter, you have a son!” (123). The maternal is denied in order to fulfill patriarchal ideology and Catherine, no better than an exploited surrogate, is left abandoned in her room while the child is whisked off in the arms of the Empress. Upon asking when she will be able to see her son, Catherine learns that a wet nurse has been found for the baby (thus, her own body is of no use) and that “the crown prince is in the apartments of the Empress” (126), for “the child is to remain with the Empress ... He ... is to live

there" (127). Lehr describes how, upon learning of this maternal betrayal, the grand duchess falls ill and the people come out in droves to "pray for her recovery their Russian hearts saddened, for they all adored her" (129). The Empress, for her part, delivers a gift of money and precious jewels–a theme consistent in this chapter–as monetary compensation for mothers to cease interfering in their children's lives.

Staring at the coins she has received in exchange for her body, her love (Serge has been relocated to Sweden), her child, and her innocence (virginity), Catherine vows she will never love another man again. She resolves that "one day that crown would rest upon her own head, and never again would anyone manipulate her life" (Lehr 133). Lehr ends the first half of her novel with a rite of passage signaling the transition from girl to woman through the bodily act of childbirth. Childbirth plays a central role in the text. For example, later in the novel, after the Empress' death, Catherine is urged to act against Peter but she refuses because she is pregnant with her illegitimate third child, Alexis Gregorovich Bobrinsky (213). The child is taken to a couple in the country, in response to which Catherine bitterly observes "Three times I have borne a child. ... But yet I am childless!" (214).

In her brief epilogue, Lehr writes:

> The animosity, pronounced even early on, between Catherine and her son, Paul Petrovich, grew more so with each passing year. Deprived of her children during their formative years, Catherine gave vent to her maternal feeling by lavishing all her love and

> attention on her grandchildren. Ironically, she removed her first two grandsons from the care of their parents in much the same manner as Empress Elizabeth had spirited away her own two children. (264)

Catherine's rupture with her son Paul leads to her naming her eldest grandson Alexander I her successor.

A similar occurrence takes place in Yolanda Scheuber's *Juana la Reina, loca de amor* (2010), when Isabel la Católica's daughter Juana, an extremely educated and intelligent woman, marries the Habsburg prince Philip of Flanders. As Isabel's heir, Juana is separated from her maternal family and is continuously declared mad and incompetent to rule by her father and husband. Scheuber, however, defends Juana against madness and attributes her unhappiness to patriarchal confinement and control over her life. In the end, her son Carlos V, the future holy Roman Emperor, rules.

In Lehr's novel, despite Catherine's wishes, four years after her death, her son Paul becomes ruler and loses no time in reversing his mother's policies and undermining/erasing all that she stood for–after all, he believes she murdered his father Peter in order to take the crown (270). Lehr ends the work by informing the reader that on March 11, 1801, Alexander I overthrew his father and, in the process, Paul was assassinated (272). Lehr's work suggests that the temptation of surrogate mothers to repeat the process by procuring for themselves the child of another woman can be attributed to the prohibition of a loving maternal relationship.

This theme is continued in Sundaresan's novel *The Twentieth Wife*. The protagonist Mehrunnisa, by virtue of the position of her father Ghias Beg (who fled from Persia to India after the assassination of Shah Ismail II in 1578) in Emperor Akbar's court, is permitted to serve the Empress Ruqayya. Summoned, Mehrunnisa meets the Empress' son, Khurram (the future Emperor Shah Jahan) (Sundaresan 65). The child, flinging himself on the Empress' lap, demands, "'Ma sweets'" (65). Mehrunnisa is surprised because the Empress has no children; in a way that resonates with Cassandra's declaration of plural mothering in Wolf's novel *Cassandra*, she modifies her position: "to be sure, there were hundreds of 'mothers' for every baby born in the *zenana*, but she had never before seen any child wrap the autocratic Padshah Begam around his little finger as this one had" (65). Sundaresan writes, "'Yes, he is mine. All mine. … I may not have given birth to him, but he [is] nonetheless my son'" (65). Khurram, Mehrunnisa learns from her mother Asmat, is the prince Salim's (Akbar's son and heir) third son by his second wife Jagat Gosini, but the Empress has custody of him. A sign of her friendship and trust, Ruqayya invites Mehrunnisa to the harem every day to help mind Khurram. Sundaresan states, "The usually levelheaded Ruqayya was obsessed with the child, to such a point that his mother, Princess Jagat Gosini, was permitted only brief weekly visits" (67). Thus, the consistent theme of mothers being separated from their children is related to other women acting as, for all intents and purposes, the maternal figure for personal and political gain. Mehrunnisa, also, faces this temptation when,

after miscarrying twice, she discovers her husband Ali Quli has impregnated one of the servants.

Ordered by her father and the Emperor to marry Ali Quli, a soldier, Mehrunnisa watches “her dreams slipping away” (Sundaresan 83). Though married, she has not borne any children. Mehrunnisa thinks, “*It could not be so*. It was unimaginable –this life without a child, this life Ali Quli had sketched out for her as the barren wife of a common soldier” (122-23). Her servant’s pregnancy, meanwhile, progresses and Mehrunnisa can only “watch her husband’s child in another woman’s body” (147). When Yasmin goes into labour, however, a mid-wife cannot be found because she “is not married” (147). Taking command of the situation, though inexperienced, Mehrunnisa feels pity for the orphan slave-girl laying on a bed of straw in the hen-house.

She realizes that “she had no choice. They were all –this slave girl, the servants, Mehrunnisa herself –the property of her husband. How could this girl have denied him anything?” (Sundaresan 149). After the difficult birth, Mehrunnisa, holding the baby in her arms, wonders “[i]f Ruqayya could command a child away from a royal princess, why shouldn’t she from a penniless orphan maidservant? She could always pension Yasmin off and send her to some remote village. She would never talk. Mehrunnisa had brought the child into this world. He must belong to her” (151). Musing over the decision, Mehrunnisa declares that she “yearned desperately for a child –but her own child, not the fruit of some other woman’s womb. So she gave the baby back to Yasmin and sent her away” (168). Unlike Mehrunnisa, who refuses the son of

her servant and eventually gives birth to a daughter, Lehr suggests Catherine mimics the actions of the Empress by later appropriating her own son Paul's child, Alexander I. Women's historical novels such as Sundaresan's and Lehr's re-emphasize the need for understanding the complexity of motherhood. Catherine is unable to see that the patriarchal ideology she subscribes to and perpetuates once she takes the crown entails her forfeiture of personal-maternal desires and that control over women's bodies resides outside of themselves.

Foreign Mothers: Sexual-Political Alliances

The woman's historical novel on monarchs during modernity emphasizes the importance of transnational marriages for political security (Wilkinson 21). Marriages to foreigners were a strategic political decision and meant an implicit truce and loyalty between respective nations. This is seen in both Lehr's *Star of the North* and Vidal's *Trianon*, in which the queen's sexuality, unlike her more androgynous predecessors, such as Kristine, "was now described as totally maternal, a symbol of motherhood rather than monarchy" (Wiesner-Hanks 20). As queen consort "'in motherhood and in her household … as well as through her family' she remained firmly engaged 'in the political community'. The fragility of her sexual reputation as a woman ensured that she remained a potential scapegoat for the failings of her husband and her kin" (Oakley-Brown and Wilkinson 16).[24] *In Star of the North*, Lehr suggests the fragility of Catherine's position as queen consort, but she innovatively reverses stereotypical

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[24] Oakley-Brown and Wilkinson help make their point by using a quotation from J.L. Laynesmith.

pairings of the “the patriot versus the enemy; the loyal citizen versus the disloyal immigrant” (Alexander 5) by contrasting Peter with the Prussian-born Catherine.

Catherine lives in Russia, her birth nation’s enemy, and Prussia and Russia are soon to be at war. She is an immigrant and, like most immigrants, she must negotiate the complexity “of a pure ‘home’” with “a ‘contaminated’ diasporic location” (Grewal and Kaplan 16). Catherine’s position is frequently described as being unstable and the threat of being sent back ‘home’ by her adopted mother/family/nation always looms. In Eva Stanchiak’s *The Winter Palace* (2011), for instance, Catherine is essentially spied upon from the moment she arrives by her servant Barbara, who works for the Empress and Count Bestuzhev, stressing that becoming Russian for Catherine is necessary for survival. Lehr describes that four years into the marriage, practically under house-arrest, and still without child, Catherine is approached by Count Bestuzhev.

Lehr writes:

> His gaze traveled about and rested at last upon Catherine’s writing table. With some surprise, he noted the works of Voltaire and Montesquieu; heavy fare, indeed, he thought to himself. He picked up another book, one dealing with the history of Russia, and now he regarded her with open curiosity. (73)

Surprised by her learnedness in contrast to the duke who plays with toy soldiers and spends hours training his dogs, Bestuzhev feels admiration for the duchess.

Sensing approval, Catherine remarks, "I am deeply interested in the history of my country" (Lehr 73). The Count asks, "And just which country is your country, madame?" (73), to which Catherine answers, "Russia is my country, Chancellor" (73). Pressing the issue one step further, Bestuzhev inquires, "And should the day come when we are at war with Prussia ... where will your sympathies lie?" (73). After a short silence, Catherine reassures the Count that her allegiance to Russia need never be questioned and if war were to arise against Frederick, she, unlike her husband and mother, would be prepared to strike him down (74). Catherine's political devotion to Russia and her ability to speak "faultless Russian" is juxtaposed with her husband who openly supports Frederick, speaks German fluently, and Russian poorly (74).

When Bestuzhev explains that he's had a troubling report from General Apraxin, whose troops are failing against the Prussians, he asks Catherine to communicate with the general. This correspondence, as Catherine knows, will undermine the Empress' orders. Bestuzhev claims, "Some time ago ... you told me that Russia was your country. If that's true, then she needs your help now as never before" (Lehr 148). Bestuzhev's inscription of Russia as a woman suggests how women and nations both fall under patriarchal governance and anchor the national imagination. According to Geraldine Heng, this posits and naturalizes "a strategic set of relationships linking land, language, history, and people to produce a crucial nexus of pivotal terms 'motherland,' 'mother tongue,' … that will hold together the affective conditions, the emotive core, of nationalist ideology and pull a collection of disparate peoples into a self identified nation"

(31). Bestuzhev also explains there are plans to draft a Manifesto altering the succession from Peter to his son Paul, with Catherine reigning as regent until Paul comes of age. Shocked by Bestuzhev's act of treason, Catherine reminds him "I ... am Prussian" (151). Bestuzhev asks, "Are you?" to which Catherine replies, "only by birth" (151) and so agrees to write the letter.

The forbidden letters (reminiscent of her mother's betrayal), Jacqui Alexander suggests, signify that guilt lies not in any act but in suspicion, which explains "the demarcation between citizen and immigrant" (237). As an immigrant, Catherine is always a suspect when contrasted with the loyal citizen. Taking her fate into her own hands, Catherine sends a plea to the Empress to send her home, back to Prussia (Lehr 167). Dressing modestly beneath her station, emphasizing the power of bodily appearance, the Empress is reminded of Catherine's girlhood and her innocence. Though disappointed that Catherine has been writing letters without permission (to congratulate a general on the birth of his son), the Empress also observes that she cannot believe Catherine would betray her: "I do believe you actually regard Russia as your country. ... For this we forgive you much Catherine Alexeivna" (175). This intimate scene between two women (daughter-mother) continues as the Empress reflects that she does not have much longer to live. Fearing Catherine's life will be in danger when Peter seizes the throne, she declares, "Your husband will kill you if he can" (177). Catherine tenderly calls the Empress "Little Mother" (177), inscribing her in patriarchal discourse as her mother but also as the mother of the nation.

When the Empress dies, Peter decisively ends the war with Prussia and plans a celebratory banquet. Meanwhile, the people are still mourning for "their revered Little Mother" (Lehr 199). Count Panin, who has been plotting with Bestuzhev to alter the succession in favour of Catherine's son Paul, exclaims, "the tsar has not only sent word to Frederick that all his lost lands will be returned to him, he has apologized for taking them in the first place!" (203). Even Panin pleads with Catherine to act against the grand duke, but she refuses. Catherine realizes that, in order to achieve her goal, she will need to win the people over. Morning after morning, Catherine sinks to her knees and bows her head in prayer for the loss of the Empress. This act of loyalty not only moves the people but also the members of the Imperial Guard (205). By comparison, when the casket is sealed in order to be taken to Kazan Cathedral, Peter is described "cavorting through the street, his booted feet tapping out a gleeful dance to a rhythm accompanied by music only he could hear" (207). Peter's actions appall the people, who whisper and murmur in the streets, "He plans to turn us all into Prussians... Long live our new Little Mother...God grant us her Imperial grace" (207). Lehr suggests that Peter cannot rule Russia because he is considered unpatriotic and disloyal and he is unable to merge his sexuality in a way that motherhood (devoted to her children and her nation) allows a woman.

Orlov, a lieutenant in the army and Catherine's greatest devotee, declares that, if given the word, the regiments will fight to place her on the throne. Catherine asks, "And what makes you think that the soldiers will follow me? ... I'm no more a Russian than is Peter" (Lehr 209). Orlov, however, shakes his

head and claims, “You are a Russian, Catherine!” (209) and reminds her that her son is, also, Russian by birth. The question of what it means to be Russian or mother becomes less about biological birth than about adopting wholeheartedly the ideological customs and beliefs, language and religion, and historical imagination of that nation.

This is echoed again by Lehr when the tsarina discovers that her private chambers in the Winter Palace do not contain a private chapel and she orders one to be constructed. Peter, who designed the Winter Palace, declares, “we have forbidden the use of private chapels, madame” (217), and Catherine, sensing her imminent danger, apologizes. She is humiliated further that night at a banquet when Peter pins the Order of St. Catherine, a symbol of loyalty, onto his mistress’ bodice (Lehr 227), once again showcasing the woman’s body as national loyalty. Peter later orders Catherine to be sent to Peterhof, where she will soon after be banished to a nunnery. Woman’s historical novels, like Lehr’s, confirm patriarchal restrictions on a woman’s body; her sexual life is always regulated by others, whether by the Empress in producing children or the denial of a sexual life altogether by Peter.

Met by Orlov on the outskirts of Peterhof in Mount Plaisir, Catherine decides to act militarily. Reaching Ismailhov and being met by thousands of military supporters, Lehr describes in sexual terms how “the men, without exception, gazed at their beautiful tsarina with adoring eyes, each of them prepared to lay his life at her feet” (Lehr 237). Catherine “felt the love of the people embrace her like the passionate arms of an ardent lover and gave herself

up entirely to the feeling it generated within her" (238). Entering Kazan Cathedral, Catherine is met with a teary eyed Archbishop. Kneeling, Katherine accepts the crown from the archbishop. As Panin notes, "it wasn't the rightful successor that the people wanted to take the place of their hated tsar; it was the foreign woman who had so blinded them with her charisma that they were all willing to overlook her origins!" (239). Reborn as the newly crowned Empress and Autocrat of Russia, Catherine appears "wearing the uniform of the Preobrazhensky Guard" (240). Lehr explains that "[s]o proud was her bearing that another great cheer erupted from the onlookers when they caught sight of her. 'A long life to [their] Little Mother!'" (240). Quickly mounting her horse and leading it in a great circle around her regiments, Panin, watching, declares, "He had always suspected that Catherine's interest in history was exaggerated. But he now saw that she had done her homework well. The act she was performing was as old as the Cossacks and hussars. The meaning was clear, to him and everyone witnessing it: She was publicly displaying her intent to take command" (241). Lehr ultimately suggests that Catherine's knowledge of history and the military as well as her ability to use her body as a mother and cultural translator secures her rule of Russia, despite her Prussian birth.

By comparison, Marie-Antoinette is described in Vidal's novel *Trianon* as detested by the people of France. Marie-Antoinette, born in Austria and the fifteenth and penultimate child of Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa and Holy Roman Emperor Francis I, is arranged to marry the Dauphin of France at a young age, before they have even met. Though she is revered for her famous

beauty and grace, she is referred to by the French as the embodiment of her nation: "*l'Autrichienne*" [the Austrian] (Vidal 49, 73). Unlike Catherine, who wins over the Russian people, Vidal's narrative centers on the increasing alienation and isolation Marie-Antoinette experiences in being away from her own mother and in relation to the French people whom she cannot win-over because of her dislike for Versailles, French etiquette, and politics. Marie-Antoinette, however, experiences a domestic happiness and a seemingly genuine love for her husband that Catherine never does.

Vidal focuses on a time in the Queen's life that is rarely given attention, her final years between 1787and 1793. Unlike most historical novels on Marie-Antoinette that take the form of an invented diary (Everlyne Lever's *Marie Antoinette, journal d'une reine* (2002) or Carolly Erickson's *The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette: A Novel* (2005)), Vidal offers several perspectives on the Queen's past life and those relevant to her domestic life in Trianon. A gift from her husband (Vidal 83), Trianon is a romantic pastoral escape for the Queen, though "jealous courtiers called it 'Little Vienna'" (52). Through women close to the queen, including two chapters by Marie-Antoinette herself, Vidal paints a sympathetic portrait leading up to and following the execution. For example, the Prologue: Portrait of a Queen begins with the voice of the court painter Madame Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, famous for her domestic scenes of the Queen with her children (reminiscent of Nefertiti) (106).

The artist, pregnant at the time, reflects:

> In many ways, Marie-Antoinette was still the child-bride, separated so prematurely from her mother and homeland. Her innocence and sincerity made her open prey for devious minds. She had blossomed, with a rich and ripening beauty that came not from midnight dancing at the opera ball, or having Monsieur Léonard dress her hair, but from domestic tranquility and maternal fulfillment. (Vidal 17)

Vidal suggests that motherhood changes Marie-Antoinette, but her former 'misdemeanors'–"card parties, "appearances at horse races," "acting in her private theatre at Trianon," "huge sums spent on diamonds" (17)–make her an ideal scapegoat for France's problems (84, 95).

The King's sister and Carmelite nun Madame Louise of France supports Vigée-Lebrun's narrative. She suggests that despite the "gazettes full of complaints against her" (Vidal 28), such as false accusations of the Queen throwing lavish parties at Trianon "for a select group of friends" (28), and her sexual promiscuity with Axel von Fresen (168, 176), she believes "motherhood has enriched her character, and sorrow, too. She lost the great Empress, her mother, in 1781, and just last summer, she lost a child" (29). The death of her young child Sophie is described by Mari-Antoinette's eldest daughter, who says, "Maman had wept as never before. She had not shed so many tears even during the terrible disturbance of the diamond necklace" (35). Vidal's novel suggests a maternal role is at the heart of the queen's life.

Marie-Antoinette tells her sister-in-law, “Mercifully, only a man can inherit the throne! Women are happier when busy with domestic matters. Leave the politics for men!” (Vidal 60). Unlike the other women discussed in this chapter, Marie-Antoinette wishes to remain outside of politics, though it becomes increasingly clear this is impossible: “a bundle of pamphlets was found, containing vicious cartoons of the Queen … there were underground presses in the palace that were printing some of the same filth (91). Vidal’s narrative juxtaposes public politics with the Queen’s domestic life.

Vidal describes the Third Estate in 1789, which “wanted to abolish all class distinctions and privileges of rank … [they] demanded the restructuring of society” (100), in the context of the death of Marie-Antoinette’s son Louis Joseph (101). This suggests only fiction can bring history into focus, into “the heart of things” (Butterfield 18). History’s inadequacy, Vidal intimates, in the vein of Herbert Butterfield, is that it cannot accurately document the “human touches” of the past that fiction can make us feel (Butterfield 21). Amidst grief for her dead child, Marie-Antoinette declares, “in the minds of many, the King was no longer the representative of God, but the Nation had become a god, and Antoinette knew that a false god was demon” (Vidal 108). Rejecting pleas from her husband to flee when “Paris is marching on Versailles” (110), Marie-Antoinette declares she will face the dangers head-on (109, 122).

Following the decision of the Assembly, the Queen, her husband, and their children are imprisoned in the Temple (Vidal 124). On “January 8th 1793, the King was sentenced” (125) and executed thirteen days later (138). The

Queen's trial takes place in October and she is questioned about her past deeds and the few objects that remain on her person, including lockets of hair from "[her] dead and living children, and from [her] husband" (150). Accused of politically influencing her weak husband, spending large sums at Trianon, conceiving "the project of uniting Lorraine with Austria" (153), having a Sacred Heart badge in her possession, and refuting the testimony of her son against her, the Queen is pronounced guilty (154). Vidal uses the eyes of the Queen's servant Rosalie to describe how Marie-Antoinette is taken in a cart for cabbages to the guillotine (164). The novel ends with Marie-Antoinette's only surviving child, Thérèse, being informed, much like the young Elizabeth in Weir's novel, that one year ago her mother "was guillotined, her corpse was thrown onto the grass of the cemetery of La Madeleine, the head between the legs, without funeral services or proper Christian burial" (170). As the only one spared, Thérèse, in order not to garner royalist sympathy, is taken to Austria in exchange for some French prisoners (172). Consoled by her religion, Thérèse ends the novel with the memory of her childhood:

> In her heart, she had found her way home to Trianon, home to the garden of childhood peace and innocence … She had found an interior garden where she could live, regardless of the vicissitudes of life, and turmoil of events that swirled around her. With her there danced again the serenity and joy she once possessed when as a little girl she had played so happily at Trianon. (187)

Vidal, thus, ends her revisionist novel on Marie-Antoinette by showcasing the Queen's maternal bond, her religious devotion, and by reclaiming Trianon, not as a house of ill-repute but as one of domestic happiness for her protagonists.

Motherhood and Queenship

The woman's historical novels suggests that "by and large queenship operated within a primarily 'familial context' … and royal daughters, sisters, and more distant female kin might be highly prized as brides on the international marriage market" (Oakley-Brown and Wilkinson 14).Within this "familial context," we can also read the frequent and willful erasure of a woman's, a future queen's, matrilineage as male anxiety about the threatening power of the maternal towards masculinity and patriarchal rule. Irigaray writes:

> If we are not to be accomplices in the murder of the mother, [it is necessary] for us to assert that there is a genealogy of women. There is a genealogy of women within our family: on out our? mother's side we have mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers and daughters. Given our exile in the family of the father-husband, we tend to forget this genealogy of women, and we are often persuaded to deny it. Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so far as to conquer and keep our identity. Nor let us forget that we already have a history, that certain women have, even if it was culturally difficult, left their mark on history and that all too often we do not know them. (*Irigaray Reader* 44)

Weir's *The Lady Elizabeth* and Sundaresan's *The Twentieth Wife* assert the importance of maternal figures in the young lives of future queens. In the case of Mehrunnisa, Sundaresan narrates her unlikely birth in a desert tent, her parent's failed attempt to give her up for adoption, and, finally, her family's good fortune in being welcomed into Emperor Akbar's court after fleeing Persia.

In Akbar's court, Mehrunnisa meets Prince Salim, the heir to the throne. Much to both the Prince's and her own despair, Mehrunnisa is arranged to marry the soldier Ali Quli, , a marriage that is ultimately a failure. Arriving in Bardwan (Ali Quli's punishment is exile for supporting the Emperor's son Khusrau instead of Salim), Mehrunnisa gives birth for the first time. Sundaresan writes, "'Maji …' Mehrunnisa whispered over and over again, wanting the cool comfort of her mother's hand on her brow, wanting to tell her of the fears that ambushed her" (216). The midwife is kind, but Mehrunnisa laments that "she was not Maji" (Sundaresan 216). Like many protagonists in the woman's historical novel, Mehrunnisa loves her mother, but she is, by virtue of marital duties, absent in much of her daughter's life. Giving birth to a girl, much to Ali Quli's dismay, Mehrunnisa names the child "Ladli. One who was loved" (217). It is only after Ali Quli's death (likely ordered by the Emperor (296)) that Mehrunnisa's desire to marry Prince Salim, now Emperor Jahangin, is realized.

Refusing to be a concubine in the harem, Mehrunnisa, a thirty-four year old single mother born in an Afghanistan desert, is granted the role of Jahangir's final and twentieth wife and the title Nur Jahan "Light of the World" (Sundaresan 379). The novel concludes with Mehrunnisa musing over her

ambition to rule the empire and citing Elizabeth, though not by name, as a source of inspiration: "European queens shone in court beside their husbands. Why, there had been one English queen who ruled alone, who had come to the throne in her own right as the daughter of a king" (380). Realizing her ambition, she determines "to be the force to reckon with behind the throne. She wanted to be the power behind the veil" (380). The novel ends with Nur Jahan's wedding and the beginning of what the Afterword declares will be the unprecedented power of a woman within the Mughal Empire.[25] Weir, like Sundaresan, exploits the many historical gaps in her protagonist's early life prior to becoming a powerful monarch.

Weir relates the young princess Elizabeth's life, beginning with the death of her mother and later her father. Unlike other historical novels, such as Susan Kay's *Legacy* (1985), which denies the sexual relationship between Thomas Seymour, the brother of Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII, (and later husband of Henry VIII's final wife, Queen Katherine), and Elizabeth Weir plays upon speculation that, early in Elizabeth's life, she became pregnant by the Admiral. Elizabeth also refuses the Admiral's marriage offer because, as Weir reiterates throughout the novel, "I have resolved never to marry" (168). Following Elizabeth's rejection, the Admiral pursues his former love (Weir 173) and, in less than four months after the king's death, he and Katherine Parr are wed (177). As guests at Chelsea Palace, Katherine and the Admiral adopt Elizabeth and become her guardians.

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[25] Sundaresan continues Mehrunnisa's tale through the lives of her niece and grand-niece in *The Feast of Roses* (2003) and *Shadow Princess* (2010).

Weir describes a series of inappropriate behaviors on the part of the Admiral, including entering Elizabeth's bedchamber early in the mornings (185-190). This is noticed by Katherine–who, now pregnant (Weir 220),will after delivering (252)–and adds to the tension between her and Elizabeth. Weir imagines that on a Sunday morning, when the Admiral and Elizabeth decidedly stay home from church, the Queen catches them in bed together (228). Disgraced, exposed to gossip, and pleading Katherine's forgiveness, Elizabeth is sent to Cheshunt where her governess' sister resides (230). Attempting to hide her pregnancy (240), Elizabeth confines herself to her rooms until she notices one day that she is bleeding (248). Contrary to Ella March Chase's novel *The Virgin Queen's Daughter* (2008), which imagines Elizabeth secretly giving birth to a daughter, Elinor de Lacy, Weir's Elizabeth suffers a miscarriage (249): "Never again, she vowed, would she risk her reputation, let alone allow any man to come near enough to get her with child" (250). Acknowledging her escape from scandal, Elizabeth reaffirms, "I will never marry" … I will never again allow love to blind me to all good sense and reason" … I will be circumspect in the future" (251); "I will continue to wear sober clothes and be a virtuous Protestant maiden" (251). When Kat declares that she can, technically, never be a maiden again, Elizabeth replies, "Nay, but the world must think it … I will never give anyone cause to doubt it. I will flaunt my virginity as others flaunt their charms, and lead a godly life from now on" (251). This incident, according to Weir (and other novelists like Edith Sitwell), solidifies Elizabeth's decision to

never marry and is symbolized by the tapestries of St. Ursula that hung in the Virgin Chambers in Greenwich where she was born (49).

Ursula, a saint beheaded, reminds Elizabeth of the unjust treatment of her mother, the deaths of her father's wives, and the risk of childbirth. The novel ends with the young Elizabeth being crowned the Queen of England upon her childless sister's death; she will never marry or have children, but she will construct her own maternal identity and be personified by others, such as in Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* (1821), as the queen without sexual desire. She is pious, chaste, intellectual, and authoritative–the opposite of her licentious mother–a "Virgin Queen." Staub writes that:

> Though she rejected literal motherhood, Elizabeth manipulated it metaphorically to serve her political agenda. Seemingly affirming traditional gender expectations, maternity provided a stratagem to turn the biological reality of her womanhood to her advantage by transforming her anomalous political authority into a socially sanctioned nurturing maternal authority. (17)

Suggesting motherhood can be constructed, Elizabeth embodies the Virgin Mother, whose English subjects will be her holy children.

The decision not to marry is also found in D'Eaubonne's focus on Kristine as a virgin queen–"an authority figure, untainted by the sin of Eve" (Oakley-Brown and Wilkinson 16)–and holy mother to her Swedish people. Kristine references Elizabeth as a source for not marrying: "*je préfère me passer d'époux, comme le fit Élizabeth d'Angleterre*" 'I prefer to pass on having a

husband, like Elizabeth of England did' (D'Eaubonne 121). Like Weir, D'Eaubonne ties this decision to an event during Kristine's adolescence. Secretly engaged to her cousin Charles (73, 79, 85), Kristine is shocked when she sees that"*[i]l était couché sur la Tzigane*" 'he was on top of a gypsy' (86). Though she never tells Charles what she had witnessed, she ends the engagement (88), deciding to never let her personal feelings as a woman overrule her duty as queen (129) or lower herself to marry a subject (99). She declares that she will rule alone (140, 143, 151, 176, 183) and identifies herself with Diane, the Roman goddess "*de chasteté et de chasse*" ("of chastity and the hunt"; 100).

Kristine's astrologer believing she is under a sign of change and mobility (by rule of the moon, a symbol for both women and Diane) contributes to her religious conversion to Catholicism (D'Eaubonne 165). Kristine, however, not only masquerades as Diane and worships her as a source for not marrying, but she also embraces cross-dressing (93) and sporting an androgynous look. Drawing on Constance Jordan's work *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (1990), Merry Wiesner-Hanks writes that "defenders of female rule clearly separated sex from gender, and even approached an idea of androgyny as a desirable state for the public persona of female monarchs" (18). Androgyny in Kristine's life is present when she has a love affair with Ebba Sparre (D'Eaubonne 91), when Charles Gustave refers to her as "Kristian," (72, 73), and when, in a similar fashion to the Egyptian Pharaoh Hatshepsut in Gedge's novel, she declares that, instead of being a queen, "*je serai roi!*" ("I will be king!"; 50).

Wiesner-Hanks argues that all concepts of masculinity, such as "physical bravery, stamina, wisdom, duty" (20), are "important determinants of access to political power" (18). Unlike Elizabeth, who embodied these attributes and also never married or had children, the weight of being a Swedish mother proves too much for Kristine to bear. Converting to Catholicism, Kristine abdicates her throne and names Charles her successor. Her break with the Swedish people is evident when they accuse her of hating her country (D'Eaubonne 263) and she fails to win their approval for reclaiming the throne when Charles dies (229, 239). D'Eaubonne's novel, like Hernando's and Lehr's, narrates not only the early life of her protagonist but also her rise to power and her life in older age.

All of these monarchs disrupt patriarchal rule. Following the defeat of her husband Peter and his subsequent death, Catherine, in Lehr's novel, declares she will not to re-marry, but "rule alone" (261). She is revered and loved by the Russian people for her devotion to her country in a similar way to Elizabeth, Kristine in her early years, and Isabel when she takes the crown of Castile. Isabel's success in becoming queen is attributed by Hernando to her questioning of patriarchy:

> *'Mi madre', reflexionaba, 'fue desplazada del trono¡tan solo por enviudar! Y yo me vi desplazada en la línea sucesoria a la corona de Castilla tan solo por tener un hermano menor. ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué somos de menos valor que un varón? Grandioso future es el que depara el destino a la sangre real si tiene nombre de mujer', ironizó. 'Mi suerte sera ser reina… pero no más que reina*

consorte. El rey de Castilla, aunque sea mi hermano Alfonso, me prometerá con algún rey extranjero para sellar quién sabe qué alianza políca; viviré en tierras extrañas hasta mi muerte, convertida en reina consortee o…', *su rostro adquirió gravedad* '*…despojada de todo mi poder y relagada al olvido si tengo la desdicha de enviudar, como mi madre.¡Pero mi destino no será distinto si algún diá o heredo la corona de Castilla! Deberé desposarme consangre real extranjera para dar descendencia que perpetúe la dinastía. Mi marido gobernará estas tierras, que no son las suyas, mientras que yo permaneceré a su sombra… a pesar de ser la propietaria de cuna de este pueblo. ¡No debería ser así! ¡Es injusto y menosprecia el valor de las mujeres!*'

'My mother,' she reflected, 'was displaced from the throne for being a widow! And I see myself displaced in the line of succession to the crown of Castile by having a younger brother. Why? Because we are of less value than a man? A great future is what destiny holds for the royal blood if she has the name woman', she said with irony. 'My fate will be to be queen ... but no more than queen consort. The king of Castile will be my brother Alfonso, I will be promised to some foreign king to seal a political alliance; Living in foreign lands until my death, converted into a queen consort or ..., ' her face became serious '... stripped of all my power and regalia, forgotten, if I have the misfortune of becoming a widow, as my

> mother. But my fate will be no different if someday I do inherit the crown of Castile! I must wed foreign royal blood to give offspring to perpetuate the dynasty. My husband will rule this land, which are not his own, while I will remain in his shadow ... despite being born in this homeland. This shouldn't be! It's an injustice and discourages valor in women! (55-56)

The treatment of her mother, including being dispossessed of her lands (Hernando 144-45), instills in Isabel the conviction to disavow being reduced to reproductive purposes and as subordinate to her husband (56).

Isabel proves her determination by untraditionally marrying Fernando d'Aragón in 1469 without her brother, the king's, consent (Hernando 111, 121,154). When Enrique IV dies, Isabel seizes the crown of Castile and is named "*como reina de Castilla*" 'as queen/ruler of Castile' (191); her husband is merely "*el rey consorte de estas tierras*" 'the king consort of these lands' (192). Fernando, recognizing the unprecedented power of his wife holding "*la espada … el símbolo del poder* 'the sword, the symbol of power' (196), rather than forsake her, commends her: "*¡Asombrosa mujer!* ("Amazing woman!"; 194). Isabel's love for Fernando, much like Mehrunnisa's in Sundaresan's novel, appears genuine and she has Fernando crowned king of Castile in a small ceremony (195) so that they can rule together in a manner reminiscent of Nefertiti and *Akhenaten*, as equals. Conversely, the hatred of a people for their queen reaches its greatest heights in Marie-Antoinette's life, though, in Vidal's novel, the queen's devotion to her religion and family is steadfast. Thus

redefining the sexual/political definitions of motherhood, the family, and rule ordained for them, Isabel and Nur Jahan marry for love, Kristine and Elizabeth never marry, and Catherine becomes the ‘foreign’ Russian mother-Empress, while Marie-Antoinette, embracing her domestic role as private mother, refuses to play publically the role of Queen as mother to her foreign people.

Conclusion

Women’s historical novels on modern monarchs suggest that a definition of motherhood is flexible, contingent, and linked with the politics of sexuality, nationhood, and religion. Contesting the gender conventions of their times and places, the heroines’ ability to play a plurality of gender roles is a testament to the constructed nature of both nationhood and motherhood. Yet, in many ways, the woman’s novel also suggests that, if a woman fulfils her political duties, she neglects her family and vice versa; she cannot be present in both, which is evident when analyzing their personal lives. There is a fear and preoccupation with losing the mother, of the mother being erased, of the daughter becoming mother and suffering the same fate. In order to break this patriarchal chain, Irigaray suggests there must be “the possibility for love of self on the side of women, and the recognition of the debt of the mother, thus freeing the mother to be a sexual and desiring woman, and freeing the daughter from the icy grip of the merged and undifferentiated relationship” (Whitford, “Section II” 77). The femino-centric topics of hysteria, separation, betrayal, surrogacy, foreigners, and the relation between motherhood and queenship all reveal the dissatisfaction

with modern conceptions of mothers. While the form and function of queenship and the maternal undergo changes, the denigration of the maternal, of the queen's mother and queen as mother, remain held in low estimation. She is relegated to an abject space. Thus, there is a need for a new woman's desire, a new gynocracy, not recognized "only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men" (Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader* 136). To break this code is to break women's silences and to establish a matrilineage that celebrates desire for women as mothers and daughters.

CHAPTER SIX

MATRILINEAL NARRATIVES: RACE, MEMORY, AND SURVIVAL

> So many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories
> – Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*

This chapter concentrates on the emergence of revisionist anticolonial writing on African, Caribbean, and Aboriginal women in the woman's historical novel. This writing coincides with "an emergent national awareness" and the postcolonial independence of several nations during the twentieth century (Zwicker 9). Essential to these works is determining the role of women in the new nation, because there is a belief that if women's history is not adequately confronted and recognized, their lives in the present will never improve. I analyze Judith Gleason's work *Agotime: Her Legend* (1970), Nancy Cato and Vivienne Ellis' novel *Queen Trucanini* (1976), *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1986) by Maryse Condé[26], and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga. Jerome de Groot believes that Walter Scott's influence has "obscured other historical fictive writing, particularly that of non-Western cultures" (13). Groot, referencing Kimberly Chabot Davis, writes that "novelists interested in the 'particular concerns of marginalized communities haunted by a history of oppression' use historical fiction to 'insist on the political urgency of rewriting history from the perspective of the disempowered'" (148-49). As Kathleen Gyssels claims with regard to Tituba, "Condé rewrites her voice to enable her to

[26] I am using the English translation of *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière … Noire de Salem* by Richard Philcox.

claim power and become master of her own narrative. Tituba, accused, misnamed, and distorted by history, has overturned the Puritans' power and knowledge by speaking for herself" (65). Authors like Condé and Dangarembga who politically engage in voicing historical silences through fragmented "first-person retrospective narratives" (Androne 271) subvert traditional master narratives of Western progress and domination and establish a "literature of revolt" (271).

Embracing a "*testimonio*" style, the works form a unique women's "resistance literature" that stresses the need for contemporary social change from the perspective of African and Caribbean women (Androne 271). However, as Rey Chow reminds writers of (fictional) history, when we resurrect the past, we cannot simply translate the native's experience and struggles: "That silence is at once *evidence* of imperialist oppression and what in the absence of the original witness to that oppression, must act in its place by *performing* or *feigning* as the preimperialist gaze" ("Where Have" 38). Continuing a pre-1970 genealogy of anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal historical novels (such as Catherine Edith Macauley Martin's *The Incredible Journey* (1923), in which two aboriginal women cross the Australian desert to retrieve a child kidnapped by a white man), these works employ historical imagination by writing the Indigenous and Black woman back into recorded history; they call into question how the historical record has been and always is already constructed while "lay[ing] claim to their own stories" (Newman 24) by creating a new maternal genealogy. Edward Said argues that postcolonial texts "are in effect a re-appropriation of the historical

experience of colonialism, revitalized and transformed into a new aesthetic of sharing and often transcendent re-formulation" (*Orientalism* 351). These authors suggest that, despite colonial/hegemonic history's attempt to enslave, murder, and erase, the maternal not only has endured but is essential to survival.

Memory is also necessary for survival and a prevalent theme in the woman's historical novel. In Gleason's *Agotime*, for example, which narrates Agotime's crossing as a slave from Dahomey to Brazil, Edna G. Bay argues that how Africans who remained in Africa during the slave-trade were affected is also a meaningful pursuit. Bay draws upon memories from both sides and discusses recent government sponsored projects in Benin: "these projects were specifically linked to the collective memory of the descendants of those who remained in Africa and of those who were taken" (43). Gleason also suggests both memory and destiny are collective: "memory animates, finds words to summon sleeping forces" (9) and refers to "our collective destiny" (97). This destiny is to "find a way, in the new world" (Gleason 99). Bay argues that "in Africa, collective memory preserves a record of the trauma of the trade to African societies and speaks directly to the question of the meaning of the trade to Africans" (45). Highlighting what many scholars, including Gleason, perceive as an inherent tension between accounts from collective memory and those of the official record, Bay attempts to bridge the two approaches:

> Good history is built by historians who document, cross-check, and search out corroborating pieces of evidence. History is nevertheless always an interpretation of the past tied to historians'

> understandings in and of the present. Collective memory works from signs of the past in the present: our empathy for what we know of the past, our sense of who we are and where we come from, and our study of rituals, symbols, and actions that could plausibly be linked to a former social or political condition. Collective memory assumes that conscious memory will gradually fade, but its signs endure. Those understandings are worthy of consideration and evaluation by a historian. (49)

Bay shows two possible understandings of the slave trade in Dahomey: one of collective memory during a time of intense insecurity and uncertainty and the other focusing on the individual experience, for example the politically-minded Agotime whose banishment is documented in historical sources (58).

Gil Zehava Hochberg sees the relation between history and personal memory as cut along gender lines. She writes:

> By assigning mother (or the maternal ancestor) the role of a ‘medium’ through which an alternative narrative emerges as a direct confrontation with history, ‘woman’ (as mother) is aligned with memory as an alternative to history. This promising role of the mother is promoted through a gendered mobilization of the radical division between ‘history’ and ‘memory.’ (2)

Hochberg recognizes the powerful role mothers play in women writers that are African and of the African diaspora. She writes that “the centrality of the maternal figure as the originator of women’s alternative voice and as a

transmitter of memory is an outcome of the particular history of black enslaved mothers" (Hochberg 2), which is evident in woman's historical novels like *Agotime* and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. In this chapter, I discuss these postcolonial works more fully through the lens of hegemonic history and women's imperialism, the arrival of the Europeans, exile, bad women, patriarchy within and without, and maternal survival.

Hegemonic History; Rewriting Women's Imperialism

Criticizing hegemonic Western history, postcolonial or anti-colonial writers (Franz Fanon, Said, Homi Bhabha, Spivak) have influenced and been influenced by postcolonial/anticolonial woman centered novels by Flora Nwapa, Jean Rhys, Zaynab Alkali, Ifeoma Okoye, Buchi Emecheta, and Nadine Gordimer. Analyzing the socio-political impact of a discourse of Empire on colonizer and colonized, these writers, in varying ways, seek alternative identities and new ways of imagining relations between races and nations. A new relation to history, thus, becomes of great value, as does the power for speaking in one's own voice. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, critiques not only Western history as hegemonic, but many of the above postcolonial theorists for their inherent sexism.

In her influential book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) and her essay "Subaltern Studies Deconstructing Historiography," Spivak writes of the challenges in re-writing India's colonial history from the point of view of the peasant insurgency, which she calls the "subaltern." Like much of women's

history, also included in the subaltern, Spivak is all too aware of a lack of records. Spivak, working with the group *Subaltern Studies*, a collective of historians, claims that the only existing records (diaries, memoirs, newspapers, etc.) belong to the colonial subject ("Subaltern Studies" 212). Spivak argues that "a hegemonic nineteenth-century European historiography had designated the archives as a repository of 'facts' and [she] propose[s] that they should be 'read'" (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 203). As an example of the incomplete archive or the production of evidence, Spivak invokes the life of the Rani of Sirmur and the records of the East India Company ("the first great transnational company" (220)).

Spivak refers to the Rani, the wife of a deposed and banished king-husband and mother to a prince, as an example of "agent-as-instrument" in patriarchal industrial capitalism and in, what will later become, transnational capitalism. The Rani is mentioned, albeit briefly, Spivak argues, because of her interest both territorially and commercially to the East India Company. One worker/writer for the company in particular, Captain Geoffrey Birch, signals to Spivak that "the truth value of the stranger [Birch, a man,] ... is being established as the reference point for the true (insertion into) history of these wild regions" (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 213) and that "here what is one narrativization of history is seen not only 'as it really was,' but implicitly 'as it ought to be'" (222). Spivak's analysis of women who have been seen not as they really were but how they ought to be is seen again when Birch asks in a letter to interfere with the Rani's private life, when she desires to be a *Sati*.

For Spivak, the Rani signifies a commodity, exchanged by men for men, that marks the movement from a "feudal" society to a "modern/imperialist" one (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 235). As Spivak notes, the Rani may be within the margins of Western history, but even the Rani herself is a woman of relative privilege and not among marginal women. Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions*, which narrates the life of Tambu, a young Rhodesian woman transitioning between tradition and modernity, supports Spivak's thinking. Spivak argues that the marginal woman, "'the third-world woman," is caught, frozen, between two polarities–patriarchal tradition and patriarchal development, subject and object–the result of which is "the figure of woman disappears" (304). While the colonial authorities, Spivak suggests, may be responsible for the near historical erasure of women like the Rani, it is the "emancipated" women and men of contemporary India who are complicit in silencing women today; therefore, contemporary women's historical novels are invaluable in re-writing and re-reading the accepted views of history and literature.

Jean Rhys' historical novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) supports many of Spivak's claims and is an important forerunner of the novels I discuss in this chapter. Rhys suggests that a critical feminist perspective evolves not only out of a rejection or retelling of the masculinist dominant discourse such as Walter Scott's but also evolves from the popular woman's novel–regardless of whether it is a "classic." Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is reinterpreted in anti-imperial feminist terms in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in such a way that it is almost impossible not to re-read the original. Spivak argues that Jane's agency in the novel, which

is heralded by later Western feminism, comes at the lack of agency granted to Antoinette (Bertha) Mason, Rochester's first wife (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 125, 127). Rhys gives Bertha Mason a story, an identity, and a humanity that draws the reader's attention to the sexism, racism, exoticism and Orientalism within Brontë's original tale, which Caroline Rody calls a "mother-text" (145). The idea of a mother-text further plays on the fact that Rhys' novel chronologically is the prequel, not the sequel, to *Jane Eyre*, though it was written much later. Rhys, thus, puts forth her own original work while simultaneously transforming/subverting Brontë's mother-text.

Similarly, Jane Haggis in "White Women and Colonialism: Towards a Non-Recuperative History" examines the role women have played in colonialism/imperialism. Haggis' strategy places, in light of anti-colonialism criticism such as in women's historical novels, three narratives side by side: 1) the subject (the British missionaries), 2) the missionaries' Indian subjects, and 3) her own purpose, a feminist post-colonial history (175). Refusing to romanticize the white-woman's point of view "allow[s] the historical figures to live within their context rather than to rewrite history to conform more exactly with current received notions" (Haggis 163). By doing so, Haggis acknowledges the danger of universalizing women's experiences or fragmenting and losing any sense of reference at all. Her project incorporates individual voices, but in concert: "Thus history becomes by analogy, expressive of difference and interrelatedness 'everybody talking at once, multiple rhythms being played simultaneously, but held together in a particular narrative, by the explicit awareness of inter-

relatedness" (165). Haggis writes that "by showing how the image of the Indian woman victim acted as a literary device and artifice of missionary women's representation to their home audience in England, [she is] able to suggest the fictional quality of the missionary portrayal of women" (181). This kind of thinking, which Spivak refers to as 'reading' and Haggis as 'translating,' is meaningful for a feminist study of historical novels such as Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998). The novel is told from the point of view of a Baptist missionary's wife and her four daughters after arriving in the Belgian Congo from the United States in 1959. One cannot ignore, Bertha Mason's dramatic death in Rhys' novel is a case in point, the participation of women in colonialism; thus, analyzing the ways in which women's lives and narratives meet and converge within the novels is imperative.

The Arrival of the Europeans: Dead Mothers and Wayward Daughters

In Cato and Ellis' and Condé's novels, a pivotal moment in the protagonists' lives occurs when their mothers are murdered upon the early arrival of Europeans to their island homes, Tasmania and Barbados respectively. Cato and Ellis' novel opens with the happy birth of Trucanini to her mother Waubelannina and her father Mangana, Chief of the Bruny Island Tribe. Coinciding with the birth are sightings of "*ria* or *rae,*" "the white man, who had come to hunt the whales and seals of the Southern Ocean, and cut down the forests of Van Diemen's Land for timber" (Cato and Ellis 7). When Trucanini is still a young child, the tribe is ambushed by the whalers. Waubelannina is raped and stabbed

to death when she fights back (9). Her mother's death and the kidnapping of her sisters, who had "been sold to a sealer on distant Kangaroo Island in South Australia, to live as his slaves and concubines" (13), however, do not deter Trucanini. As if learning from her mother's death that those who fight back are punished and die, Trucanini engages in relationships with the whalers, who are multiplying in numbers and setting up permanent residences.

Cato and Ellis write: "The white men fascinated her. And she could not resist the good things they gave her" such as sugar, tea and biscuits (12). Cato and Ellis suggest that, while some of the women were sold as slaves, others, like Trucanini and her friend Pagerly, "went to the whalers' camps by choice" (14). However, when the natives are forced out of the towns, tensions between the new settlers and natives increase until "an uncompromising hatred of the white invaders had replaced the courteous welcome given by the natives to the first explorers. Every white man, every single one, must be killed or driven back into the sea he came from!" (Cato and Ellis 17). Likewise:

> The settlers, the newspapers, the officers of the Van Diemen's Land Company in the far northwest, all clamoured for action. The treacherous, savage black men were stopping them from getting on with their lawful business of clearing the bush, raising sheep and exterminating the unique fauna such as the Tasmanian tiger and the native cat. Reasoning with the natives had proved useless. Every one, every single one, must be killed or driven into the sea! (18)

Governor Arthur, wanting to avoid the extermination of the aborigines, decides to woo them with food stocks and for a permanent storekeeper to live on Bruny Island.

George Augustus Robinson, seeking social mobility, is awarded the job. Robinson also considers it his job to civilize "the black on Bruny" (Cato and Ellis 21) by introducing "them to the Christian religion" and "the women, who … less fierce and more tender-hearted than the men, may later act as missionaries and ambassadors to members of their race in other parts of the main island" (21). For this reason, Trucanini, like Malinalli in Esquivel's *Malinche*, is sent to accompany Robinson back to Bruny so he can instruct her in his language and religion. Cato and Ellis write: "George Robinson had outlined his great plan for 'ameliorating' the natives to Lieutenant Gunn. The plan was to take a party of civilized blacks with him as interpreters on a friendly mission the wild tribes of the unexplored bush. He would take no arms; and he believed he could persuade the natives to come in peaceably and give themselves up" (29). Thus, Trucanini willingly becomes Robinson's chief translator and guides his expedition.

Condé's novel *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, by contrast, reimagines a popular subject in contemporary women's historical fiction, seventeenth century witch trials. For example, Susan Fletcher's *Corrag* (2010) traces the life of Corrag, a woman imprisoned, waiting to be burned at the stake (like her mother and her grandmother) for her involvement in the 1692 massacre of the MacDonald clan in the Scottish Highlands. Mary Sharratt's *Daughters of the Witching Hill* (2010), set in England, focuses on a group of women tried as

witches for practicing folk magic. Tobsha Learner's *The Witch of Cologne* (2003) and Sherri Smith's *The Children of Witches* (2010) are set in Germany and Kathleen Kent's *The Heretic's Daughter* (2008) takes place in early colonial Salem. In two novels on Salem, Tituba figures prominently: in Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Calligraphy of the Witch* (2007), she is the friend of the slave Concepción Benavidez, a Mexican woman who is accused of witchcraft by her own daughter, and, in *Witches' Children* (1982) by Patricia Clapp, the narrator Mary Warrren, a girl possessed, accuses Tituba of witchcraft. In all of these works, social-political hierarchies along gender, class, race, and epistemes (most of these women have knowledge of plants and healing and/or fortune-telling and being a medium) contribute to the accusations and confessions, often procured under duress.

Condé's work reimagines all these axes converging in the life of the historical figure Tituba, a West Indian female slave from Barbados. The initial setting of a plantation in the Barbados resonates with other anti-colonial women's historical novels that are plantation narratives: for instance, Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010), Isabel Allende's *Island Beneath the Sea* (2010), *Unburnable* (2006) by Marie-Elena John, or the experimental work *The Salt Roads* (2004) by Nalo Hopkinson. Though Tituba is a plantation slave, her life is known in historical records for surviving charges of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692.

The novel begins with the lines "Abena, my mother, was raped by an English sailor on the deck of *Christ the King* one day in the year 16** while the

ship was sailing for Barbados. I was born from this act of aggression. From this act of hatred and contempt" (Condé 3). Tituba tells the reader that her mother, upon arriving in Bridgetown, is bought by Darnell Davis so that she can entertain and look after his wife who pines for England. Edouard J. Glissant describes the experiences of "transplanted" (112) slaves like Abena as constituting "shock," "painful negation" and "brutal dislocation" (62). Glissant also refers to a "nonhistory" (61-62) that exists outside master narratives of History (112) and prevents "'the collective consciousness' of the colonized from absorbing the totality of this tortuous genealogy" (Thomas 87). Writing nonhistory is a means towards realizing a collective memory and consciousness. As Jennifer R. Thomas clarifies, "nonhistory can emerge as history for peoples of the Caribbean with the help of the writer who cultivates a historical consciousness unlimited by the traditional chronological and hierarchal understandings of experience" (88). Thus, Condé's writing of Abena engages with nonhistory by delving into a relatively unknown African-Caribbean past.

When Davis learns that Abena is pregnant, however, he banishes her from the house and gives her to one of his slaves, Yao, who is also an Ashanti. Condé writes: "While Abena stood there in front of him her head hung low, Yao's heart filled with immense compassion. It seemed to him that this child's humiliation symbolized the condition of his entire people: defeated, dispersed, and auctioned off" (5). Together Yao and Abena find reciprocal peace and support. Though Yao fervently loves Tituba when she is born, Tituba suspects her mother feels differently. She surmises, "when did I discover that my mother

did not love me? Perhaps when I was five or six years old. Although the color of my skin was far from being light and my hair was crinkly all over, I never stopped reminding my mother of the white sailor who had raped her" (Condé 6). As a slave, Abena is also cautious of loving a daughter too much.

A slave's life is unpredictable and subject to the whim of a white master, which is evident when Tituba recounts a day her mother takes her to the yam patch and, unexpectedly, they meet their master Davis. When Davis tries to rape Abena, Tituba hands her mother a cutlass that she uses to strike the man (Condé 8): "They hanged my mother. I watched her body swing from the lower branches of a silk cotton tree. She had committed a crime for which there is no pardon. She had not killed him, however. In her clumsy rage she had only managed to gash his shoulder. They hanged my mother" (8). Following Abena's death, Yao commits suicide and Tituba finds herself taken in by an old slave woman named Mama Yaya (9).

Mama Yaya is a powerful woman with a gift for prophecy, healing, and making potions; she has an innate connection with nature. She also has the ability to see and communicate with the dead, which she teaches to Tituba. Her skills allow Tituba to see her mother and later Mama Yaya after she dies (Condé 10). Living as a recluse on the edge of a pond, Tituba inspires fear in the other slaves, including John Indian, who thinks she is a witch. After John Indian's invitation to a local dance in Carlisle Bay, Tituba returns home to summon Mama Yaya. Though Tituba desires John Indian's love, Mama Yaya warns against it. Mama Yaya "shook her head. 'Men do not love. They possess. They

subjugate'" (14). Abena seconds this opinion in an exchange with her daughter: "'Why can't women do without men?' she groaned. 'Now you're going to be dragged off to the other side of the water'" (15). Despite "Mama Yaya's reluctance, and [her] mother's lamentations," Tituba meets John Indian at the dance (16). John Indian declares his desire for her to live with him in Bridgetown. Similar to Trucanini's sexual feelings towards Mr. Robinson, Tituba desires John Indian's love, though she acknowledges that "therein lay [her] misfortune" (18). Tituba muses:

> My mother had been raped by a white man. She has been hanged because of a white man. I had seen his tongue quiver out of his mouth, his penis turgid and violet. My adoptive father had committed suicide because of a white man. Despite all that, I was considering living among white men again, in their midst, under their domination. And all because of an uncontrollable desire for a mortal man? Wasn't it madness? Madness and betrayal? (19)

Fully knowing the dangers that lay ahead, Tituba takes her meager belongings and sets off for John Indian in Carlisle Bay.

After arriving at Susanna Endicott's, John Indian's mistress, Tituba's baptism is arranged; she is given commands for the cleaning of the house and she takes bible instruction as the new young wife of John Indian (Condé 21-23). Tituba reflects:

> The slaves who flocked off the ships in droves and whose gait, features, and carriage the good people of Bridgetown mocked were

> far freer than I was. For the slaves has not chosen their chains. They had not walked of their own accord toward a raging, awe-inspiring sea to given themselves up to the slave dealers and bend their backs to the branding iron. That is exactly what I had done. (25)

Tituba becomes increasingly conscious of the mistake she has made and the pain she will suffer. Her epiphany comes when her mistress accuses her of being a witch. Susanna Endicott's accusations serve as a precursor to future claims against Tituba that she is a witch. As punishment for Tituba being a witch, she and John Indian are sold to a minister leaving for Boston the following day (35). Unable to abandon John Indian, Tituba knows she is being essentially banished to America as an act of revenge, but that she will, in turn, enact her own revenge–she will tell her story. Both Condé's and Cato and Ellis' novels provide a glimpse into the life of a young woman whose complicity with patriarchy determines their suffering. Despite the deaths of their mothers at the hands of white male colonizers, Trucanini and Tituba persist to engage in this dangerous world for the love of a man. The outcome of this love is that both women are indoctrinated into a Christian religion and education and taught the English language, whilst being exiled from their native lands and enslaved in the service of the colonists.

Exile and Rewriting the Myth of Aeneas

The theme of exile is not only central in women's historical novels but also Virgil's classic Roman epic *The Aeneid*. Virgil writes: "I impose no limits of

time or place. I have given them an empire that will know no end" (Book I-278-9). Virgil's protagonist, Aeneas, as we know from Wolf's *Cassandra*, is a prince of Troy. Building on Homer's *Iliad* in which Aeneas is also a demi-god, the *Aeneid* is the tale of his exile and survival after the burning and capture of Troy by the Greeks. Both Cato and Ellis and Gleason draw from this founding myth when writing the lives of two relatively unknown historical nineteenth century queens: the sole remainder of the indigenous Tasmanians, proclaimed Queen of the Tasmanians, Trucanini (c.1812–8 May 1876) and the West African Queen of Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin), Agotime (reign 1789-97). The jacket sleeve to *Agotime* likens Agotime to a "womanly Aeneas" carrying her gods and vodu to a new land.

Amidst Troy burning, Virgil depicts Aeneas carrying his father Anchises on his shoulders, leading his son by the hand, and saving the Trojan gods. Like Aeneas, Agotime's odyssey as a slave from Dahomey to Brazil is one of wandering. Surviving slavery, Agotime escapes and lives in Casa Xelegbata, São Luis for a time. Virgil's immortalization of Aeneas in the founding history of the Roman Empire, Gleason suggests, is like Agotime, who founds her eventual Rome in Brazil–she does not, contrary to some historians/tales, return to Dahomey once her son Gãkpe takes power.

Bay argues that Agotime's fate is uncertain and it is unclear that she ever returned to Dahomey to become the recorded *kpojito*, Queen Mother, "though survival and return, then, seem to have had a particular importance in Dahomean thinking –almost as if exile as a captive in a foreign land was perceived as a

period of trial or testing" (56). According to Gleason's account, Agotime remains steadfast in Brazil. The last line of the novel reads "No, when she left Casa Xelegbata, she was headed towards the interior –" (Gleason 293). Agotime's destiny, like Aeneas', is imposed by the gods. Her decision to put down new roots, the author through a contemporary narrator suggests, makes finding traces of her life and spiritual power possible.

Gleason is not the only one, however, who rewrites the tale of Aeneas from a female and feminist perspective. Cato and Ellis re-interpret the most famous scenes between Aeneas and his lover Dido in the personages of Mr. Robinson and Trucanini. In Book I, Aeneas is ship-wrecked onto the shores of Carthage, a city ruled by Queen Dido. Up until now, Virgil has portrayed Aeneas as the quintessential Roman hero: steadfast in his respect/duty towards the gods, homeland, and family. In Carthage, Aeneas sees the city newly being built with citadels and temples dedicated to Juno. The high walls also depict the fall of Troy. Aeneas sees his King Priam and the events of the war before him, including himself in combat. Dido, nonetheless, welcomes the Trojan Prince and tells him, "I, too, have known ill fortune like yours and been tossed from one wretchedness to another" (Book I-628-9). In Virgil's text, Aeneas and Dido's fates are intertwined and Aeneas will eventually cause the ruin of Dido and her city. Dido's love for Aeneas is solidified when Venus sends her son Cupid to inflame Dido with a fiery poison/potion, ultimately a destructive love. Thus, a mad passion, Virgil argues, will cause Dido's downfall, much like it does for Trucanini when she meets Mr. Robinson.

Trucanini, enlisted by Robinson, helps round-up the remaining natives on the island. The government's plan is to domesticate and civilize those natives who are willing and to kill those who are not. During their trek through the bush, Robinson's life becomes endangered by hostile natives seeking him out, which causes him to jump into the river for safety. Essentially, Trucanini saves his life and the pair takes refuge in a cave before making love (Cato and Ellis 82). This mirrors Virgil's text when, while out hunting, Dido and Aeneas are driven by a storm into a cave for shelter. The storm is caused by Juno, who is trying to make an alliance with Venus for Dido and Aeneas to marry and co-rule. Virgil writes: "that day was the first cause of death, and first of sorrow. She [Dido] gave no thought to appearance or her good name and no longer kept her love as a secret in her own heart, but called it marriage, using the word to cover her guilt" (Book IV-171-4). Cato and Ellis do not suggest Trucanini believes she is marrying, but a similar cultural mistranslation occurs. The love of a 'foreign queen' is null and void; Trucanini is neither white nor British, just as Dido herself is Carthaginian, the sworn enemy of Rome during the time in which Virgil is writing.

Essentially both women are 'engaged' and in love with the enemy of their peoples. Is Trucanini, like Dido, a traitor to her nation? According to Ellis, "[t]he Aborigines thought little of Trucanini. They were inclined to regard her more as a traitor than a saviour for her exploits with the Friendly Mission" (145). This view is supported in the novel by the few times Trucanini does help her people against the whites, including a charge/acquittal of murder (Cato and Ellis 207). The narrative, thus, offers a complicated protagonist whose allegiance

appears to be torn. She is never portrayed as despising her own people, but she is also not a glorified heroine. She is naïve, trusting, and has sexual feelings for Mr. Robinson that convince her that change and a better future for her and her people are possible–she does not have the clairvoyance to know what colonization and submission to the whites in the future will actually entail.

The sobriquet “Queen” also highlights the tension between Trucanini and her people; to the whites, in old age, she becomes a local celebrity as “people believed that she really was a queen, and considered her a heroine, the saviour of her race” (Cato and Ellis 145). Ellis suggests that the facts about Trucanini have been obscured and that she was only granted the ironic title after the death of her people. She is a queen without a kingdom, rights, or citizens. The empty appellation problematically also signifies her allegiance to the whites (Ellis 146). The sexual affection between Trucanini and Mr. Robinson, like Aeneas and Dido, is short-lived; Aeneas forgets his fate and his oath to the gods, in this case to track and capture the natives for the government.Coincidentally, Robinson’s first wife Maria dies, like Aeneas’ first wife Creusa, and he remarries after his affair with Trucanini and lives with his new wife Rose in Rome (Cato and Ellis 238)–just as Aeneas, after his time with Dido, marries his destined Latin bride, Lydia.

Analogously, Milton in *Paradise Lost*, describes Satan as an empire-builder; he is ambitious, a colonizer, and an adventurer, which, according to Heather James, are positions Aeneas holds in Virgil’s epic (2552), and I argue Mr. Robinson possesses in Cato and Ellis’ novel–according to an older and wiser

Trucanini, he is "a Rageorapper, a devil!" (235). Does this characterization also fit Agotime? Does Agotime re-enact the colonizing-imperializing process, though she is a Dahomean slave, when she spreads her vodu throughout Brazil? Like Aeneas, she is not seeking a return to her original home, nor does she ever return to Dahomey, but she, also, is not a war-monger in the way Aeneas is portrayed. Agotime does, however, install the gods from Dahomey in Brazil and continues her Dahomean familial lineage in a way similar to that which Aeneas does with Ascanius, his Trojan son. Though her only biological child remains in Dahomey, in Brazil, Agotime adopts a son named Luiz Braga, a romantic poet who is half black (Cato and Ellis 262) and speaks Portuguese. Much like Piat who complicates Québec's history in *Les Filles du Roi*, Gleason challenges Brazil's history and suggests it cannot ignore and erase its African past. Gleason's narrative suggests that Agotime's legend and her gods are still alive and visible today and that she warrants a feminist novel worthy of preserving her heroic life in the epic manner of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

The imperializing aspect of Agotime in Gleason's novel is ambiguous because her cult is subjugated and limited by the dominant discourses; she must find imaginative/alternative ways to express her beliefs. By comparison, Mr. Robinson's imperializing role in Cato and Ellis' novel is clear. Derogatorily nicknamed by the other colonists as "Black Robinson" for his affection for Trucanini, he must, like Aeneas who puts his personal feelings aside when he flees Carthage and sails for Italy, dis-engage himself from Trucanini and return to his wife and children in Hobart Town. When Dido reminds Aeneas of his

marriage pledge to her, Aeneas claims that he has not held the torches of a bridegroom, "nor [has he] offered [her] marriage or entered into that contract with [her]" (339-40; Book IV), though "[i]t is not by [his] own will that [he] still search[s] for Italy (361-2; Book IV). Unlike Dido who, when Aeneas leaves in the night, ritualistically burns all of Aeneas' clothing and belongings before laying herself atop the pyre, Trucanini does no such immediate act. In fact, hers is a slow-death. Maintaining a quasi-friendship with Mr. Robinson over a period of years until his eventual return to England, she suffers poverty, exile to Flinders Island, racism, and, finally, as the only member of her race still alive, the annihilation of her people. Towards the end of the novel, Mr. Robinson pays a visit to his old friend Trucanini (Cato and Ellis 184), who barely acknowledges his existence, bringing to mind when, in Book VI, Aeneas pleads with honeyed words to Dido in the Underworld, but she only stares back, emotionally unmoved, and flees, his enemy, "hating him" (474-5).

Patriarchy Within and Without

Among the challenges the women in Gleason's *Agotime* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* face is patriarchy within their own cultures as well as patriarchal prejudices from imperializing European forces. In *Nervous Conditions*, the protagonist Tambu and the women in her Zimbabwean family (formerly Rhodesia) are subject to the rules of her father and uncle. In the case of Agotime, she faces patriarchal discrimination from her own Dahomean culture. Gleason's novel introduces Agotime just prior to her exile:

> She was at a crossroads now. Frightening though her prospects, she willingly committed herself to change, for nothing could be worse than the dismal path the last five years had taken. When her husband King Agõglo died, she, unlike those childless wives required to immolate themselves upon the bier, had passed with come fourscore others into the keeping of Adãdozã, his son and successor. However, unknown to the commonality, this customary transfer had in her case implied immediate imprisonment. (8)

Confined to the panther-wives' compound, Agotime awaits her banishment, while her only child Gãkpe is in exile on the banks of the Weme.

Prior to her departure, Agotime secretly consults the oracle of the Bokonõ. The Bokonõ tells Agotime, "adapt to circumstance; be discreet, adept at disguise, change of place and you will survive to accomplish that which Fa has decreed" (Gleason 33). When Agotime is brought before her stepson, evidence of a transatlantic exchange between European, Brazilian, and Dahomean cultures is clear. Adãdozã sits on a throne, "a gift from his 'brother' George III" (43), and there are Dutch canons that had been given in exchange for "one hundred slaves apiece" (48) surrounding the procession. Agotime, also, muses on the name that each canon bears, as if its maker were a king: "No Dahomean smith would dream of afixing his name to one of the artifacts … [but] she would have liked, before she died, to leave upon something somewhere a little brass plate that said *Agotime made me*" (48). On the other side of the Great Gate are the *caboceers* and slave traders. Gleason writes: "Victims of a languished trade, some of these

ex-sailors and adventurers, accidently captured in the course of Dahomean raids along the littoral, had remained unransomed prisoners as long as twenty-five years in Abomey" (49). At her late husband's bidding, Agotime learns Portuguese from Innocencio, a caboceer whose name ironically translates as "innocent," and undertakes a religious education from the priests (49).

Standing before Adãdozã, Agotime is accused of telling stories, naming the king a tyrant, and, like Tituba in Condé's novel, being a witch (Gleason 54). Possibly too powerful to execute because of her access to the supernatural (Bay 53), the outcome is that Agotime is sentenced to Whydah Beach as an anonymous slave destined for Brazil (Gleason 59). Bay, in her study on the effect of the slave trade on African societies such as Dahomey, argues that "the ruling elites themselves lived with the possibility of becoming victims of the trade. Being traded overseas was one of the several documented punishments for losers in political struggles at court" (52). Thus, Agotime is sold, like many other Dahomean slaves, by her own stepson into the hands of European and Brazilian traders.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga stresses the patriarchal limits her protagonist faces when pursuing her dream to be educated. The novel begins in an existentialist fashion with the female protagonist Tambu telling the reader, "I was not sorry when my brother died" (Dangarembga 1). In a sense Tambu benefits from Nhamo's death in 1968. As the second eldest child in the family, Tambu is only permitted to attend the missionary school in Umtali where her uncle is headmaster after Nhamo dies. Tambu argues: "Though the event of my

brother's passing and the events of my story cannot be separated, my story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment and about Nyasha's rebellion" (1).

Tambu recounts how, at an early age, her family only had enough money to send Nhamo to school: "my father thought I should not mind. 'Is that anything to worry about? Ha-a-a, it's nothing,' he reassured me, with his usual ability to jump whichever way was easiest. 'Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables'" (Dangarembga 15). These rigid gender roles based on sexual difference continually attempt to limit Tambu's life choices, but she knows education can help her situation.

Dangarembga writes:

> My mother said being black was a burden because it made you poor, but Babamukuru was not poor. My mother said being a woman was a burden because you had to bear children and look after them and the husband. But I did not think this was true. […] I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood. (16)

Planting and growing her own maize in the year 1962, Tambu affirms to her family that she will raise her own school fees (Dangarembga 17), despite her father's disapproval and her mother's conviction that she will fail.

The success of her maize is accredited not only to her hard work and determination but also to her late grandmother who "gave [her] history lessons as

well. History that could not be found in the textbooks" (Dangarembga 17). History plays an important role in the novel as Tambu is torn between dominant master narratives and the point of view of the colonized as well as women's knowledge and history, which is not recorded versus patriarchal historical accounts. This struggle plays itself out, literally, when Tambu discovers that Nhamo has been stealing her mealies (22). After attacking Nhamo on the playground, Mr. Matimba offers to help Tambu sell her mealies to the Whites in the town (24). Earning enough money to pay for all of her school fees, much to Nhamo's jealousy, Tambu comes top of her class in Sub A and, the following year, in Sub B (31). It is, also, at this time that Tambu's uncle Babamukuru and his wife Maiguru, after five years of living and studying for Master's degrees in England, return home with their children Chido and Nyasha (35, 102).

Babamukuru decides that Nhamo will live with him and attend the missionary school (Dangarembga 48). When Nhamo unexpectedly dies from what is believed to be mumps while in his uncle and aunt's care, the family is distraught and full of guilt (54). Though Tambu's father sees little point in educating her, Babamukuru says, "I will not feel I have done my duty if I neglect the family … Tambudzai – must be given the opportunity to do what she can for the family before she goes to her husband's home" (56). In favour of Tambu's education, Babamukuru still clings to an idealized conception of woman, whose roles include, first and foremost, marrying and having children. Thus, Tambu not only has to overcome the future her mother and father have already mapped out for her, but she must also negotiate the expectations of her aunt and uncle who,

in some respects, adhere to traditional gender divisions of labour and, in other respects, embrace Western materialism and ideals such as career, education, home, car, religion, clothing, etc.

Learning to navigate her new lifestyle at her uncle's, conforming to a school with white children, and adapting to the ways of the missionaries proves alienating for Tambu (Dangarembga 105). Tambu reflects, at the end of the novel, on being accepted to a prestigious Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart (195) where she learns European languages, plays sports, and voraciously reads literature (199). According to Tambu's mother, it is this:

> 'Englishness,' in which one must tread carefully: Be careful, she had said, and I thought about Nyasha and Chido and Nhamo, who had all succumbed, and of my own creeping feelings of doom. … I was beginning to have a suspicion, no more than the seed of suspicion, that had I been too eager to leave the homestead and embrace the 'Englishness' of the mission; and after that the more concentrated 'Englishness' of Sacred Heart' (207).

The novel concludes with Tambu asserting her increasing criticisms of colonialism and patriarchy within both her own family and foreign influence. The woman's historical novel becomes the medium for her catharsis, once again suggesting its suitability for women writers (208).

Bad Women

In all of the novels discussed in this chapter, women's transgressions of a hegemonic and idealized image of the good woman as wife and mother are described–Trucanini lives with the whalers and Mr. Robinson, Agotime dares to undermine her son-in-law's authority, and Tituba is incarcerated as a witch in Salem. Several of the female characters in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, in particular, however, are referred to as "bad women." In this section, I focus on the characters Nyasha and Lucia. Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, is a self-proclaimed "hybrid" (Dangarembga 79) negotiating, with difficulty, her Shona culture and an English one. She is not fully accepted in either culture. When Nyasha returns from England she is unrecognizable to Tambu. Unlike Tituba, for whom returning to the Barbados is a kind of justice, for Nyasha, returning to Zimbabwe proves difficult. For one, Nyasha barely understands Shona (42, 78), thus, making conversation nearly impossible. Tambu, like her other family members, disapproves of Nyasha and judges her ungrateful, critical, and spoiled (52, 60).

The relationship, however, begins to improve after Tambu moves to live with her aunt and uncle and the cousins share a room. Tambu, though, cannot understand the way her cousin talks disrespectfully to Maiguru, to which Maiguru apologetically says, "They are too Anglicized … they picked up all these disrespectful ways in England" (Dangarembga 74). As Tambu notes, however, she is unsure if her aunt is "censoring Nyasha for her Anglicized habits or [Tambu]for [her] lack of them" (74). Tensions between cultural and gender expectations continue as Nyasha rebels against her parents. She smokes

cigarettes, starves herself, is outspoken, and reads English novels voraciously (84-85). Tambu knows that "beside Nyasha [she] was a paragon of feminine decorum, principally because [she] hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked;" thus, "Babamukuru thought [Tambu] was the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be and lost no opportunity to impress this point of view upon Nyasha" (157). This is not entirely accurate, however, as Tambu criticizes her mother in the text more than once, such as over the dirty latrine (125). Tambu's relationship with her mother, a personal and political figure, influences her relation to the mother-country and mother-tongue.

As Katrina Daly Thompson notes, "[t]he mother tongue in *Nervous Conditions*, then is no mere metaphor for first language but also a linking of Shona to the character of Tambudzai's mother" (52). Learning English as a language and lifestyle means a distancing and separation from her mother. Nyasha also feels alienated from her mother, who she views as a wasted talent. Tensions between Nyasha and her parents reach a climax at the same time that she reaches sexual maturity. After attending a school dance, Nyasha stays outside with a boy named Andy, who promises to teach her a new dance (Dangarembga 113). Tired of waiting, Tambu and her cousin Chido go into the house. When Babamukuru discovers Nyasha is still outside, he fetches her and cries, "No decent girl would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of night" (115). Babamukuru continues to argue, "Why can't you behave like a young woman from a decent home? What will people say when they see Sigauke's daughter

carrying on like that?" (116). He tells Nyasha that "[he] cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore" (116) and he strikes her for talking back to him. In retaliation, Nyasha hits her father and they struggle until Chido is able to hold Babamukuru and Nyasha escapes to the servants' quarters (117). Tambu remembers:

> Thinking how dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition … What I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (118)

Tambu's realization jump-starts her feminist consciousness and continues afterward when she, Nyasha, Maiguru, and her uncle travel/drive to visit her family for Christmas.

It is at this point that Lucia is introduced into the narrative (Dangarembga 126). Lucia is Tambu's mother's sister and is described as "a wild woman" (127); Dangarembga writes: "Look at Lucia! Ha! There is nothing of a woman there. She sleeps with anybody and everybody, but she hasn't borne a single child, yet. She's been bewitched. More likely she's a witch herself" (128). Tambu sees the contradiction of these claims.

Lucia is criticized for not being a good woman, thus, losing the social status of the categorization; her being childless also seems to exclude her from being a woman. Her sexuality gives her power, for which she is called a witch. The notion of female sexuality as a threatening supernatural power is also supported by Tituba in Condé's novel and Trucanini in Cato and Ellis' work. Adding to Lucia, her "shame" is that she becomes pregnant with Takesure's child (meaning it is a distant cousin of Babamukuru's) and is sleeping with Tambu's father (Dangarembga 129). When Jeremiah says that he'd like to take Lucia as a second wife, Babamukuru refuses the marriage based on the fact that bigamy is sinful and "would bring the wrath of God down on the entire family" (129). The "problem" of Lucia prompts a serious family meeting that the women, including the accused, are not permitted to attend.

With the women fighting amongst themselves, Lucia finally strides into the room of men to defend herself and set the record straight (Dangarembga 146-47). The patriarchy decides that a cleansing ceremony is necessary for the family, for which two ideas are put forth: a traditional witchdoctor or a Christian wedding between Tambu's parents. In a way reminiscent of the minister Samuel Parris in Condé's novel wherein he insists upon marrying Tituba and John Indian on the ship bound for Boston, Babamukuru insists upon a Christian marriage. Tambu, in response to the wedding, tells Nyasha:

> The more I saw of worlds beyond the homestead the more I was convinced that the further we left the old ways behind the closer we came to progress. … When I confronted Nyasha with this evidence

> of the nature of progress, she became quite annoyed and delivered a lecture on the dangers of assuming Christian ways were progressive ways. 'It's bad enough,' she said severely, 'when a country gets colonised, but when the people do as well!.' (150)

In the end, Tambu refuses to attend the wedding (170).

Tambu's refusal causes Babamukuru to equate her with Nyasha. He tells Tambu she is ungrateful, disrespectful, and evil: she is "a bad girl" (Dangarembga 169). Her punishment is two weeks of the servants' chores. Lucia, on the other hand, is able to somewhat redeem herself when she suggests to Babamukuru that she would like a job (159). Unable to secure one for herself, Babamukuru finds Lucia a position working at a hostel (159), for which Lucia is forever indebted. Though she defiantly defends Tambu in her decision not to attend the wedding (173), Lucia is able to make her living as a single mother and prove to Babamukuru that she can be "good." Nyasha, on the other hand, is described at the end of the novel as having a breakdown.

On holiday from school, Tambu sees the decline in Nyasha's health. Tambu hears Nyasha internalizing and crying in the words of her uncle: "I'm not a good girl. I'm evil. I'm not a good girl" (Dangarembga 203). She, then, proceeds to rip her history book into shreds declaring, "Their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies" (205). This behavior prompts Nyasha to be sent to Maiguru's brother in Salisbury and, later, to be placed in a clinic (206). Nyasha suffers, literally and metaphorically, from starvation. She is hungry for change. Dangarembga suggests that this hunger is a symptom of a nervous condition,

which is not only the title of the novel but also is included in an epigraph from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* that reads: "the condition of native is a nervous condition." Thompson explains that "Nyasha cannot articulate her illness because it occurs in a language which is not part of the culture surrounding her, the 'bewitching master narrative', English" (57). Nyasha's problems, once again, are attributedby Tambu's mother to her "Englishness."

Tambu senses the contradiction to this claim; it is as though as her body deteriorates, her thoughts become more lucid. Nyasha's "English" education alerts her to the sexist and racist historical record and culture she lives within, one which distorts and ignores history from the point of view of the Black Zimbabwean, particularly Black Zimbabwean women, and is myopic when it comes to the future. Nyasha envisions gender equality and, therefore, she is also, like Tambu, "critical of her mother's sacrifice of self for her father's ambition" and his colonializing and Puritanical way towards women's sexuality (Shaw 9-10). Derek Wright argues that "puritanism is the principle ingredient of the colonial education that Babamukuru enforces upon his children" (122). This highlights the complicated relation the girls have with sexuality, colonialism, and family customs. Returning to school (206-7) at the end of the novel, Tambu, a young woman, reflects on the process of self-realization and being caught between traditional and modern colonial patriarchies in Zimbabwe.

Maternal/Historical Survivals and Metanarrative

Women's historical novels insist upon women's survival, individually and collectively. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the novel ends with Tambu seeing her education as a ticket to freedom, albeit not without problems. She witnesses the death of her brother Nhamo, the decline of her cousin Nyasha, and the wayward ways of her other cousin Chido, who dates a white girl. These family members serve, for Tambu, as painful reminders of the dangers in becoming Anglicized and, at the same time, raise questions of what it means to have an authentic existence. Tambu, thus, is very much torn between her African heritage and assimilating to the ways of the whites. Her story is a quest for a sense of self and a means for making sense of the racial and patriarchal limitations imposed upon her. The initial joy she feels for taking charge of her own life by escaping the homestead and the mission and, later, exiling herself to the college is juxtaposed with the preordained exile in Gleason's novel *Agotime*.

Agotime, a former Dahomean queen and later exiled slave, is celebrated as a woman of tremendous power and courage. In the Foreword, Gleason writes: "the gods she brought to a new world have known a modest survival. This is her story, an exploration of her unsung destiny" (v). According to Gleason, Agotime's legacy, however concealed, persists in São Luis, Brazil in the Casa das Minas "by which they mean the Dahomean cult house" (4). Though Agotime's name is inconsistent in the formal records, Gleason suggests that evidence of her life has been preserved, such as a pair of sandals, a spear, her courtyard, the drums, and the room where she was interviewed by ambassadors

who tried to persuade her to return to Dahomey (2, 264). For Gleason, these potential objects/texts signal the preservation of Agotime and a female genealogy in the community's memory (2). Defiantly, Gleason appropriates Agotime's life as both mythical and historical: "it was not a dream" (3).The importance of preserving her story is emphasized when she claims:

> The brand on the boat: that was unreal. There it was, still on her breast, but she had never accepted it. No, she was growing old, and she might be recaptured and sold many times, but she had never and would never be a slave, not in that sense anyway. To have been clawed by the unseen, however, and to have survived to tell the tale, even if it could never be told, this made an honest woman of her! (251)

Gleason highlights that physical restrictions will not imprison her mind; in her mind, Agotime is and always will be free. She rejects the name "slave" that has been imposed upon her by authorities she refuses to recognize.

Jacqui Alexander articulates this history of "the Crossing" seen in Gleason's and Condé's novels on the life of Kitsimba, a slave who "numbered among those who through the door of no return were shuttled from the Old Kongo kingdom to the Caribbean circa 1870" (6). The forced journey in Gleason's novel suggests that the promise of a future articulated by the European heroines' "crossing" in chapter one must be read in the context of slavery. Alexander reads Kitsimba's story as a way for reconciling the embodied with the disembodied sacred or spiritual and, therefore, disrupting accepted boundaries of

episteme, geography and nation. She promotes multiple pedagogies as they relate to re-understanding history as a dialectics, a palimpsest, and the Crossing is "meant to evoke/invoke the crossroads, the space of convergence and endless possibility … it is the imaginary from which we dream the craft of a new compass" (Alexander 8). Thus, Agotime's legacy persists in Brazil while, in Condé's novel, Tituba eventually returns to the Barbados, her motherland.

Tituba originally arrives in Salem, Massachusetts because she and her husband John Indian are owned by Samuel Parris, a Puritan. Tituba notes: during this time "thousands of our people were being snatched from Africa. I learned we were not the only ones the whites were reducing to slavery; they were also enslaving the Indians, the original inhabitants of both America and our beloved Barbados" (Condé 47). Mixed-race, Tituba has an African mother and a European father, who, literally and figuratively, dominates the former through rape. Tituba, however, only embraces her maternal African side and, born in Barbados, she feels a strong love for the country (48). This is amplified when she arrives, first, in Boston and, later, in the village of Salem (53). In Salem, however, Tituba, criticized for her vast knowledge of plants and herbal remedies as well as for the colour of her skin, is considered a witch (90).

She is a "visible messenger of Satan" (Condé 65). Condé does not deny that Tituba is a witch, but rather she problematizes how a word can have a single connotation–Tituba is a witch who uses her magic to heal and cure but also to cause injury and harm. In addition, the spirits of Tituba's mother and Mama Yaya offer comforting words: "Out of them all, you'll be the only one to

survive" (86). Ann Armstrong Scarboro suggests that the use of the "I" in the novel's title as well as the "first-person narrative point of view empowers the heroine, making her a survivor rather than a victim" (214). It is a slave narrative, though, Gyssels reminds us, "there are virtually no autobiographies of African slaves" (71). Tituba will survive, but she will also be forgotten: "I felt that I would only be mentioned in passing in these Salem witchcraft trials about which so much would be written later, trials that would arouse the curiosity and pity of generations to come as the greatest testimony of a barbaric age. There would be mention here and there of a 'slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing 'hoodoo'" (110). Condé's narrative allows Tituba to speak through the author as a conduit into the present while, at the same time, reminding the reader not to be seduced by so called facts or the narrative authority of the "I." She puts into question linguistic designations, in this case "Afro-Caribbean", "woman", "slave", and "witch," and how the individual I's story relates to and can or cannot speak for the collective. An example of what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction," Tituba's narrative is open equally to interpretation and falsification as are other accounts in the record –but the novel cannot be a parody of the suffering the historical Tituba endured; this is the dilemma women's historical fiction faces.

Highlighting omissions in the historical record, Condé continues to put a postmodern twist on her narrative by imagining Tituba meeting the infamous and fictional protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hester Prynne, in prison (Bharati Mukherjee's novel *The Holder of the World*

(1993) also rewrites *The Scarlet Letter* by focusing on seventeenth century British Imperialism and on the life of Hannah Easton, whose travels to India from Puritan American are traced by a twentieth century narrator, Beigh Masters). Hester, a self-proclaimed “feminist” (Condé 101), a sign of Condé’s insertion of the American present into the past, tells Tituba about being accused of adultery and that, though she is pregnant with her lover’s child, she plans to commit suicide (98). Jane Moss argues that Condé “is killing off Hawthorne’s heroine at a point before his classic novel begins. Here is another act of revenge against the American intellectual establishment” (10). In a way that invokes Rhys’ rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, Condé, through the character of Hester, is able to call into question Western discourses, including feminism.

Playing with relations of power, the author imagines Tituba and Hester as both having been accused of transgressing Puritan values; thus, Condé often gives the reader a novel of “self-conscious clichés” and stereotypes expected in female slave narratives (Moss 9) to criticize these imbalances. The insertion of the fictional Prynne is juxtaposed with the scant historical record, allowing Condé to question how reality and whose reality is constructed. As I have argued throughout this work, however, despite the complexity and contradictory claims Condé puts forth –there is no better example than when she claims, “for me Tituba is not a historical novel. Tituba is just the opposite of a historical novel” (Condé, “Interview” 200-01)–the novel still holds onto certain truths and a belief in social transformation based on revisiting the past. Zubeda Jalazai rightfully argues that “Condé’s engagement of Tituba and her shifting allegiance to

historical accuracy also illustrate that appeals to history still carry authority, even for those creating self-referential fiction, or harboring a postmodern 'incredulity toward metanarratives'" (423). Tituba's court testimony also includes extracts from the actual trial.

In a footnote, Condé writes that "[t]he original documents of the trial are kept in the Essex County Archives" (104). The trial coincides with Hester's determination to hang herself (Condé 112) and the end of Tituba's marriage to John Indian, whom she never sees again (110). Imprisoned in Salem Town, Tituba reflects not only on the loss of Hester's child but also her own unborn child, which she aborted because she could not bear the pain of bringing an innocent child into a life of slavery and abjection (52, 113). Released seventeen months after her incarceration, Tituba learns she must pay her debts for being in prison, which necessitates being bought as a slave by a Jewish widower named Benhamin Cohen d'Azevedo (123). Under his roof, Tituba cares for his nine children and helps him communicate with his dead wife (125). Tituba and d'Azevedo become lovers and, together, they find consolation in their respective persecutions (Jewish and black). Crises arise, nevertheless, when, harassed by anti-Semite townspeople, d'Azevedo's house is set on fire and his children die. Thus, d'Azevedo decides to leave for Rhode Island. He grants Tituba her freedom and the right to return to Barbados (134).

Tituba's narrative stresses the importance of survival, particularly when she is recognized by a Nago sailor named Deodatus on the ship. Deodatus asks Tituba if she is the daughter of Abena who killed the white man and Tituba

remarks, “I had forgotten the ability our people have of remembering. Nothing escapes them! Everything is engraved in their memory!” (Condé 136). The power of collective memory is echoed again when Condé writes: “Our memory will be covered in blood. Our memories will float to the surface like water lilies” (168). The defiance of Tituba’s mother serves as a powerful impetus for her own revolt against slavery when she finds herself living with maroons near Bellaphine (143). Without a family or home, Tituba’s odyssey back to the Barbados makes her a “sort of female hero, an epic heroine, like the legendary ‘Nanny of the maroons’” (“Interview” 201). Condé continues, “I hesitated between irony and a desire to be serious. The result is that she is a sort of mock-epic character” (“Interview” 201). While ambiguity manifests itself throughout the novel, there is rebirth for Tituba when she returns to the Barbados and reconnects, once again, with her maternal ancestors.

The beginning of Tituba’s political career is signalled when she publically begins practising her magic powers and organizing slave revolts (Condé 150). After spending time with the maroons, Tituba, pregnant, returns to her former cabin (155). She reasons, “If the world were going to receive my child, then it would have to change!” (159). Her rebellion continues when a slave-boy named Iphigene (a name similar to Agamemnon’s daughter whom he sacrificed to the gods) is brought to her for healing (159). Iphigene tells the story of his mother’s death at the hands of their master, which resonates with Tituba’s own life-story. Together, the pair prepare for a revolt.

Betrayed, Tituba and Iphigene are captured by the planters and taken to the gallows (Condé 171). Tituba is accused of her crimes and is the last to die; at the moment of her death, she sees Mama Yaya, Abena, and Yao waiting for her (172). The Epilogue follows, in which Tituba claims, "And that is the story of my life. Such a bitter, bitter story. My real story starts where this one leaves off and it has no end" (175). Surviving in the hearts of her fellow Barbadians, Tituba urges them to keep fighting and to refuse submission and subordination. Like Gleason's Agotime, Condé writes: "I do not belong to the civilization of the Bible and Bigotry. My people will keep my memory in their hearts and have no need for the written word. It's in their heads. In their hearts and in their heads" (176). Denied motherhood, Tituba explains how she chooses a girl named Samantha to be her descendant, learn her art of communicating with the dead, and possess the special power of plants and animals: "a child I didn't give birth to but whom I chose! What motherhood could be nobler!" (177). Believing she is one with her island (177), Tituba shows herself for those who can perceive her presence in the last lines of the novel: "the twitching of an animal's coat, the crackling of a fire between four stones, the rainbow-hued babbling of the river, and the sound of the wind as it whistles through the great trees on the hills" (179). By contrast, Cato and Ellis reveal the impossibility of the Tasmanian's survival when Trucanini dies in *Queen Trucanini*.

After spending several years in exile on Flinders Island, Trucanini and the remainder of her peoples ("fourteen men, twenty-two women, and ten children, mostly part-white" (Cato and Ellis 230)) are brought to Oyster Cove

(231): “their new home was an old probation station for convicts” (231). Oyster Cove proves the final breaking point for the settlers; the dream of returning to their old homes and ways of life clearly becomes impossible. Disheartened, subject to living in abject poverty and prone to alcoholism, the settlers know they have been “left to die” (236). Cato and Ellis suggest that by 1866, with the certain extinction of the race, Trucanini and the four others are treated as objects and likened to animals: “the world was at last beginning to take an interest in the unique race of the Tasmanians, now that it was almost too late. Like the *Thylacine*, the marsupial wolf or ‘Tasmanian Tiger’, which had been hunted almost to extinction, they were suddenly valuable –even dead ones” (239). A photograph taken of the group of five marks this historical event (241), supported by an article in the Hobart *Mercury* that “noted that only four people remained of the 4, 000 to 7, 000 original inhabitants. ‘The Tasmanian natives as a race are now virtually extinct … As savages they were found, as savages they lived, and as savages they perished’” (242). The last member of her race, Trucanini is given the ironic title of Queen and, with the last man, her husband, is photographed for postcards (242). When Trucanini’s husband dies, however, his body is stolen and exhumed for medical purposes (246). Thus, “added to the burden of being the last of her race was the nightmarish fear of being mutilated after death” (247). Alone, Trucanini reflects on her love for her island, in a similar way to Tituba in Condé’s novel, and equates her separation from her island as a separation between mother and child (48):

> This was her country. She alone had come back to it. She had no mother, no father, no brother, no uncles, no aunties, no sisters, no children; and now she had no husband. She was solitary as she had been in her mother's womb, before her aunties called her into the light. Yet she was surrounded by her own country, and it sustained her as a mother's blood sustains the unborn child. (248)

The novel ends solemnly with Trucanini's death in 1876 and the Royal Society losing "no time in making its move to get custody of the body" (251).

Conclusion

Postcolonial women's historical novels describe protagonists experiencing exile from their homes akin to a maternal exile. While Agotime continues her legacy in Brazil in Gleason's novel, Tituba lives in the memory of Barbadian slaves and their descendants, though Condé refuses to mythologize her as a founding mother. Tituba dies by hanging like her mother before her because she rebels against slavery. Trucanini, likewise, witnesses the death of her mother by the colonists and, as the sole survivor of her race, becomes a historical artifact of Tasmania's imperialist past (a stamp was dedicated to her as a part of the Famous Women series appearing in 1975 (Ellis 159)). Tambu, living in 1960's Rhodesia, inherits this maternal past. Initially, as an adolescent, she rebels against her own mother and mother-tongue, but, by the end of the novel, she questions her uncritical and hasty rejection and her unknowing participation in acts of racism, sexism, and imperialism from a new perspective. By writing and

re-writing the Indigenous, Black, and Caribbean woman back into recorded (fictional) history, these post 1970's women's historical novels call into question the historical record as construction but also the reality of trauma and suffering within history. Poignantly, Julie Neman argues that "[f]or some stories there can be no revisions" (40). This becomes clearer when analyzing the role of hegemonic history and women's imperialism, the arrival of the whites, exile, bad women, patriarchy within and without, and maternal survival in each of the novels.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A NEW SEXUAL POLITICS OF SPACE: WORKING MOTHERS

> The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex
> – Friedrich Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*

A recent and popular theme in women's historical novels is the working mother. Post 1970s novels narrate the economic circumstances of working women and the potential to make the transition from poverty to wealth, not by marriage, but by employment. Many of these works focus on the nineteenth and early twentieth century and include the lives of black slaves and white pioneers (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 44). For instance, Daphne Marlatt's cleverly named *Ana Historic* (1997) employs multiple meanings of "ana" such as "backward, reversed, again, anew" (Marlatt 43) and implies 'against history,' 'not history,' and even "an anecdote" ("Ana")). Marlatt reinvents the life of Mrs. Richards, a widow and school mistress, who figures ever so briefly in history after arriving in British Columbia in 1873. The time-setting, however, circa the industrial revolution in England remains the most popular setting for these novels. For example, Catherine Cookson's *The Rag Nymph* (1991) narrates the life of an English rag and bones woman in the 1850s, in Posie Graeme-Evans' *The Dressmaker* (2010), Ellen Gowan goes from poverty to wealth by owning her own dress-making business in 1850s London, and, finally, Elizabeth Hickey's *The Wayward Muse* (2008) narrates the life of Jane Burden's social rise as a model and muse for artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Though speaking on the

Industrial Revolution and the breakdown of the "bourgeois family," the arguments put forward by Friedrich Engels and amended by Ann Taylor Allen are relevant for a broader and more general discussion of working women in the post 1970s transnational writing of women's historical novels.

Allen suggests that, during the "latter decades of the nineteenth century" in Western Europe, patriarchy as an absolute was challenged; it was no longer believed to be "a universal aspect of human civilization" (20). She also claims that a new consciousness for women arose:

> Mothers had not always lived a life of abject dependence –they had once been independent, self-supporting, and even powerful … if the father-headed family was not a God-given and universal order, but merely a political arrangement that had risen in response to historical circumstances, then it might also come to an end. (Allen 20)

This kind of thinking is further supported in Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884).

Engels rejects the belief that divisions of labour founded on hierarchical sexual difference are ahistoric. He concludes that, if the rise of the wife in modern day capitalist societies "over the husband, as inevitably brought about by the factory system, is inhuman, [then] the pristine rule of the husband over the wife must have been inhuman too" (*Communist Manifesto*, note 36). Society must destroy "the twin foundations of hitherto existing marriage – the dependence through private property of the wife upon the husband and of the

children upon the parents" (Engels, qtd. in Jones, "Introduction" 67). For Engels, woman's equation with the womb and synonymy with the home is challenged within modern capitalism by the rise of the working woman outside of the home.

Though Engels, as well as Karl Marx, recognized the quasi-liberating potential of capitalism for working women, both writers were aware of what Zahra Karimi suggests is still occurring in today's globalized world–the exploitation of women workers. Cheap female labor entails "lower wages and inferior working conditions" as well as long hours, insecure employment, flexibility, and sexual harassment (Karimi 169). Though attune to the public sphere, a serious consideration of the domestic sphere as an economic realm is missing in Marx and Engels' work. The domestic is considered non-economic and outside of the domain of production: it remains under the rubric of reproduction. Thus, now many feminists such as Selya Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell are critical of Marxism and believe that if Marx and Engels' concept of production has no place for motherhood or domestic gender relations between men and women, then the theory is inadequate in conceiving production (50). Contemporary women's historical novels supplement Marx and Engels' conception of production by revealing that women's domestic roles contribute considerably to a household's wealth and, therefore, the wider economy's (i.e., city, state, nation, empire).

Also related to an understanding of reproduction are ground-breaking works like Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, *1750-1850* (1987), which theorize middle-

class men and women as inhabiting separate spheres. Some scholars, such as Janet Wolff, however, believe this study needs revising. Wolff argues that "the simple equation of men/public and women/private, of course, is quite wrong … men also inhabited the private realm of the home. Working-class women always, and necessarily traversed the public sphere of work and the street" (118-19). Amanda Vickery, likewise, describes a fluid and relational understanding of the separate spheres. She believes that an uncritical commitment to the separate domains "fails to capture the texture of female subordination and the complex interplay of emotion and power in family life" (Vickery 401). A theory of separate gendered spheres within the familial realm and the workspace is, this chapter argues, at best, complex and specific to certain cultures, times and places.

I explore gendered realms by expanding this study to include transnational novels outside of industrial England. Within each work, however, the father figure–the patriarch as breadwinner, head of the family, legal citizen and owner of his wife and children–is dramatically displaced and questioned. I examine critical approaches to divisions of labour between men and women within the home and the public sphere, and how women are described as either "work oriented or family oriented" (Garey 6) in relation to the following novels: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1982), *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006) by Belinda Starling, *Miss McGhee* (2007) by Bett Norris, *The Blood of Flowers* (2007) by Anita Amirrezvani, and Joyce Lebra's *The Scent of Sake* (2009).

In centering on the life of a working mother, considered a social taboo in all of these works that range from seventeenth century Iran to the American south in the 1960s, the novels depict the complexity of designating spaces as gendered and social uncomfortability both then and now with women, particularly mothers, who works outside of the home. As Anita Ilta Garey notes, since the industrial revolution, there has been a social trend rationalizing the claim that "employed women with children are seen as less than fully committed mothers" (7). Relatedly, Allen suggests that, in the 1970s, a new feminist epistemology (Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Juliet Mitchell, Adrienne Rich) took hold in Western Europe and challenged the nuclear family. Many women rejected motherhood as irreconcilable with being a mother and began "repudiating the cult of patriotic motherhood [and] they defined childrearing as an individual choice" (Allen 233). Thus, at the same time "the work of married women outside the home had begun to be accepted by public opinion" (225). Reconciling or balancing one's traditional maternal duties (childrearing, household chores, cooking etc.) with a career continues, however, to be a difficult challenge and both motherhood and women's work require continual redefinition.

The texts analyzed here foreground and draw from this feminist movement by highlighting subversive sexualities and mobilities between domains by the heroines, which, the authors suggest, could not be possible if the women did not have the love and support of other women and the opportunity to earn an income. Adrienne Rich notes that in the nineteenth century, as is evident

in Starling's and Lebra's novels, "women's work was clearly subversive to the 'home' and to patriarchal marriage; not only might a man find himself economically dependent on his wife's earnings but it would conceivably even be possible for women to dispense with marriage from an economic point of view" (*Of Woman Born* 49). Thus, the concerns identified by Rich reappear in today's novels as contemporary fears and anxieties.

In addition, each work resonates with a transnational feminist concern for legally redefining marriage and the family. This includes refuting the supremacy or normalcy of heterosexuality. Jacqui Alexander compares the "fear of a queer nation" (213) with the "heterosexualization of family and of morality" (3). Her point is illustrated in the United States' recent defense of the sanctity or purity of heterosexual marriage (for example, the 1993 Defense of Marriage Act): a union between a man and a woman for the purpose of producing heterosexual children. Alexander writes that "at a time of empire [such as the US'], heterosexuality emerges as the nexus of Judeo-Christian fundamentalism and militarization to uphold ostensibly natural teleologies of propagation and of market capitalism simultaneously, both of which require privatized heterosexuality and, increasingly, privatized homosexuality as well" (221). In Norris' novel, the sexual privatization that Alexander describes as well as violent responses to her homosexuality are seemingly justified by the US constitution upholding morality, law, tradition, natural sex, and national/personal integrity (Alexander 220). In accordance, this chapter discusses women taking up untraditional roles and jobs typically reserved for men through the following femino-centric topics:

gender boundaries, forbidden spaces, weaving as storytelling, illicit sexuality, and spirituality. In each novel, the breakdown of the traditional patriarchal family, inaugurated by women working in the public sphere of men and breaking sexual taboos, is significant.

Boundaries Dissolving

As mentioned above, many women's novels focus on the nineteenth century industrialization of England and Starling's work *The Journal of Dora Damage*, which narrates the protagonist Dora taking over her husband's bookbinding business after he succumbs to rheumatism, is an excellent example. The novel, presented as Dora's diary that has later been edited by her daughter Lucinda in 1902, describes both the recent rise of industrialization and Peter's subsequent accrual of debts and loss of respectability. The Damages are in dire financial trouble and, with Peter not well enough to continue working, Dora, desperate, begins to slowly learn and take over his trade. Initially, a curtain separates Peter's workshop from the rest of the house and family (Dora and their only child Lucinda) (Starling 3). In the house, Dora is responsible for all domestic duties (childrearing, washing, cooking, cleaning, and so on). Not oblivious to his debilitating illness, Peter tells Dora, "It perturbs me to mention the affairs of men's business within these four walls, and with my wife … but we are in trouble" (20). Starling also undermines traditional associations of femininity with weakness and masculinity with power when she juxtaposes Peter's illness

and physical frailty with Dora's strength. Peter, unable to pull himself to a standing position, is dragged by Dora to his feet. Starling writes:

> Perhaps he had never noticed how much I had to carry our long-limbed daughter around, or even that she was no longer a baby. It was as if he did not know that muscles could be made strong through the labours of housework or factory work, muscles that could rise up and crush the languid, unmuscled rulers of their sex. Did they not have to work an eighteen-hour day and more, and tumble into bed at the end of it, too tired even to dream?" (22-23).

Over a period of months, Dora pawns her valuable belongings in order to pay the rent and keep food on the table. Unable to find solutions to their economic situation, Dora braves the streets and risks her reputation by visiting Charles Diprose, who might be willing to give her husband some work binding medical anatomy books (56).

Lying, Dora tells Diprose her husband has sent her in his stead (Starling 59) and, when she returns home with the commission, Peter rages and demands to know where she has been; he asks "how a mother can leave her house, her husband, her child? With no *prior* explanation?" (63). Disheartened by Peter's claims, Dora makes her way into the kitchen and puts Lucinda's bed in front of the stove, full-knowing that the family is "going to have to start living out of one room for warmth, like the poor unfortunates who had no choice but so to do" (64). Margaret Higonnet clarifies that, during the mid to late nineteenth century in England:

> While the poorest women lived in quarters so cramped that segregation by sex was scarcely possible and privacy a dream, the architecture of wealthy women's 'private' domains subdivided into private and public arenas, such as dressing rooms and salons. The home had a very different configuration of private and public for a mistress or a maid, for an aristocrat or a peasant, 'upstairs' and 'downstairs,' in a city or on the land. ("New Cartographies" 4)

Higonnet's research, supported by Starling's novel, suggests men and women's domains within the spheres are relational and permeable. Despite Peter's objections, Dora informs him that, whether he likes it or not, she will re-open the business and do the bookbinding herself, though she will disguise the work as his (Starling 65). Thus, Dora disrupts the neat division between workspace and domestic domain and the realm of husband and wife–symbolized when she has the curtain separating the workspace from the home removed.

Discontent with women taking up new positions is clear, however, not only in Peter's reactions, but in Diprose's when he pays an unexpected visit to the Damages. Dora knows "[they] would have got away with it had Jack [the apprentice] been here, had [she] not sent him out to deliver [their] trade card to a stationer's in Holborn. But to someone who knew, like Mr Diprose, it would have been apparent, from the hammer in [her] hand and the jar of freshly made paste on the bench, that [Dora] was doing men's work" (Starling 92). Dora's entrance into the working world, however, is not unique. Peter, himself, is initially against women working in professions assigned to men, such as

bookbinding. He exclaims, "They laid off twelve men – *twelve men* – today at Remy's, including Frank and Bates. They've taken on twenty women – or girls, I should say – since Christmas, and they're all staying. It's an outrage, an utter disgrace" (17-18). Women are only suited for "lower-quality work" (18) and "steal from honest workers and their poor families, threaten[ing] the very structure of the family life upon which England became great" (64). Peter adds, "Their standards are lower. They will sell shoddie work, for less. And their expectations are lower" (19). Continuing with his tirade, Peter concludes, "Too many machines … Machination equals *fem-in-i-cation*" (19).

Marx and Engels, similarly, characterize the period of the Industrial Revolution with these consequences: "the less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences in age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class" (*Communist Manifesto* 28). Marx and Engels, like Peter, describe the modern capitalist worker stripped of his trade and vocation in production and reduced to non-skilled factory work with machines–but this machine work also incentivizes women to leave the confines of the home. Engels argues that women are emancipated by entering into public industry and believes that the "quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished" (*Origin of the Family* 83). Women are, therefore, permitted to work in these roles because they are considered cheaper labour than men and increase business profits.

Marx aptly summarizes the paradoxical situation for women in this time:

> However terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system may appear, large-scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes. (*Capital* 620-21)

This change occurs within the Damage household. Refusing to succumb to the workhouse or whorehouse (Starling 45), Dora begins to put the bookbinding business back on track and earns enough for the family to survive. Starling, once again, plays with gendered spaces–Dora becomes the sole breadwinner spending long hours in the workroom and Peter increasingly withdraws from his former space until he is eventually confined completely to the domestic realm.

Exemplifying several dilemmas of the working mother, such as what Allen calls "the double burden" (1) and of which Marx and Engels were unable to anticipate nor fully theorize, Dora struggles with balancing her public binding work with her domestic duties, especially nursing Peter and childrearing her epileptic daughter. She remarks, "I knew Lucinda was suffering from my absence … a child needs her mother in ways far greater than a workshop needs its binder, a house its cleaner, or even a husband his wife. Not to mention that the river ran in both directions: I was suffering from Lucinda's absence no less"

(Starling 98). Finding the transition from a working mother within the home to one outside proves difficult.

Allen claims that Dora's challenge continues today: "women still assume the chief responsibility for the family, and do most of the work of reproduction and childrearing" (1); this maternal dilemma "restricts their participation in economic, social, and cultural life and is now the major source of gender inequality in Western societies" (Allen 1). Dora, however, cannot afford not to work as a binder, nor can she pay someone to help her in the home; it is necessary for the family's survival that Dora do it all. She must learn and master the craft while tending to her domestic duties and, in the process, must abandon any sense of what she believes is womanly propriety or moral purity.

Initially taking on commissions for bibles and books deemed appropriate for her sex (Starling 12, 189), Dora soon discovers that binding anatomical books, illegal pornographic catalogues, and those with an imperialist/colonial subject matter such as tribal customs in Africa or interracial sex such as in *The Lustful Turk* pay much better (163,189, 269, 392). Thus, Dora embodies the contradictions capitalism entails. Dora rejects traditional women's work by running the business herself (particularly necessary after Peter dies) and she challenges Victorian ideals of women's moral superiority or innocence as well as a lack of sexual desire (she has an illicit romance with a recently freed slave named Din); she also puts into question the issue of exploitation and the personal sacrifices women make when money becomes the deciding factor in one's life chances.

Forbidden Spaces

Dilemmas about gendered divisions of labour affect most protagonists in women's historical novels, but the protagonist of Lebra's *The Scent of Sake*, Rei, is a quintessential example. The novel is set throughout several decades of mid-nineteenth century Japan. Beginning in 1825, Rei is described scrubbing wooden sake barrels outside her family's brewery. In her Note to Readers Lebra writes, "the real economic strength of Japan is in the hands of the prosperous merchant class, the chonin, and among them sake brewers are the most powerful." Thus, the novel is very much about the rise of the merchant class in Japan's increasingly capitalistic economy, which brings new, though limited, opportunities for women (Ueda 14). Women workers were subservient to men and, in 1908, still limited to fifteen suitable occupations: "flower girl, telephone operator, drugstore attendant, babysitter, professional storyteller, wet nurse, woman gangster, concubine, prostitute, dancer, seamstress, masseuse, laundress, office secretary, and circus girl" (Ueda 14-15). Rei defies these restrictions by working for her family's brewing house, but traditional boundaries remain intact, such as the division between business and family.

Like the Damage's household, there is an outer office, an inner office, and, then, the rooms for the family. Rei is permitted to work outside of the brewery, but not inside: "[w]omen were never to enter the forbidden door that gaped darkly before her. 'Let a woman enter the brewery and the sake will sour,' the old ones always said" (Lebra 1). When Rei's father discovers she is working

too close to the door, he bellows, “Get back to the kitchen!” which Rei interprets as “the place of women. How unreasonable of her father to expect her to be only a confined ‘girl in a box’” (3). Divisions of labour according to gender are clearly marked out, though, as the only heir to the Omura House, Rei envisions an active role for herself in the business; she desires to make Omura House the number one brewery in Kobe, Japan.

Following Rei’s banishment to the house, she is informed that she is now engaged to an apprentice name Jihei, though she is secretly in love with Saburo Kato, the third son of another brewing house (Lebra 6-7). Lebra writes that “for a merchant class family, marriage was a matter of momentous import … Choice of spouse depended on many factors, least among them the emotional preferences of the two individuals” (183). Similar to Dora who initially strives to fulfill a Victorian ideology of maternal and domestic perfection, “the angel of the house” (Starling 305), Rei’s mother gives her this advice: “You must try to be a good wife, Rei. Be compliant. Your feelings must not intrude … Women often find it necessary to ‘kill the self.’ Otherwise life becomes too difficult” (Lebra 7). Thus, Rei as wife-mother is “enslaved in self-sacrificial roles that suppress the expression of desire” (Rogers 4). Though Rei chooses to obey the wishes of her family, she also commits to pave a new destiny for herself.

Lebra writes:

> She thought suddenly of the way her father banished her to the kitchen, wanted to keep her away from the business side of the brewery, especially transactions involving cash, something to

> which women of Kansai merchant houses had no access. How was she to fulfill her responsibility to the house if she wasn't allowed to be involved in the business of brewing? (9)

Married to a man she does not love, Rei is, nonetheless, responsible for producing an heir (Lebra 18). She consents to this obligation, but she also negotiates for the inner office within the brewery to become "her own sphere" (18) so that she can concentrate on the business. Rei's entrance into the forbidden world of her husband and father is a slow process, but she begins by learning from the clerk Kin-San, to whom she quietly puts forth suggestions such as increasing their market to Edo (24). Rei's dreams are put on hold, however, when she miscarries (31) and discovers her husband, who has little business sense, has produced another heir with a geisha named O-Toki (41). Failing to give birth to her own child is attributed to Rei's "constant involvement in the affairs of the house" (44); thus, by working, which is considered unnatural for a woman, she sacrifices her perceived biological duty to be a mother and upsets the traditional division between work and home.

The decision to adopt O'Toki's child is made by Rei's father, much to Rei's despair (Lebra 50-51). The child's arrival, however, coincides with the death of Rei's mother (72), suggesting that the cycle of birth and death (106), the family, and the business are interlinked (106). Much later, when Rei does have her own children, including a granddaughter, she declares, "The family and the brewery are equally important to me … They are really one and the same" (239). Adopting O'Toki's child, Yoshitaro, under the pretence that she is his biological

mother (90), Rei understands that this will benefit the business. Yoshitaro, eventually learning the truth of his adoption, thinks to himself, "*I really have two mothers, my natural mother here in the Sawaraya and Rei, the virtual head of one of the most powerful houses in all Kobe*" (201). Though Rei looms in the public shadow of the house, her desire for the house to succeed necessarily involves her taking on the role of mother to both her family and the business.

As the business expands, so too does Rei's family: unprecedentedly, she adopts two more of Jihei's illegitimate children, Kazu and Teru (Lebra 110), has a secret affair with Saburo Kato, gives birth to his daughter Fumi (106), and, later, has a son by Jihei named Seisaburo (134). When Rei's father dies, as per his instructions, she is given the family seal, ostensibly giving her power over the running of the business. Despite her powerful position, as a woman she cannot attend the Brewers Association meetings (124) or ever enter the kura. Lebra never has Rei, much to the reader's disappointment, undermine this rule. Thus, while some gender boundaries are rejected outright, other traditional ones remain intact. Lebra further suggests, like many women's historical novels such as Starling's, that Rei's unusual power is solidified because her husband is weak. When Jihei dies after a night of drunkenness (195), it is because, as Yoshitaro notes, "he'd always moved in Mother's shadow" (202). The transition of power from a man to woman is also linked with political and economic changes occurring in Japan.

Domestic borders, divisions of labour, and relations with foreign nations were becoming more flexible within Japanese society. Pressured militarily by

Western forces with their "black ships and guns" to resume trade, Japan, on guard against foreign imperialism, is, nonetheless, in the process of moving away from an isolated feudal society (The Tokugawa period (1603–1868) to the Meiji or Enlightened era (Lebra 297)). In terms of the business, Rei decides that White Tiger should buy its own ships and run its own shipping company, though no brewer has ever done so (291). Able to adapt to changes (270), Rei's survival and success amounts to White Tiger taking the number one position by the time she is eighty-eight years old (363, 364). Though Rei is, for all intents and purposes, responsible for the economic success of her family and the business, history will not be kind.

Rei knows that in "the name tablets of the generations of Omuras" she, nor any woman, including her very capable daughter-in-law, will be included (Lebra 363). A similar omission is conceded by the protagonist of Amirrezvani's heroine, a beloved carpet maker who says ""I will never inscribe my name in a carpet like the masters in the royal rug workshop who are honored for their greats skill … [when they sit on my carpet] my heart will touch theirs and we will be as one, even after I am dust, even though they will never know my name" (360). Thus, women's historicals identify gaps and silences but also presences in alternative creative outlets.

Weaving the Work of Women Storytellers

Women's historical novels like Lebra's *The Scent of Sake* and Starling's *The Journal of Dora Damage* describe the ways in which patriarchy exercises power

within and outside of the home. Though women's experiences within the domestic sphere can be dramatically different, for instance isolating, imprisoning, or confining, feminist historiographers such as Carroll Smith-Rosenburg and Nancy Cott believe women's domestic spheres can, also, be sites of affirmative "women's culture." Thus, gendered divisions of labour have the potential for creating "an autonomous, homosocial female world bound together through kinship networks and women's shared life experiences of marriage, family and religion" (Morgan 7). As Sue Morgan clarifies, critics of this approach, such as Ellen DuBois, regard "the sometime romanticised portrayal of female domesticity as an ineffective way to challenge patriarchal structures, reminding readers that any form of women's culture still existed in a world whose contours were largely determined by men (8). This kind of empowered women's culture within the parameters of a patriarchal society is found in both Amirrezvani's novel *The Blood of Flowers* and Walker's *The Color Purple*. Amirrezvani's protagonist supports a belief in the separation of spheres until her anonymous protagonist, for economic reasons combined with personal desire, dares to transgress gendered divisions of labour and space.

Set in seventeenth century Iran, experiencing a renaissance in carpet weaving (Karimi 175), the text begins with the anonymous narrator and her mother living in poverty without a protector. The young narrator asks her mother if, this time, she can recount the story of her and her mother's past (Amirrezvani 6). Moving into the past, Amirrezvani portrays the narrator as a young girl living in a village making a carpet to sell for her dowry. Marriage plans continue until

her father suddenly dies (19). Without a patriarch, the narrator and her mother Maheen are subject to abject poverty and they must sell the family's valuables, including the carpet, in order to survive (19). The narrator and her mother decide to leave their village for the first time and move to Isfahan, Iran's capital.

Their only relative, her father's half-brother Gostaham, lives in Isfahan as a master carpet maker. Amirrezvani writes: "My father could no longer protect us, and no one else was duty-bound to do so. My mother was too old for anyone to want her, and now that we had no money for a dowry, no one would want me" (31). When the daughter and mother arrive at Gostaham's house, impressed by its grandeur, they are ushered to meet his wife Gordiyeh. Unlike the rest of the family, the narrator and her mother, in a manner similar to Sivakami in Padma Viswanathan's *Toss of a Lemon*, are taken to a "tiny room squeezed between the kitchen storerooms and the latrine. There was nothing in it but two bedrolls, blankets, and cushions" (Amirrezvani 38). The "I" of the story realizes that she and her mother, without having a male protector, are essentially servants (39).

A brief respite from servitude arises when the protagonist is allowed to work at the Great Bazaar, which is closed to men twice a year "so that the ladies of the royal harem could shop in freedom" (Amirrezvani 54): "[a]ll men had been ordered away under penalty of death, lest they should catch a glimpse of the unveiled women" (55). Starling's, Lebra's, and Amirrezvani's novels suggest that experiences differ depending on whether or not a woman is in the city or the village, the urban or the rural, but, in both instances, there are some semi-respectable spaces for middle-class women. For example, in the cities in

Victorian England the theatre, park, or department store were respectable and, in Rei's case, she visits Japan's flower exhibits, while the narrator of Amirrezvani's novel visits her friend Naheed, the hammam, and the bazaar, provided she is properly dressed.

Slippages in rigid gendered spaces and divisions of labour in the woman's historical novel, however, are linked to capitalist economics. The narrator and her mother prove admirable negotiators for Gostaham and secure several important and profitable commissions when they work his bazaar shop. Gostaham rewards the narrator by taking her to visit the normally off-limits royal rug workshop (Amirrezvani 58). The narrator's ambition and love for carpets is clear, but, as her uncle knows, love is not enough: "What a pity you're not a boy! You're the right age to apprentice in the workshop" (63). Attempting to find a way around this gender exclusion, she asks to assist her uncle with his projects at home. Her uncle grants his consent provided she does not shirk her household chores (65). Unlike a boy, who would only devote himself to the craft, she is forced to balance her domestic duties with her work, for which she is forced to steal time on the side to complete; considered a semi-respectable woman, she can only practice this craft within the home. In this way, the narrator as a carpet weaver contributes to an increasing cottage industry in Iran made up of mostly women, which will, in later centuries, become increasingly threatened and industrialized (Karimi 170).

Tired of being berated by Gordiyeh for their backward and clumsy village ways and for draining the household's resources, the mother-daughter

team decide to save for another dowry by selling medicinal herbs and beginning a new carpet. The narrator's fate changes, however, when, one day, returning from the hammam, she enters her uncle's home and carelessly removes her picheh and head scarf. Unbeknownst to her, a stranger wanting to commission a carpet for his daughter is watching (Amirrezvani 71); horrified she shouts, "well, don't just stand there looking!" and retreats to the *andarooni*, "the part of the house where women were safe from male eyes" (71). The protagonist later learns that the stranger is a wealthy horse trader named Ferydoon (73). Though her mother knows "marrying [her] is the only way [they] can hope to live on [their] own" (81), once again emphasizing women's socio-economic dependence on men during this time and place, this opportunity is cut short when Gostaham receives a letter from Ferydoon offering to make his niece his wife (115). But it is "not for a lifetime marriage contract. It's for a *sigheh* of three months" (117). Maheen knows a *sigheh* is a fancy word for a prostitute and that "once [her] daughter's virginity is gone, who will want her then?" (117). Ferydoon has the option of renewing the sigheh indefinitely and must pay an agreed amount of money to the family each time,. Gordiyeh reminds them, "How can two penniless women expect more?" (123). With this new arrangement, the mother-daughter continue to live under Gostaham's roof, while the narrator increasingly learns more from her uncle about making carpets (141).

Waiting for Ferydoon's summoning, the narrator works on a carpet for a commission her uncle has with a foreigner, a Dutch man of the Dutch East India Company. The trade with the Dutchman signals, as in Lebra's novel, initial

interactions and trade with the imperializing and soon to be industrial West and, for the protagonist, an opportunity for economic independence. With her mother helping, she has a "bold idea: What if I could find a few women knotters and hire them to make my designs? That's exactly what they did in the royal rug workshop and in the rug factories that dotted the city" (Amirrezvani 179). An all-woman workshop, though keeping in line with gendered divisions of labour, is innovative and allows for a new solidarity between working women. For example, one of the women named Malekeh is commissioned because her husband is ill and unable to work. Though the protagonist enjoys some sexual pleasure with Ferydoon and he renews his sigheh for a second time, things change when the girl learns her best friend Naheed is arranged to marry him. Feeling guilty about her sigheh with Ferydoon, the narrator is, nonetheless, required to keep it concealed. In exchange for her secrecy, she blackmails her aunt. The aunt promises the narrator that she will be allowed to make a rug so she can sell it and keep the profits (227). When Naheed eventually discovers that her husband has a sigheh with her best friend, the friendship dissolves; Naheed informs her that "[a] respectable married woman like me does not associate with someone who sells sex for silver" (247). Realizing her role as an economic pawn–by virtue of the fact that she is female, unmarried, fatherless, and poor–within her family, the narrator intercepts Ferydoon's offer to renew the sigheh and decides, on behalf of her uncle, to, unprecedentedly, reject it (262, 278, 287). Discovering that the girl has renounced the sigheh in his name, Gostaham banishes the mother and daughter to the streets (288).

Cast onto the streets, the narrator finds Malekeh, who agrees to take them temporarily into her home, which consists of a small room for the entire family (Amirrezvani 293). The economic situation of working women, the woman's historical novel suggests, is not always one of social mobility. Sally Zigmond's work *Hope Against Hope* (2009) details the lives of two sisters who must sell their pub to make way for a railroad. One ends up working in a brothel, while the other is sexually harassed in the boarding house where she works. Erica Eisdorfer's *The Wet Nurse's Tale* (2009) traces the life of Susan Rose, forced to become a wetnurse when she loses her job though she struggles to feed her own baby. Her son is, later, sold to another family by her father. In Amirrezvani's text, the plight of the mother-daughter worsens and, without a meager income, they are slowly starving. When Maheen falls ill, the daughter is forced to go into the streets to beg (306). Propositioned by a butcher for a sigheh for an hour or two in exchange for meat to make her mother a healing soup, she has no choice but to consent (308, 321, 322), though she postpones the meeting. Rather than sell her body in exchange for food, the daughter is forced to grovel in front of her aunt and uncle, upon which she is given enough money to repay the butcher and buy some medicines to sell. Thus, it is her wealthy uncle who guarantees her survival.

Her uncle, also, commissions some carpets from her and allows her to show them at the bi-annual harem's bazaar (Amirrezvani 332, 348). Within the harem, the girl finally wins the favour of the Shah's favourite Maryam and declares, "I had finally achieved what I wanted: sold a carpet on my own, of my

own design, on my own terms" (351). The narrator's success continues because, as a woman, she is permitted to visit the harem, which brings her business opportunities her uncle or any man cannot imagine. Upon leaving the harem one day for her own modest home, the narrator reflects:

> As each of the thick wooden gates slammed behind me, I thought about how richly dressed Maryam was, how soft her hands, how glittering her rubies, how perfect her face, how lovely her red hair and tiny red lips. And yet, I did not envy her. Each time a gate closed with a thud, I was reminded that while I was free to come and go, she could not leave without an approved reason and a large entourage. She could not walk across Thirty-three Arches Bridge and admire the view, or get soaked to the skin on a rainy night. She could not make the mistakes I had, and try again. She was doomed to luxuriate in the most immaculate of prisons. (358)

Amirrezvani envisions a gendered freedom and creative outlet for her narrator that is only possible, first, by her uncle's economic situation and, then, her own economic independence, her autonomy within a non-patriarchal family, and the support of a social network of women: her employees, employers, friends, and, most important of all, a master of story-telling, her mother.

Sewing also contributes to the success of Walker's protagonist Celie in *The Color Purple.* The climax of the novel is when Celie discovers from her lover Shug that her husband Mr._____ has been keeping her long-lost sister Nettie's letters from her. In an attempt to refocus Celie's anger, Shug suggests:

"us ought to do something different … let's make you some pants" (Walker 146). Shug notes that Celie's the one out in the field everyday, doing a man's job in a dress, and she deserves practical clothing. As Lin Yu notes, the other protagonists discussed here fulfill the tasks many African women already perform: "the dual function of being both a provider and a nurturer to their children" or family (137). The pants also signify a new sense of empowerment for Celie and a forthcoming power shift in her relationship with Mr._____, who remains anonymous throughout the text (a sign of historical racism but also a play on gender because typically women are the ones without names and/or are simply known by their husband's names (i.e., Mrs. Richards in Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. Marlatt writes, "what is her first name? she must have one –/so far she has only the name of a dead man,/ someone somewhere else" (37)). By contrast, Celie is known only by her first name. Sewing, for Celie, is a means for identity, independence, and healing. Together, she and Shug sew the pants while reading all of Nettie's letters. When they finish, Shug tells Mr. _____that she's bringing Celie to live with her in Memphis (Walker 199).

In Memphis, Celie's pants sell well (Walker 213). Like Amirrezvani's narrator, Celie becomes successfully self-employed and hires some local women, creating a feminine workspace. Understanding the importance of being an artist, Shug tells Celie, "Let's us just go ahead and give you this diningroom for your factory and git you some more women in here to cut and sew; while you sit back and design. You making your living, Celie, she say. Girl, you on your way" (214). Celie's liberation through finding a woman to love combined with her

capitalist endeavours, however, brings to the forefront what many feminists identify as the paradox of capitalism: it permits individual economic independence necessarily at the price of an other's economic servitude and exploitation. It is unclear from the text how Celie will resist, if she can, the kind of gendered commodification capitalism requires. Celie's success continues after her stepfather dies and she returns to Georgia to reclaim the house and drygood store that her biological father used to own before he and his brothers were lynched for taking business away from white merchants (174). Will Celie suffer from the same kind of racism when she, taking Shug's advice, uses her parents' store to sell her pants (245)? Walker implies that Celie, an independent black woman, will triumph despite living in a racist, sexist, classist, homophobic society.

Illicit Sexuality: Lesbian Mothers in the South

The novels in this chapter describe a working protagonist's forbidden sexuality and transgressions of the traditional patriarchal family. In Starling's novel, Dora falls in love, first, with a recently freed American slave named Din who works in her bookbinding workshop and she lives with her former employer's wife Sylvia (443), with whom she raises her daughter Lucinda. In Lebra's *Scent of Sake*, Rei secretly meets Saburo Kato for one night of passion and Amirrezvani's protagonist, like Starling's, takes her sexual life into her own hands. After being briefly "married" to Ferydoon, the narrator proclaims, in similar terms to Malinalli in Laura Esquivel's *Malinche*, that she will never desire a man who

sees "in [her] only a mirror for his own pleasure" (364). Bett Norris' novel *Miss McGhee* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, however, both reject patriarchal relationships by focusing on the forbidden romances of two working lesbian women.

The novels bring visibility to the lesbian subject, which many historians and theorists of lesbianism (Faderman, Rich, Rupp, Vicinus, Wittig, Zimmerman, and others) argue has been erased and excluded from dominant discourses, including feminism. While Norris' text narrates the experiences of a white lesbian woman living in Myrtlewood, Alabama, Walker's novel narrates the experiences of a black lesbian living in Georgia. I categorize the novels as lesbian according to Lillian Faderman's broad definition in *Surpassing the Love of Man: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women From the Renaissance to the Present*:

> 'Lesbian' describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be part of the relationship to a lesser or greater degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. (17-18)

Though Faderman's definition ignores lesbian relationships outside of monogamy or those of a purely sexual nature, her description aptly characterizes Norris' and Walker's novels.

The time-frame of *Miss McGhee* moves from post WWII in 1948 to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and tells the story of Mary McGhee, a promising employee from a Texas Oil Company who has just been hired to get a local lumber mill, in operation since the Civil War, back on its financial feet. Resonating with Norris' epigraph, which "is dedicated to all those strong ladies who never married and who somehow made their own way in the world in a time when it was not easy to do so," Adrienne Rich points out:

> The fact is that women in every culture and throughout history have undertaken the task of independent, nonheterosexual, woman-connected existence, to the extent made possible by their context, often in the belief that they were the 'only ones' ever to have done so. They have undertaken it even though few women have been in an economic position to resist marriage altogether. ("Compulsive Heterosexuality" 635)

An atypical woman, Mary finds success working for an oil company prior to being transferred to her new employer Tommie Dubose, who, she quickly realizes, is unfit to run the business.

Like Rei in Lebra's text who bypasses her husband Jihei, Mary keeps Tommie busy while, essentially, running the business on her own (Norris 13). Mary is informed by a local girl, "My mama says you got a big mess to straighten out, but she don't see what one woman alone can do. She says there ain't a chance in a hunnerd a woman can set that lumber yard back to rights. It's a man's job. They ought to have hired a man, my mama says" (16). In light of

Tommie's inabilities, Mary suggests, much to the chagrin of Gerald Buchanan, the Dubose's banker and bank president, that Tommie's wife Lila become active in the business (27, 39). Lila will also have access to the checking account for the first time (29). At this point, the reader is still unaware as to why Mary has come to Myrtlewood. It is only after she retreats to a small fisherman's cabin in Mobile Bay and reflects on how and why she has come to Alabama to work for the Duboses that her past is revealed.

Mary recounts a past of fear and violence experienced because of her homosexual relationships, which have been more debilitating than her being a woman working in a man's world. She remembers being caught by her father in the hayloft with another girl and being beaten: "the sound of the fist meeting flesh, the crunch of the bone in her nose, the animal whimpers she emitted" (Norris 50). Forced by her father to leave in the middle of the night, without being able to say goodbye to her mother, Mary's memories next turn to Samantha, the daughter of her Texan employer, Big Sam: "She could recall with minute detail the look on Big Sam's face when he burst through the door and stood, his hand still on the knob, staring at them in bed, sitting up in surprise at his entrance, Sammie naked and defiant, smiling at him, almost triumphant, but unable to hide the fear her pride tried to mask" (51-2). Unlike her father, Big Sam gives Mary a train ticket, a large amount of cash, and "a job in a backwater, forgotten town, working for an imbecile" (52), which is likened to exile, not only in the geographical sense but in a psychological one (85).

As a lesbian, Mary is in exile and pretends to follow heterosexual norms and expectations. When Sammie visits Mary, she wonders if their lives "would have been easier if we could ignore this and live like normal women?" (Norris 88). Mary's use of the word "normal" is problematic because she suggests her homosexuality is unnatural; lesbians are not normal women as women are heterosexual. Though Mary internalizes the patriarchal language of heterosexuality as normality, she reveals to Sammie, again in terms of exile, that now with Lila she is "caught once again by emotions and desires it would be foolish to indulge" (89). She continues, "I feel trapped, Sammie, because I crave what is not acceptable. Exiled to the back of beyond, isolated, and yet it happens again" (89). Meanwhile, Lila, working with Mary in the office several mornings a week, begins to question her heteronormative role as Tommie's caretaker and wife.

> I never sat around dreaming about getting married, like I suppose most girls do. When I thought about it, I always imagined I would be married, but I dreaded it. I felt like, that's what I'm supposed to do, so I'll just do it, but I never was eager about it … Isn't there some other choice, some other way to live? Look at Miss McGhee. Is there some kind of law that says this is what women have to do, and that's it? (58)

It is not until after her weekend with Sammie that Mary finally decides to disclose her past to Lila and reveal that she is in love with her (107), though the

relationship will have to be concealed and conducted in secret, mostly at Mary's cabin in Mobile Bay.

As the relationship blossoms, so does the business, though Buchanan continues to insist they need a male manager to run the mill. Norris writes: "It don't look right, a woman hiring and firing men. We need a man in here, somebody that knows timber and land and how to run a sawmill and boss the men. Somebody Mrs. Dubose can depend on" (155). Buchanan's idealizations of the patriarchal workplace and family are further frustrated when, after Lila's husband Tommie dies (Norris 203), Mary moves in with her. Tired of sneaking around (221), Lila claims that, for a town in denial of homosexuality, together they will be rationalized as "a widow sharing a house with a spinster" (222). A homophobic Buchanan tells them, "People wonder, and they'll start to talk about what two women do, shut up in that house together every day. Every night" (225). The emphasis on night is clear; night is the time of sexual acts, thus, no two women should spend a night together.

Norris further describes the sexual relationship in the rhetoric of economics so that the sexual or personal household converges with the public business relationship. While Mary tells Lila, "I want to be a real partner in the business, not a secretary. I don't want to feel like an employee anymore" (Norris 227), Lila responds with her own interpretation of partner, rejecting the way Mary always rescues and protects her, thinking her naïve, childish and feminine (254). Lila insists upon democracy between them and a shared equality: "I want

to feel like a partner too, and not just in the business" (228). She continues in feminist terms:

> Mary, it's time we changed the way we do business. You're not my teacher any more. I'm not your student. I am your lover, and we are equal partners in this relationship. We live together, honey. You're not here to look after me, to oversee my every move and approve my decision. You're here because I love you and I want to live with you (254).

It is Lila's optimism and her feminist belief in an individual's ability to make real social change that finally convinces Mary to publicize the private and no longer suppress her lesbian relationship with Lila, though both know the path towards recognition and rights will not be easy.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker also describes the importance of female companionship, both physically and emotionally, in the lives of her protagonists, particularly Celie and Shug. An epistolary novel that "interweaves the African American oral tradition with that of the white-identified epistolary novel" (Lauret 109), *The Color Purple* begins when Celie, only fourteen years old, is raped by her father Alphonso (Walker 1) (though later in the novel she learns he is her stepfather) (176). Celie, like Dora, uses the format of diary entries to explain that, because of rape, she has given birth to two babies, though they have been forcibly taken away from her (the reader learns later that her children have been adopted by a Reverend and his wife who, having also taken in Celie's sister Nettie, travel together to Africa as missionaries and return at the end of the novel

to reunite with Celie). Early in the text, however, Walker makes Celie's sexual preference known. Celie claims: "He [father] beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got something in my eye but I didn't wink. I don't even like mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them" (5). Maria Lauret believes that Walker "rewrites the early epistolary novel's script of rigidly fixed gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality" (102). When a man only known as Mr._____ in the text, asks for Nettie's hand in marriage, Celie takes her place and learns about Shug Avery.

Celie stares at a picture of her future husband's former flame and mother to three of his children; she was "the most beautiful woman I ever saw" (Walker 6). Knowing Nettie shows promise at school and wanting to protect her from a violent life, Celie marries Mr._____ in her stead (12). Her father sweetens the marriage deal by throwing in a cow and telling Mr._____ that "she can work like a man" (8), again suggesting a fluid sense of gendered divisions of labor. Being unfeminine, normally considered a drawback for a woman, in this case is considered valuable– Celie's ability to work contrasts stereotypical feminine weakness, which is considered useless and unprofitable.

Things change for Celie when Shug, very much a professional entertainer, comes into town to sing at a local club (Walker 21). When she falls ill (43), however, Celie notes that "nobody in this town want to take the Queen Honeybee in. Her mammy say She told her so. Her pappy say, Tramp. A woman say she dying– maybe two berkulosis or some kind of nasty woman disease" (43). Finally, Mr._____ decides to take Shug in and Celie is tasked with looking

after her (45). Celie reflects, “the first time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man” (49). While Celie nurses Shug, she also works on a quilt with a pattern called Sister’s Choice (58). The choice of pattern is poignant given that, by this point in the narrative, Celie’s sister Nettie has run away in pursuit of her freedom and a better life, though Celie has no idea as to her whereabouts and is emotionally suffering in her marriage. The title of the quilt suggests Celie’s choice to marry in her sister’s place. Shug is the one gleam of happiness Celie possesses.

When one of Mr.’s_____ children, Harpo, builds a jukejoint, Shug is urged to start singing again (Walker 71) and she dedicates a song to Celie in gratitude for her kindness (73). Though Shug sleeps with Albert, Celie’s husband, Celie doesn’t care because she doesn’t love Mr._____ (78); her sexual feelings are only for Shug. Seeing Shug perform just prior to her leaving for a road tour, Celie says “I feel my nipples harden under my dress. My little button sort of perk up to. Shug, I say to her in my mind, Girl, you looks like a real good time, the Good Lord knows you do” (81). Upon returning from the road, lying in bed together, Celie tells Shug that she was raped by her father, her mother died, her two babies were taken away, and then she was bartered to Mr._____ ,who doesn’t love her and assaults her (112). Shug informs Celie that she loves her and kisses her before they make love (113). Unlike Mary, who experiences violent repercussions because of her lesbianism, Celie doesn’t seem to suffer from any homophobia. bell hooks questions how the text can justify not showing

lesbianism as socially problematic for the other characters in the novel (217) given the historical setting and time-frame.

Celie's happiness with Shug is disrupted, however, when Shug falls in love with a young musician. Unable to understand her attraction to a man (Walker 250), Celie describes Harpo's and his wife Sofia's attempt to set her "up with some man" (260)" as misguided. Celie says, "They know I love Shug but they think womens love just by accident, anybody handy likely to do" (260). For Monique Wittig, Celie's lesbianism as a Black woman provides her with a double kind of freedom; it is a freedom from what Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality" and slavery. Wittig writes:

> Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ('forced residence, domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual. We are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free. (20)

At the end of the novel, Walker shows a counter-discourse to the heterosexual family. Shug tells Celie that she is coming home for good: "I missed you more

than I missed my own mama" (Walker 283). Shug's statement reflects a change in understanding the family, including one's mother, as the one you choose out of love, not necessarily the one from whom you are born. The family is not a fixed entity; it is fluid. An argument for redefining the family as an economic unit that began with Marx and Engels in the mid-nineteenth century, is renewed through contemporary works like Norris' and Walker's, but, with a shift in understanding the family in terms of mutual love and respect, both heterosexual and homosexual, and as flexible in its gender roles.

Woman's Spirituality

Religious fundamentalism, racism, classism, and sexism intersect in many women's historical novels, but Norris' and Walker's novels reflect this convergence particularly well by focusing on rethinking the family, woman's economic independence, and woman's spirituality. Each novel opens with references to God; Walker's novel begins with her step-father's words: "*You better not tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy*," and then Celie's undated letter begins with "Dear God," (1). Norris begins each chapter with a message in italics from the Klu Klux Klan in the form of a "*Report to the Grand Dragon*" (3). Following this brief report, the novel states the words "FEAR GOD" (Walker 3). Mary McGhee reads these words on a sign along the highway as she arrives in Myrtlewood, Alabama in 1948. The presence of God haunts and permeates each novel set in the early and mid-twentieth century America.

Walker explains in a later 2003 edition's Preface that the novel "remains for [her] the theological work examining the journey from the religious back to the spiritual." She believes readers have not recognized this important aspect of the novel because of the "pagan transformation of God from patriarchal male supremacist into trees, stars, wind, and everything else" it may have "camouflaged for many reader's the book's intent." Walker's claim is supported by her protagonist Celie who, as I already stated, begins the book with a letter addressed to "Dear God," "written in the African American vernacular of black Southern speech" (Lauret 90), and continues in a confessional style. This changes, however, when Celie discovers that her sister Nettie and her children are still alive (Walker 117). The letters then switch almost exclusively to an exchange between Nettie and Celie, who, each not knowing if the other is reading her respective words, are writing to one another in faith; God receives few letters. When Celie learns from Nettie the truth about her family, she writes to God for the penultimate time: "my daddy lynch. My mama crazy. All my little-half brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children not my sister and brother. Pa not Pa" (177). Some pages later, Celie declares to Nettie, "I don't write to God no more. I write to you" (192). Confronted by Shug, Celie retorts: "What God do for me?" (192). She continues to explain:

> He give me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably wont ever see again. Anyway, I say the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown … If he

> ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you. (192)

Celie realizes that she has never searched for God on her own terms.

Celie has only passively received what others have dictated, which is also true of her understanding of women. She has, for the most part, accepted and internalized patriarchal roles for women; thus, the novel is very much a coming to terms not only with one's self as a woman but also the self's relation to a higher power. Writing is essential to Celie's journey or pilgrimage to finding herself and her God, though Lauret argues that, for Celie, writing is a last resort for when speech fails.

According to Lauret, this encapsulates an important difference between "the dominant (white) culture's valorisation of writing as against speech" (107). Such writing includes "white women's literature, which tends to take *writing* as the mark of liberation from patriarchal oppression" (Lauret 107-8). Therefore, "Walker undermines the ground of *written* discourse upon which her own work rests" (107), while at the same time stressing the importance of the African-American woman's domestic narrative, like Celie's, which has been excluded from hegemonic literature and history. Though Lauret privileges Celie's increasing ability to speak as a black woman, Carmen Gillespie believes that, through her letters, Celie finds:

> A validating outlet through which to express her anguish and also to assert her morality, innocence, and outrage at injustice. This ability resonates with the traditions of African-American slave

> narratives and echoes the long and pervasive history of the African-American literary tradition of correlating the acquisition of literacy and voice with the attainment of freedom. (59)

Rather than privileging one form of text over the other or pitting them against each other, a stable hierarchy between speech and the written text is continually put into question and played with by Walker, evident in her discussions of God.

Shug explains that, for her, “she doesn’t worry about pleasing God by going to church, she just does the best she can and to feel loved by God” (Walker 193). When Shug asks Celie to describe her God, Celie replies, “He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted” (194). Explaining that she, too, used to see the God that Celie describes, Shug knows the image is only the “one that’s in the white folks’ white bible” (194). A white God she clarifies, like white people, is not interested in the prayers of colored people; this is why, she says, “God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. … She say, my first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people” (195). The transition from thinking about God as a man carries over for both Celie and Shug into everyday life.

Walker suggests that patriarchy dictates most of life’s experiences because “Man corrupt everything … He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain’t” (197). This androcentric thinking suggests the importance in establishing a maternal relationship with the divine. A

feminist reappraisal of the divine is evident when Shug tells Celie that, in order to critically reject her former white God, she must think about nature instead. Simultaneously, in Africa, however, Nettie is working as a missionary to spread Christianity and the word of God to the Olinka peoples (Walker 235).

Valerie Babb argues that Nettie's writing to Celie "alters literacy and takes it out of its imperialistic function of dominating oral cultures and allows it to record an oral history that would otherwise be lost" (79). Both Celie and Nettie (and I would add Walker) transform writing from a "device traditionally used by a white male culture to ensure its authority" (Babb 75) into a means for surviving. However, the Olinka are unable to tell their own tale; it is only through Nettie, an African-American, that the reader learns that the African Olinkas are being displaced and their traditional ways of living threatened by English builders using the village as a rubber plantation headquarters (Walker 226). Nettie also realizes that her preconceived notions of kinship between Africa and America are fragile at best. This is evident in her thoughts on God that change after her experiences as a missionary.

Nettie describes Africa's history of selling Africans as slaves and a history of western colonialism/capitalism in conjunction with the Olinka's patriarchal practises such as scarification and female circumcision (Walker 241). For Walker, "'Africa,' despite its almost mythical presence in the novel, is not celebrated as some idealized space outside the history of women's oppression, but then neither is America held up as a locus of liberation" (Lauret 108-9). Walker suggests that patriarchal oppression is trans-cultural and trans-national.

Constance Richards concurs that "Walker's critique of patriarchal practices against the bodies of women transcends the politics of white versus black, colonizer versus colonized, and addresses forms of cultural nationalism that appropriate traditional African patriarchal practices as anticolonial strategies" (104). For this reason, Nettie reflects on her own complicity in the colonial project and comes to believe that God is, now, for her, "more spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone –a roofleaf or Christ- but we [I] don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us [me]" (Walker 257). The last letter of the novel comes full circle back to the opening letter, only this time Celie is empowered.

This final letter coincides with Nettie returning with Celie's children back to Georgia. Gillespie writes that "Celie is able to reclaim–through narrative and, ultimately in reality–her stolen, lost, sold children. Through Celie's knowledge about her children and ability to read their lives, Walker addresses and tries to rewrite, even redress, the historical loss of black women's children" (64). At the end of the novel, Celie is able to , forgive Mr._____ for keeping Nettie's letters in a way that makes her a Christ-like figure. The final letter is marked "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (Walker 285). Celie's return to God, albeit from a new critical perspective, shows both spiritual transformation, forgiveness, and a sense of the self-reimagining that Walker writes of in her preface.

The spiritual shift that occurs for Celie and Nettie can be described to a certain extent as returning to the legacy of slavery and "African-based

cosmological systems" (Alexander 290). Jacqui Alexander argues that "housed in the memory of those enslaved, yet not circumscribed by it, these Sacred energies made the Crossing" of the Atlantic during the slave-trade (292). Celie may possibly be reviving traces of the practices of Winti, "in which one becomes oneself in the process of becoming one with the Sacred; and they manifest their sacredness in nature ['wind. Water. Fire. Thunder. Lightning. Volcano. The cosmic geography of Sky. Earth. Trees. Forest. Park. Mountain. River. Ocean. Rocks. Stone' (Alexander 303)] as well as in their relationship with human beings, both of which take shape in a process of mutual embodiment" (Alexander 301). With Celie and especially Nettie, who returns to Africa and then makes the Crossing back to the United States again, an alternative maternal spirituality survives.

Alexander, like Walker, suggests that "the idea, then, of knowing self through Spirit, to become open to the movement of the Spirit in order to wrestle with the movement of history … are instances of bringing the self into intimate proximity with the domain of Spirit" (295). Thus, the feminist statement that "the personal is not only political but spiritual" (Alexander 7, 295) is particularly relevant when reading *The Color Purple*. The renewed spirituality seen in *The Color Purple* continues Alexander's argument that feminism's, particularly a postmodern one's, preoccupation with the secular has meant a costly neglect of the sacred (15) and, thus, a reappraisal of the sacred–"spiritual labour and spiritual knowing" (15)–is essential to transnational feminism because it plays such an important role in shaping/healing women's lives.

Norris' novel, similarly, touches on the issue of religious fundamentalism when she discusses segregation between the whites and blacks living in her town and the events leading up to the Civil Rights Movement. Mary's own involvement is clear when the local doctor tells her that the town is completely divided between rich white people and poor blacks who live "down there, red mud and dust and outhouses and shacks. Poverty, disease, misery" (Norris 81). Norris writes that "Mary was appalled. The Depression was over. How could people live like they did here, completely ignoring an entire segment of the population, effectively confining them in a camp as though they were prisoners of war?" (81). Though Mary can recognize oppression based on race, she is unable to face her own oppression based on lesbianism and she does little to further the visibility or the rights of homosexuals. Repressing her sexual desires, she begins going on regular walks through the town so that she can meet more of the "Negroes" (144) and understand their situation better.

Giving money to the black school for textbooks and blackboards (Norris 144), Mary is also accosted by one of Lila's brothers for "hirin' niggers to do white men's work" at the lumber mill (150). Buchanan echoes the man's sentiments when he explains that they need to hire a male mill manager, "somebody who knows how to hire the right kind of people" because "some of the men don't like working side by side with niggers. That's just a fact. And there's good people who need work and they see these Nigras taking jobs away from them, and they got families to feed" (155). Mary, knowing what it feels like to be discriminated against for taking a man's job, defends her decision: "'The

men I've hired need the work and have families to feed too.' And some of them had lost their land and farms to the bank, Mary didn't bother adding" (155).

Norris's novel is similar to novels like *Property* (2003) by Valerie Martin, which narrates racial and class tensions between the wife Manon Gaudet, whose slave Sarah is unwillingly her husband's mistress (like Walker's Mr._____ never-named husband) on a sugar plantation near New Orleans during the 1830s prior to a slave revolt. The argument in Norris' novel involves Lila, who doesn't question racial segregation and is upset when it's disclosed that Mary is giving the black men skilled work and paying them a wage equal to the white men's (157). Lila's opinion about the situation changes, however, when her beloved maid Annie, a black woman, is accosted for riding in Lila's car. The garage owner asks her, "why don't you git out and walk like all your friends in Montgomery?" (Norris 181). The speaker is referring to the recent protests against racial segregation on the buses and a refusal to take public transportation until things change (182, 187).

Together Mary and Lila start working for the cause of equality (Norris 188, 230). By 1965, Mary's and Lila's involvement causes them to be the target of several raids, particularly by the local townspeople and members of the Klu Klux Klan (251). Things come to a climax in the novel when Annie's house is burnt to the ground and Mary and Lila are violently involved in the struggle (279). As Mary begins to lose faith in the fight, Lila stands defiantly by her, encouraging them to continue working. Mary's determination to combat injustice is restored when "down the street, two cars full of black people from Annie's

church pulled up at Miss Louise's house and began picking through the rubble that sill smouldered. Watching friends she hadn't realized she had, Mary said, 'Maybe we should call Annie and Ben, see if they want to ride with Selma with us'" (285). Ultimately Norris, like Walker, suggests spirituality need not be confined to discriminatory patriarchal parameters and definitions. Lila and Mary fight for racial equality, basic human rights, and the equality of others while remaining tied to their Christian faith. Norris, thus, ends her novel with hope. An individual feminist woman and feminists in solidarity can transform a community and combat oppression in all its manifestations, such as race, sexuality, class, religion, and gender.

Conclusion

Analyzing women's historical novels across different times and places on working women shows a disruption and transformation of gendered spaces and spheres, including the patriarchal family, patriarchal public roles and jobs, and heterosexuality. The novels discussed stress the importance of a woman being able to earn and keep her own income, as financial independence is a means to guaranteeing other forms of social independence, including not marrying. Essential to this freedom is, also, the love and support of other women: for example Dora with Sylvia and her daughter Lucinda in Starling's novel, Lebra's narration of Rei with her daughter Fumi and daughter-in-law Tama, Amirrezvani's narrator with her mother Maheen, and friend/co-worker Malekeh, Celie and Shug in Walker's work, and Lila and Mary as life and business

partners in Norris' novel. At the same time, we can read these works as expressing historical and contemporary fears about the breakdown of traditional patriarchal society, which is threatened by women, lesbians, and mothers who work outside of the home. As Rich suggests, such beliefs are reactionary and strive to decree that "the home, its cares and employments, is the woman's true sphere" (*OWB* 49). The struggles of working women are clear when reading the femino-centric topics of boundaries, spaces, weaving, romance, and spirituality in the woman's historical novel from a transnational feminist perspective.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VIOLENT WOMEN: REVAMPING THE GOTHIC NOVEL

> No man who oppresses a woman can be free.
> – Karl Marx as quoted by Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two*

Having roots in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783), Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788),[27] and Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novels, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), the novels discussed in this chapter resurrect the eighteenth century woman's Gothic historical novel as a contemporary "vehicle for expressing terror and fear" (Groot 16). Wallace argues that "women writers have used the Gothic as 'a mode of history' precisely because it expresses their complex and ambivalent relationship to history as both events and narrative" (*Woman's* 20). Lee, in particular, "uses the Gothic mode to stage a coded but sustained (and angry) political protest against the ways in which women have been excluded from history" (Wallace, *Woman's* 20). Inspired by their literary foremothers, these writers "examine gender difference and the problems and anxieties involved in being female" (Rogers 37) from a transnational feminist perspective. The past, for these writers, is dark, incriminating, sexualized, mysterious, and charged with fairy-tale and supernatural elements.

Gothic works expose "the dark side of conformity, alternatives to the status quo[;] it is contradictory, providing social critique and highlighting what lies beneath everyday behaviors, what hidden contradictions, dreams, fantasies,

[27] Kari Lokke claims Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792) is the progenitor of a distinct genealogy of feminist historical novels.

and fears undermine the ostensibly familiar and ordinary" (Wisker 95). Other characteristics include an isolated and isolating domestic setting, a rural landscape/wilderness, the presence of ghosts or spirits, a deliberate play with idealizations of romance, a focus on maternal figures, and a detailed analysis of class conflicts, particularly between the mistress and maid, both of whom display a propensity for violence and murder.

Notable contemporary examples in this category include Ann Rinaldi's *The Color of Fire* (2005), which describes the life of a white servant who witnesses a fellow black servant being accused of treason and subsequently put to death. In Carol Birch's novel *Scapegallows* (2007), the historical English protagonist, Margaret Catchpole, is a former servant and "a smuggler's trollop" (174) sentenced to hang two separate times before being pardoned and exiled to Australia "for life" (418). Angela Badger's *Charlotte Badger: Buccaneer* (2002) and Zana Bell's *Forbidden Frontier* (2008) both chronicle the life of English convict and pirate Charlotte Badger, who, after being transported to Australia, became one of the first white women to live in New Zealand. *Newes from the Dead* (2008) by Mary Hooper narrates the historical life of Anne Green, a London maidservant, hanged in 1650, but revived when doctors at the Oxford Medical School prepared to dissect her body. *Chains* (2008) by Laurie Halse Anderson portrays a slave sold to a man loyal to England during the American Revolution; Isabel must choose between becoming a spy for the American rebels or remaining loyal to England. In all of these Gothic historical novels, women are indirectly and directly involved in criminal activity.

Rather than condemning their respective protagonists for breaking the law, the authors contextualize and predominantly defend their respective heroine's choices. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry suggest that such "stories contradict the dominant narrative about what a woman is generally and about women's capacity for violence specifically" (51). The authors argue that "mother, monster, and whore narratives exclude the possibility that women can choose to be violent because violent women interrupt gender stereotypes. 'Real' women are peaceful, conservative, virtuous and restrained; violent women ignore these boundaries of womanhood" (Sjoberg and Gentry 50-1). Such restrictive roles confine women's acts to being rationalized as "vengeance, insanity, and sexuality" (216). The act of confining ignores the political impact/justifications of women's violent actions. Nevertheless, Sjoberg's and Gentry's triad conforms with how the authors here choose to justify their protagonists' actions, perhaps legitimizing their criticism. These feminist discourses also focus less on the criminal act itself and more on the domestic and familial circumstances leading up to the violence.

This writing emphasizes the necessity for reevaluating women's familial and personal narratives in conjunction with political history–the murders would have been publicized, giving the woman a certain, albeit biased, public presence. In analyzing works specifically from the mid-late nineteenth century–*Kamouraska* (1970) by Ann Hébert,[28] Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), and *The Observations* (2006) by Jane Harris, I pay particular attention to the Gothic elements as well as British colonialism and

[28] I am using the English translation by Norman Shapiro of the original French text *Kamouraska*.

immigration in relation to the crimes themselves. Britain figures prominently in the woman's historical novel pertaining to violence and crime.

In *Kamouraska*, Elisabeth and her domestic servant Aurélie Caron, both French and living in Québec, face the law of the British Queen Victoria and are sentenced to prison for murder. Grace Marks in Atwood's novel and Bessy in Harris's *Observations* are Irish immigrants to British territories, Canada and Scotland respectively, and each enter into domestic service: a related sub-genre includes novels on women during the potato famine in mid-late nineteenth century Ireland and their subsequent mass migration and displacement, for example, Jonatha Ceely's *Mina* (2005) and *Bread and Dreams* (2006) and Pat Kelly's *Galway Bay* (2009), which describes a family's emigration to America. Only Sethe in *Beloved* does not face British colonialism because the United States is already independent at this time. Nevertheless, Sethe is a slave born into domestic servitude prior to abolition. Thus, she is part of Britain's/America's slave-trade legacy and compared to an immigrant, who has few rights, she has none.

All of the protagonists in this chapter are historical or, in the case of Morrison's *Beloved* and Harris' *The Observations*, inspired by historical figures and events. Bessy is loosely based on Hannah Cullwick, an eccentric English domestic servant who kept a diary in the Victorian era called *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant* (Harris, "Interview" n. pag.). Morrison's *Beloved* is imaginatively inspired by the historical figure Margaret Garner, a pre-Civil War slave who murdered her own daughter before being

caught by US Marshalls; she later died from typhoid while working as a slave on a plantation. Unlike the historical Garner, Morrison eventually makes Sethe a free-woman and gives her a life and future outside of and beyond slavery. The novel is a means for recuperating those slaves whose voices/lives have been silenced and gone undocumented and is aptly dedicated to "Sixty Million and more."

The woman's historical novel reveals that criminality in the nineteenth century did not only pertain to working-class women (for instance, the imagined diary of Mary Surratt who was convicted of conspiring to assassinate President Lincoln, in Pamela R. Russell's *The Woman Who Loved John Wilkes Booth* (1978)), but they were more vulnerable and likely to be punished because of their low social standing. Roxanne Rimstead argues, "Traditionally, domestic servants in literature have been fixed as icons and stock characters (for instance, drudges, loafers, fools, messengers, mammies, and accomplices), or under-represented as silenced subjects, background fixtures mute as furniture" (44). In these novels, the servant protagonist speaks in her own voice (with the exception of Aurélie in *Kamouraska*, who is not the central character) and, as she encounters these prejudices, we see her internally reject them. Essential to understanding the protagonist's psychological state is the narrative technique of flashbacks between each protagonists' present and past, suggesting a continuity not only between time-frames within the novels but also to the contemporary time in which each author is writing. Thus, power dynamics between race and class and between a competing past and present are at play in each text.

Rimstead, referencing the work of several theorists, posits:

> Of the few existing literary studies on domestics in Western literature, most note that when paternalism was displaced by capitalism and the role of the servant shifted from loyalty to a contractual arrangement, the dramatization of intrusion increased, as manifested in crime writing that featured servants as threats within the household (Harris, Robbins, Trodd). The sexualization of master/servant relations and the icon of the domestic as temptress, the heightened need for privacy in the bourgeois home in the nineteenth century, the social hysteria around contamination by servants and the poor in general as morally and intellectually inferior, the rhetoric of racial purity in national policies to recruit domestics abroad, and the construction of good and bad femininity which helped separate the ladies from the maids-social attitudes like these buttressed the popular icon of the domestic as working-class intruder. (46)

Reflecting recent transnational feminist concerns on the relation between gendered domestic labour and gendered mobility, economic and social boundaries are crossed and blurred in these novels. The woman's historical novel "remind[s] the public that a majority of migrant workers are females who provide 'the cheapest, flexible, and most docile labor…for dirty, demanding, and dangerous jobs which locals shun'" (Tenaganita, qtd. in Ong 174). Though class separates the mistress and maid and they often fear, loathe, and avoid one

another, they also imagine one another as maternal or sisterly figures and as being transformed by the other.

In Harris' *The Observations*, Bessy's mistress, Arabella, dresses herself in her servant's clothing and Grace in Atwood's *Alias Grace* dons the apparel of a lady when she steals Nancy's her mistress' clothing. Wallace identifies the cross-dressing woman as important a "figure as the tragic queen" (*Woman's* 21) in the woman's historical novel and argues that she be read as the "woman novelist herself, 'cross-writing' as a man in order to enter into the 'masculine' sphere of history" (21), but this kind of cross-dressing is unique to Gothic writing. By dressing as a woman from a different class, new feminine identities are constructed. This further allows freedoms respective to the different gender expectations determined by social stratum. The issues of gender, race, and class in these novels are brought to the forefront through the analysis of such topics as the servant as criminal, red velvet, matricide and othermothering, the servant as prostitute, and the mistress as murderer.

The Servant as Criminal

Atwood's *Alias Grace*, Harris' *The Observations*, and Hébert's *Kamouraska* focus on "maids as slaves" (Ong 158) and, in these cases, the servant as criminal; Morrison's *Beloved* centers on the slave-servant-criminal. Aihwa Ong's description aptly applies to the theme of gendered divisions of labour, migrancy, and poor working conditions that the protagonists experience within the novels. In *Alias Grace*, Atwood reimagines the life of Grace Marks, who at the age of

sixteen was accused and found guilty of murdering, with the help of James McDermott, her former employer Thomas Kinnear in the year 1843 in Richmond Hill, Upper Canada. The novel is a montage of literary and historical documents:

> [It] is pieced together like a patchwork, incorporating ballads, etchings, fictionalized dialogues, archival documents from the Kingston penitentiary, fictionalized letters, inner monologues, transcribed confessions, newspaper clippings, excerpts from Susanna Moodie's nineteenth-century descriptions of Grace, epigraphs from romantic literature, and even chapters titled after quilt patterns. (Rimstead 52)

Beginning in the years 1851 and 1859, an incarcerated Grace is sitting in the Governor's wife's parlor. Grace works as an unpaid servant for the Governor's wife during the day. Unlike her partner in crime, her so called "paramour" (Atwood 89), James McDermott, who hung for Kinnear's and his housekeeper Nancy Montgomery's murder (9), Grace's death sentence was commuted at the last minute (28, 258).

Shuttling between the past and present, Grace recounts her tale to a psychiatrist, Dr. Simon Jordan. The reader pieces together Grace's past leading up to and after the murders at the same time as he does. We learn from Grace's meetings with Dr. Jordan that she was born in Northern Ireland (Atwood 31, 95), which is likened to a crime in and of itself. Grace's Confession confirms that "*both of the accused were from Ireland by their own admission*. That made it sound like a crime, and I don't know that being from Ireland is a crime; although

I have often seen it treated as such" (103). Grace confesses that her mother only married her father, a Protestant Englishman and stone-mason by trade (105), because she was pregnant. When Grace's older sister Martha leaves home for good, Grace only nine years old says, "all the work Martha used to do around the house was now on me" (106). With Grace's father searching for work and drinking his wages in the taverns, the Marks' are close to starving, save for the charity of her mother's sister, Pauline.

When Pauline becomes pregnant herself and can no longer support Grace's very large family, the decision to immigrate to Canada is made for them (Atwood 110). Grace reflects, "Many were doing it, and there was free land to be had in the Canadas, and what my father needed was to wipe the slate clean. Stone-masons were in great demand over there because of all the building and works that were going forward" (110). On the voyage, Grace's mother falls ill and dies (120); the family, when they arrive in Toronto, is given lodgings by Mrs. Burt (125), a widow who pities them. Under the pretence of looking for work, Grace's father falls behind on rent and drinks their small savings; he tells Grace, who is nearly thirteen, that she is "almost a grown woman now and [she] was eating him out of house and home, it was time [she] went out into the world to earn [her] own bread" (127). Grace, having mastered sewing from her mother, begins her first job working as a lowly servant for Mrs. Alderman Parkinson (127).

While working for Mrs. Parkinson, Grace meets her soon beloved fellow servant, Mary Whitney (Atwood 147). Working in the laundry, Mary reminds

Grace, “remember that we [are] not slaves, and being a servant [is] not a thing we were born to, nor would we be forced to continue at it forever, it was just a job of work” (157). Like the narrator in Amirrezvani’s novel *The Blood of Flowers*, Mary instructs Grace on how, by saving their wages for a dowry, they can hope to marry into good households. Though Mary cautions Grace that men are liars and not to trust them, she falls victim to her own warnings and finds herself pregnant with her employer’s son (172). Discrimination against an unwed mother is clear and flies in the face of Victorian ideals of women’s moral purity and virtue. If Mary has the child, she will be forced out onto the streets and her reputation, which these novels suggest is the most important thing a young unmarried woman has, will be ruined.

Unable to face her dismal future prospects, Mary has an abortion (Atwood 175) and soon after dies (176). Grace, too reminded of Mary’s death, takes up a new position with Mr. Dixon and, thereafter, a series of employers for whom, despite the increasing amount of immigrants, there was a persistent belief that were never enough to make up the shortage. As an immigrant, Grace is suitable to work as a servant in a wealthy “Canadian’s” home but her immigrant status also explains why it is used as leverage against her when she commits murder. The immigrant is considered suspicious and rightfully lower on the social strata. Dependable servants are, understandably, scarce and, as Grace is trained and has a reference, she is paid more (199). It is while working for Mr. Watson that she meets Nancy Montgomery (200), who tells her that she is Mr. Thomas Kinnear’s housekeeper and he is in need of another servant (201).

Despite having to leave the city for the country, Grace, desiring female companionship, takes the position (202).

Though Nancy feigns friendship and sisterhood in the beginning (a trend also seen in *Kamouraska* and *The Observations*), Grace begins to realize that Nancy "did not like being crossed, and most of all she did not like being put in the wrong by Mr. Kinnear" (Atwood 223) with whom, according to Grace, she has a rather inappropriate and intimate relationship. It is also while working for Mr. Kinnear that Grace meets McDermott, formerly from Ireland and an ex-English and Canadian soldier (226). McDermott, surly and insolent, is given notice to leave by the end of the month by Nancy (254). McDermott tells Grace that "he did not care to stay any longer with such a parcel of whores" (255). Grace does not understand his meaning, so McDermott explains that "it was only common knowledge that Nancy had a baby when she was working over at Wrights', by a young layabout who ran off and left her, only the baby died. But Mr. Kinnear hired her and took her in anyway, which no respectable man who have done; and it was clear from the first what he'd had in mind" (255). Learning about Nancy's past, Grace loses her respect for her (though she should remember her love for Mary Whitney) and begins to argue and speak back to her (256), which coincides with McDermott's increasing frustration and anger towards Nancy–to the extent that he voices his intention to kill her and Mr. Kinnear (257, 309).

McDermott's words cause Grace to reflect on her own situation. She says, "no prospects before me except the drudgery I'd been doing; and although I

could always find a different situation, still it would be the same sort of work, from dawn to dusk, with always a mistress to be ordering me about" (Atwood 260). Trapped within patriarchal gendered divisions of labour, Grace tells Dr. Jordan about how she discovered Nancy was pregnant with Mr. Kinnear's child (272). She also describes the murders: hitting Nancy on the head with an axe, strangling her with a neckerchief that had once belonged to Mary, and McDermott shooting Mr. Kinnear and tossing him into the cellar with Nancy's dead body (316-19). This part of the narrative neither absolves nor inculcates Grace in the murders, but suggests that she suffers from amnesia (a recurring problem from the time when Mary Whitney dies). After the murders, Grace explains how she and McDermott planned their escape to the United States and she took Nancy's dresses (332).

Arriving in Lewiston, the pair, quickly caught by the authorities, are arrested (Atwood 353). In Grace's defense, her lawyer Mr. MacKenzie coerces Grace into saying,

> I was little more than a child, a poor motherless child and to all intents and purposes an orphan, cast out upon the world with nobody to teach me any better; and I'd had to work hard for my bread, from an early age, and was industry itself; and I was very ignorant and uneducated, and illiterate, and little better than a halfwit; and very soft and pliable, and easily imposed upon. (361)

Grace's propensity for transgressing the law is explained by her working-class status and implicitly, by her gender. As a young woman, without a mother to

instruct and guide her, Grace is ultimately left to fend for herself. Ruth Beinstock Anolik writes that "the absence of the mother from the Gothic text allows for narratable deviance to flourish in the text, a deviance that in turn allows the text to thrive" (98).

Dr. Jordan's attempts to fact-check many of Grace's claims are, likewise, inconclusive. Upon visiting the lawyer who secured Grace's pardon, for she was never tried for the murder of Nancy Montgomery, the lawyer tells Dr. Jordan, "in my opinion, she was guilty as sin" (Atwood 378). Dr. Jordan also visits the old Kinnear house and the Adelaide Street Methodist Church in order to see Mary Whitney's gravestone (387).

Though the stone validates Grace's story, he knows it proves nothing:

> The Mary Whitney buried beneath it may not have any connection with Grace Marks at all. She could just be a name, a name on a stone, seen here by Grace and used by her in the spinning of her story. She could be an old woman, a wife, a small infant, anyone at all. Nothing has been proved. But nothing has been disproved, either. (387-88)

As Grace's innocence or guilt remains unresolved, Dr. Jordan asks her to be hypnotized by a Dr. Jerome DuPont (a former peddler Grace was acquainted with).

Under hypnosis, Grace purports to be speaking as Mary Whitney; Mary Whitney, inhabiting Grace's body reveals: "I told James to do it. I urged him to. I was there all along!" (Atwood 402). That Mary Whitney has been periodically

taking over Grace's body, unbeknownst to her, exonerates Grace's involvement in the murders. It is after this experience that Dr. Jordan hastily leaves, knowing he will have to make a report of what he has witnessed, though he confirms "the truth eludes him. Or rather it's Grace herself who eludes him" (407). In a letter, one of Grace's supporters writes that "as a result of this session [hypnosis], and the astonishing revelations it produced, Dr. Jordan gave it as his opinion that Grace Marks' loss of memory was genuine, not feigned–that on the fatal days she was suffering from the effects of an hysterical seizure brought on by fright, which resulted in a form of *auto-hypnotic somnambulism*" (432). The novel ends with Grace's pardon and departure on August 7th, 1872 (447) to a home provided in New York.

Atwood maintains that "the true character of the historical Grace Marks remains an enigma" (465), but she invents for Grace a marriage to her former neighbour at the Kinnear's, Jamie Walsh, who testified against her in court (452). Though he now believes in her innocence and begs forgiveness, his interest in Grace, Atwood suggests, is suspect and is possibly/probably no different than any other member of the public whose curiosity has motivated an unusual interest in a woman who transgressed Victorian Canadian ideologies of sex and gender.

Red Velvet

Historical novels on Mary Queen of Scots such as Philippa Gregory's *The Other Queen* (2008) support Rayne Allinson's research that argues Mary's body

symbolizes three aspects: “the immortal body of the sovereign, the immaculate body of the female martyr, and the polluted body of the criminal” (Allinson 100). At her execution, Mary’s clothing played an essential role in her refusal to renounce herself as the rightful ruler of England. Wearing a sumptuous black gown, she heightened her status and the injustice she faced. Allinson associates the “petticoat of crimson velvet” (107) that Mary wore underneath her gown with a subversive invocation of martyrdom. Allison continues to note, “Although it is possible Mary wore red to strengthen her resolve and reinforce her monarchical status, its omission from the Earl’s report suggests that it was interpreted as yet another act of resistance against the criminal identity imposed on her by the block and axe” (108). Red velvet is a symbol for social status, sexuality, and blood in Mary’s life and continues to be used in the contemporary woman’s Gothic novel—for example, in Emma Donoghue’s *Slammerkin* (2000) (a word meaning both ‘a loose gown’ and ‘a loose woman’ (Jamison)), the servant protagonist murders her mistress in 1763 London. Mary Saunders desires, like many women in these novels, velvet and lace and fine clothing. Her desire leads her to a life of prostitution and criminal behavior. Just as Grace in Atwood’s novel “is discursively constructed as someone who strays from normative femininity –as a violent deviant who fails to uphold her role as moral purveyor” (Siddall 88), so too are Aurélie Caron in Hébert’s novel *Kamouraska* and Sethe in *Beloved* described.

Caron, who agrees, like Grace, to murder her employer, is an interesting and prominent figure in Hébert’s novel. She is seen through the eyes of her

mistress, the narrator of the tale, Elisabeth d'Aulnières. Like the other texts, Hébert's narrative technique of recollections shuttles the reader between Elisabeth's present, which is with her dying second husband, Jerome Rolland, and her past when she married the violent, abusive, and unfaithful Antoine Tassy, the squire of Kamouraska, and plotted to have him murdered. As in *Alias Grace*, the novel also takes place in pre-Confederation Canada, but in French-speaking Québec during the late 1830s. Elisabeth, in the early pages of the novel, describes the warrant for her arrest and the indictment followed by:

> Two months locked up, and then home. Reasons of health. Family reasons. Good-bye, prison. And good-bye to you, dear warden. You poor bewildered man. Well you have my maid to console you. Justice can hold her as long as it likes. Two years behind bars. Poor Aurélie Caron. But time wipes the slate. And now you're free, as free as your mistress. A new life, a new start …. (Hébert 3)

Caron, clearly a servant, has served longer in prison than her mistress.

> Her dying husband Jerome, who, incidentally, wants their current maid Florida by his side rather than his wife, confronts Elizabeth about Caron. Delirious, he asks about the girl "who used to smoke a pipe? … Aurélie Caron … Wasn't that her name? … Yes, I remember now …" (Hébert 21).

Rolland's question catches Elisabeth by surprise as she has tried to bury her past and possibly her guilt surrounding the murder; Hébert, however, suggests leaving the past behind is impossible.

Elisabeth recounts her past living in Sorel with her three aunts, her mother, and her servants, including Caron, even after her marriage (Hébert 40-41). Caron's observations within the house, however, inculcate Elisabeth in her husband's murder: "'Madame would always go and lock herself in one of the bedrooms with Dr. Nelson' …. It's written down on paper, with an official stamp. Aurélie Caron's sworn deposition. That lying child" (40). The ambiguity and play between fact and fiction entails asking whose words count as truth. The novels suggest that it is those spoken by an established local-national (though, of course, former immigrant), white, wealthy gentleman and, in this chapter, also the "native" white, wealthy woman–for example, Susan Moodie's reports in *Alias Grace*–are those whose words are not questioned. In *Kamouraska* as well as *Alias Grace*, the blurring of facts legitimizes why the historical novel, an inherent mixing of the real with imagination, is a most suitable genre for these feminist texts. In contrast to Caron's damning testimony is Elisabeth's aunt Mademoiselle Angélique Lanouette's statement, which exonerates Elisabeth based on her good breeding, piousness, and class, not to mention her devotion as a wife.

Hébert writes: "And as for Aurélie Caron, everyone knows what a reputations she has. Elisabeth's worst mistake, the only thing she can be blamed for, was keeping that girl on. That shameless, unprincipled liar … That drunken beast … That … That slut…" (41). Aurélie, like the other servants discussed in this chapter, is portrayed in the stereotypes of her class, time, and place: fond of drinking, sexually loose, and prone to immoral-illegal activities (Lacelle 49).

Claudette Lacelle claims that in Canada during the nineteenth century servants did not commit any more crimes than other groups (49) and the most common crime committed in Québec especially was desertion (151); therefore, women servants, the majority of which were mobile and between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, constituted a very small percentage of criminals (56), particularily murderesses. Nonetheless, they had a reputation for being immoral and vulgar (the Québec City newspaper *L'Evénement* "had a special column dealing with servants' crimes" (Lacelle 122)). Also worth noting, in terms of the ethnic-immigrant stigmatism Grace encounters (and Bessy in *The Observations*), is that, in Québec City (1871-75), Irish servants, followed by French Canadians committed the most crimes (Lacelle 123).

The second aunt, Adélaïde, confirms her sister's testimony: "Aurélie Caron … Nothing but a liar … A slut, a drunkard …" (Hébert 43). The third aunt lays her hand on the Bible and whispers, "'Madame was never alone in her room with Dr. Nelson. Her mother, Madame d'Aulnières, was always with her.' All at once Aurélie's laugh chills me to the bone" (104) because Aurélie Caron says, "I swear, Madame spent a lot of time alone with the doctor. With the doors closed. As soon as her mother went out" (105). A class barrier discredits much of Caron's testimony though the reader knows she is telling the truth. Racism is also at play. Rimstead believes that Caron is "a mixed-blood" (47); is she Métis? Is this another reason why Elisabeth separates herself from the working class: "I won't be brought to trial before the likes of them! Servants, innkeepers, boatmen, peasants! Good for nothing witnesses, every one! None of them can stand up

against me. And as for Aurélie Caron …" (53). Even before Elisabeth's marriage to Tassy, Caron troubles her.

Both fifteen years old, Elisabeth says, Caron "taunts me, this child, and makes me green with envy" (Hébert 55). Elisabeth envies Caron for her physical freedom and asks her several times about boys because she is married to the respectable Antoine Tassy, squire or *seigneur* (which in the French text plays on the word "Lord") of Kamouraska (66). Subject to her husband's violence, womanizing, drunkenness, and extended disappearances, Elisabeth takes her two children and moves back to Sorel with her mother and aunts (96). Elizabeth reflects, "The first thing I do, back in Sorel. Hire Aurélie Caron. Despite my mother's and my aunts' entreaties. To play Milady and her maid. Until …" (100). Fascinated by Caron, Elisabeth remarks, "they say you have yourself a merry time, Aurélie! Down by the river, out on the islands. Is it true? Tell me, what do you do? Tell me everything!" (100). Elisabeth's life changes when she meets Dr. Nelson (104), her husband's former school friend. Elisabeth falls in love with the doctor, and, thus, their affair begins. Caron serves as an essential part of the affair as she carries messages between them and even drives Elisabeth to the doctor's home (139).

The situation leads Elisabeth to send Caron to go fetch the doctor: "Please, Aurélie, you have to. I'm pregnant. …" (Hébert 144). Elizabeth, first, needs to make peace with Antoine so "the blameless wife can announce that she's pregnant again by her husband" (145). It is during this time that Elisabeth tells Dr. Nelson that they must kill her husband (148). When Dr. Nelson learns

the child is his, he decides to do her bidding (158). Hébert writes, "The poison is Elisabeth's idea. A pregnant woman's obsession. Send Aurélie to Kamouraska with poison, so she can …" (166). In order to convince Aurélie to undertake the mission, Elisabeth bribes her with money and material possessions: "Now I'm giving Aurélie some cakes. And ribbons too. Red ones and green ones. In an instant her sullen face lights up. Like a child, in tears one moment and laughing the next" (176). Dr. Nelson and Elisabeth dress Aurélie in beautiful clothing; she "claps her hands. Begins to stir. To flutter. Struts about the room. Comes back to the mirror. Declares, in a shrill little drawl: 'I'm absolutely gorgeous! Just like a high-class lady!'" (181). Dr. Nelson tells Aurélie she will go to Kamouraska, seduce Antoine, and poison him. He describes her reward should she succeed: you'll "never have to work again for the rest of your life, Aurélie. You'll live like a lady. Red velvet and all" (182). He tells her, "I'll give you a place of your own, with beautiful things" (182). Thus, the dream that Mary Whitney envisions for herself and Grace, once they are married, tempts Aurélie. Elisabeth sweetens the deal by calling Aurélie her friend and her sister. Moved by flattery and the promise of a change in status, Aurélie consents to their wishes (182, 185, 188).

Lee Skallerup argues that "she has totally embraced the values of the upper class, and when she is presented with a possible way in, she takes it. But the class that she longs to be a part of ultimately betrays her" (150). Antoine manages to survive Aurélie's poisoning and, when she returns, Dr. Nelson declares he must take the act into his own hands (Hébert 191) and commits murder on January 31, 1839 (229). On the morning of February 7th, the day after

Dr. Nelson has returned to Elisabeth, he was to have been arrested by the authorities (247), but has already escaped for the American border (248) (like Grace and McDermott attempt in *Alias Grace*). Elisabeth, with her aunt's help, goes searching for her lover, but is arrested (248). She declares:

> You're not my friend anymore, Aurélie. I told you to lie when they put you in the box. Anything, so long as you didn't betray us. Now look what you've done. Here you are in prison, just like your poor mistress. I'm so afraid this awful place is going to taint me, Aurélie. … Your Honor, this girl is a liar, a shameless slut. (249)

Though Dr. Nelson makes it to Burlington, Vermont, it is suggested by Elisabeth that he is captured and taken back to Canada, where he and Elisabeth seemingly accuse one another of the crimes. Two months after being imprisoned, Elisabeth is released and quickly marries Jerome Rolland (255-6). Dr. Nelson is extradited back to the United States and disappears (250, 254). Aurélie's fate after she is released from prison remains unknown.

Red velvet also plays an important part in Morrison's *Beloved*. The work opens in 1873, Cincinnati, with Sethe and her daughter Denver being haunted by a baby's ghost. The mother and daughter live at I24, the former home of Sethe's mother-in-law Baby Suggs, who dies shortly after Denver's two brothers leave home (Morrison 3). Sethe explains that the ghost is Beloved, her baby who died when she was two (4). While discussing the ghost and thinking back to her lost child, Sethe encounters Paul D sitting on her porch (6); he is the last of the Sweet

Home men and Sethe and Baby Suggs were slaves with him eighteen years ago in Kentucky.

Sethe, now a cook at a restaurant who sews on the side (Morrison 10), explains to Paul D how, pregnant with Denver (named after a whitegirl who helped her give birth (29)), she made her dangerous escape from Sweet Home. Amy M. Green argues that Amy, the run-away white girl who finds and helps Sethe, a run-away slave, “harbors an obsession, a near physical craving for red velvet, a powerful symbol of blood spilled in both acts of cruelty and childbirth, both of which relate directly to Sethe” (120). In Hébert’s novel, Elisabeth tells her servant, “You’ll live like a lady. Red velvet and all” (182); thus, red velvet can be considered a symbol for a woman’s escape from the margins, her desire for upward class mobility, her dangerous sexuality, and for blood spilled.

Irigaray uses the term “sang rouge” to signify not class or sexuality but red blood as a link to the maternal:

> The red blood refers to the possibility of a maternal genealogy, which would take its place alongside, and in fertile conjunction with the paternal genealogy, which is the only genealogy recognized by patriarchy. Red blood may also refer to the unacknowledged debt to the mother, on which patriarchy depends. (Whitford, “Section I” 18)

With Amy’s help, Sethe and Denver make it to Baby Suggs’ house (Morrison 8). Baby Suggs, the reader learns, is a free-woman because her son Halle, who also worked at Sweet Home, bought her freedom (11, 23). When Suggs leaves the

farm, Sethe replaces her and it is during this time that she begins a relationship with Halle, marries him, and bears him children (23, 26).

Experiencing the trauma of being a female slave, Sethe describes how prior to running away "those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. He held me down and took it" (Morrison 16). Later Paul D tells Sethe that it is this sight that breaks Halle and the reason she couldn't find him on the day they planned to escape together (68). Following her traumatic experience in the barn, Sethe tells her white owner Mrs. Garner, who is physically and symbolically unable to speak up on Sethe's behalf; instead she ineffectively cries and the boys and a man known only as Schoolteacher beat Sethe severely leaving scars that look like a tree (17). Paul D asks, when she ran, did Schoolteacher ever find her, to which she replies yes, but that under no circumstances was she going back (42). Sethe explains, "I don't care who found who. Any life but not that one. I went to jail instead. Denver was just a baby so she went right along with me" (42). Though the reader reflects on the contradiction of sending a slave to jail when the slave has no legal rights in and of him or herself and, thus, is outside of the system, Sethe seems to give little thought to her prison sentence. It is also possible, as Lorna L. McLean and Marilyn Barber surmise in their work on nineteenth Irish immigrant domestic servants in Canada, that incarceration, though it impeded one's liberty, could be preferable to a harsh patriarchal, racist, and poor economic situation awaiting one's existence outside (145).

Matricide and Othermothering

In *Beloved*, Sethe neglects to tell Paul D that, when the men came for her, she was in the shed with her children: "Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other" (Morrison 149). With the two boys breathing and Denver still alive, Sethe breastfeeds her; "she took her mother's milk along with the blood of her [dead] sister. And that's the way they were when the sheriff returned, having commandeered a neighbour's cart" to take her to prison (152). Baby Suggs brings Sethe food in prison and tells her that The Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio, "had drawn up a petition to keep [her] from being hanged" (183). Approximately three months later (because Denver is ready for solid food), Seth is released (183). Upon release, Sethe is ex-communicated and sentenced to a life of exile from the black community, both for her perceived pride and for her denial of any wrongdoing. Sethe, however, buys a modest gravestone with only the child's name (like the one Grace buys for Mary Whitney and Arabella, in *The Observations,* buys for her cherished servant, Nora), which overlaps with the arrival of the ghost in the house.

The ghost, temporarily extricated from the house while Paul D lives with Sethe, coincides with a strange woman appearing (Morrison 50). The imagery of giving birth is prevalent in her arrival–not only does Beloved emerge from the water as if she has just been born, but, when Sethe sees her for the first time, she proceeds to release water as if her water is breaking. Paul D asks the woman what her name is and she calmly replies "Beloved" (52). Clear to the reader, but

unknown to Paul D, is the link between this girl and Sethe's deceased child by the same name. The return of Beloved, the daughter, also symbolically signifies Morrison as a daughter returning to the legacy of slavery from "a black female point of view" (Rody 23). A bridge "between the authorial present and the ancestral past" (24), the novel emphasizes a daughter haunted by her connection to her enslaved maternal ancestors.

Taking comfort and joy in Beloved's initial arrival, "Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable" (Morrison 58). It is while Beloved and Paul D are living with Sethe and Denver that the past reveals itself. Denver, who has little memory of her early childhood, is asked by a local boy about her mother (102): "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (104). Paul D is also shown a newspaper photo and article by their neighbour Stamp Paid who witnessed the murder (154). Though refusing to believe the photo depicts Sethe, Paul D confronts her and can't understand how, even out of love, she committed murder (165). Sethe, "your love is too thick" (164), says Paul D and he moves into town.

It does not take Sethe long to realize, "BELOVED, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing" (Morrison 200). Beloved symbolizes the loss of children born into slavery as a collective. As Shirley A. Hill points out, "enslaved black women …

give birth to 'property'" and were "especially victimized by motherhood" (109). Sethe says, "I'll tend to her as no mother ever tended a child, a daughter. Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children" (200). For Sethe, the painfulness of slavery is traced back to her own mother who worked in the rice field and wasn't able or allowed to breast feed her. She was fed by a nursemaid and only given leftovers, after the white children were full. Seeing her own mother maybe once or twice in her life, the last image of her Sethe remembers is her hanging (60-61, 200).

Sethe claims a role for herself that has been denied slaves: mother. Yi-Lin Yu argues that, despite persistent racism and sexism, "black motherlines are also restored and maintained through other forms of maternity operated mostly in female-affiliated network and connection" (136). This is clear from Sethe's own experiences with her mother. Patricia Hill Collins, constructing an Afrocentric perspective on motherhood, argues that, unlike white motherhood, which is conceived as a private experience, black motherhood is "a public and 'collective responsibility' performed within 'cooperative, age-stratified, woman-centred, 'mothering' networks'" (Collins, qtd. in Yu 137). Collins identifies four themes that express an "Afrocentric ideology of motherhood view" (Yu 137): "1) Bloodmothers, othermothers, and women-centered networks; 2) Providing as part of mothering; 3) Community othermothers and social activism; 4) Motherhood as a symbol of power" (Yu 137-8). Thus, Morrison's work is a counter-novel to violated and disrupted matrilineages and provides, through the woman's historical novel, a revolutionary notion of othermothering.

The balance, however, between mothering, working, and having time for one's self is a problem that still plagues twenty-first century society. Morrison writes that Sethe's life/history is meant to relate "to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's place" (xvi). Motherhood, while a gift and joy, can also consume. This is evident in Sethe's increasingly problematic relationship with Beloved. Giving her entire self to Beloved, Sethe loses her job at the restaurant (Morrison 240). When Denver realizes that her mother is overwhelmed because of her guilt, she takes matters into her own hands and asks for help (243, 248). Morrison writes, "Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that, and seeing her mother diminished shamed and infuriated her" (251). When Denver explains to one of the neighbours that Beloved has returned in the flesh and is pregnant with Paul D's child, the community rallies itself for a rescue (256).

After eighteen years of solitude, judgment, and avoidance by the neighbours, thirty women in solidarity (a relationship that is not possible in slavery–though the bond of experiencing slavery becomes a familial bond) make their way to I24 to save Sethe (Morrison 257) and chase Beloved away (262). Paul D also returns, asking for forgiveness, much in the same way Jaime Walsh pleads with Grace Marks in Atwood's *Alias Grace*, so that he and Sethe can have not only a past, a past confronted, exorcised, and spoken, but a post-slavery future together (273).

The Servant as Prostitute

Harris's *The Observations* is told from the point of view of Bessy, who, like Grace in Atwood's *Alias Grace*, is a young Irish domestic servant (7). Working in Victorian Scotland for a Mrs. and Mr. Reid, similar to Grace, Bessy's metanarrative patches "together versions of reality and events" (Wisker 75). With competing claims for truth and lies, it becomes clear the narrator is unreliable. Bessy, glossing over the truth to Arabella Reid, explains that she's been living in Glasgow (Harris 3), working as housekeeper for a Mr. Levy of Hyndland (7), but is now seeking employment because her employer has died. Short a servant, Arabella hires Bessy (14). Bessy impresses her mistress because she is literate. Bessy informs Arabella that her late mother taught her to read and write.

The reader, however, knows this is a lie: "my mother was alive and most likely blind drunk down by the Gallowgate as usual and even she was sober she barely have wrote her own name on a magistrate's summons" (Harris vii). While working, Arabella asks Bessy to keep a diary of not only her daily events but also her feelings (18). When Bessy's matter-of-fact entries are not elaborate enough for her mistress, she begins to invent. For example, she writes of her mother and compares her to a smiling angel (60). Bessy later discovers that her mistress is secretly writing a book called *Observations on the Habits and Nature of the Domestic Class in My Time* (90) and she reads the entry written about herself: "*The Most Particular Case of a Low Prostitute*" (103). Arabella reveals

in her notes that she has received a letter from the late Mr. Levy's brother who confirms that Bessy, whose true name is Daisy, was not really a housekeeper, but, in the manner of Nancy in Atwood's *Alias Grace*, was kept there under "IMMORAL CIRCUMSTANCES" (121).

Arabella also learns (and, hence, so too does Bessy and the reader) that she "was reputedly sold into his brother's [Mr. Levy's] care by an elder sister, who in return collected a weekly payment" (Harris 124). As Bessy begins to think about her past, she reveals that her so-called sister is really her mother (141). Bessy discloses her early life with her mother Bridget, a prostitute, in Dublin. Meeting a man named Joe Dimpsey, Bridget falls in love and, after he tells her he is sailing back to Scratchland, Scotland, she tells her eight or nine year-old daughter she's going with him, but that she can't afford to take her: "You'll be all right here on your own for a few years until you grow up, will you not?" (149, 150). Pleading with her mother not to leave her behind, Bessy convinces Bridget to agree that she will do whatever is asked of her (151). Pretending to be Bessy's older sister, Bridget pimps out her daughter for the entire week in order to raise Bessy's boat fare (233, 237).

Arriving in Glasgow together, Bridget takes a room off Stockwell Street and quickly puts Bessy to work (Harris 238), including making her perform incestuous acts with her (364). As Daisy notes, many of the prostitutes in Glasgow are also "from across the water anyway so there was a bond there in common" (239). The narrative then switches back to the present and Bessy is piecing together the unusual circumstances in regards to the previous maids

being dismissed by Arabella. The maid who stands out is Nora. The reader learns that she died mysteriously on the railway tracks one night after being hit by a train. While Bessy plays tricks on her mistress, pretending that Nora's ghost is haunting the house and slowly driving Arabella mad, a real "ghost" also appears to Bessy in the form of her mother (300).

Bessy awakens to see someone in her room: "even without looking I knew that the person was my mother" (Harris 301). The appearance of Bessy's mother coincides with several notices in the local paper asking for help in the whereabouts of a certain Daisy O'Toole: "*STRAYED from her home on Wednesday the 2nd September last, DAISY O'TOOLE, also known as ROSEBUD or POD*" (359). At this point in the narrative, Arabella is convinced that two people, Mrs Gillfillan and her hunchman McDonald, who run a Register Office for servants and are interested in "what makes a maid loyal and obedient" (375), have come to experiment upon Nora (376).

The woman, who has been lurking around Castle Haivers and who Arabella imagines as the woman wanting to hurt Nora, is in fact Bessy's mother (Harris 409, 418). Bridget explains that a local man, Reverend Pollock, answered her newspaper ad and told her about a young girl working at Castle Haivers who fit her description (412). For Arabella, in her confusion, he is the supposed henchman (465). It becomes clear that Bridget has come to claim Daisy/Bessy in order to make her work for her again: "she wanted *me* back" (422). Arabella imagines the events happening to Bessy as happening to her dead servant Nora, suggesting that she confuses Bessy with Nora and that one servant is the same as

the next; every servant is replaceable. In reality, however, it is truly Bessy's life that is at stake, as she foresees a terrible future back in Gallowgate (424).

Bessy reveals:

> Now I realized that no matter where I went, she would track me down … She'd never let me be. It was only a matter of time before she got me fired. And then where would I go, with no character and no money? She'd only come after me again and even if I found another job, she'd spoil it for me by telling them what I was. Of course, my missus didn't care about all that. Dear lovely missus! She didn't mind what I'd been. (Harris 424)

Unable to escape her past and her path, Bessy resigns and agrees to go back to Glasgow with her mother (427). Before she is able to leave, however, her mistress Arabella, who has been locked inside her room due to her illness and madness, turns the tables. Disguised in Bessy's servants' clothing, Arabella makes her way into the center of town set on killing both Mrs Gillfillan (Bridget, Bessy's mother) and McDonald (the Reverend) (451). In true Gothic style, Bessy's mother is found dead (471) on the rail tracks, in the same place where Nora, Arabella's former servant, died.

The Mistress Murderer

With the death of Bridget, Bessy in *The Observations* is free from a life of shame and prostitution. Though Arabella could not save Nora (who was pregnant at the time of her death and dismissed from the house because of it by Mr. Reid,

therefore, very much a Mary Whitney figure from Atwood's *Alias Grace*), she saves Bessy by pushing her mother in front of a train (Harris 511). She also injures Mr. Pollock, who was the father of Nora's unborn child. Thus, the feminist perspective Rimstead writes of in *Alias Grace* is applicable because *The Observations* "focuses on the sexual exploitation of female domestics by privileged men as the dark side of class power" (52). It is, also, only by engaging in sexual relations with powerful men, as Nancy or Bessy does with Mr. Levy and as perhaps Nora does with Mr. Pollock, that social mobility is possible. Arabella is moreover proclaimed mad by her husband and doctor and sent to an asylum, which is similar to Grace, who spends time in an asylum after the murders, though Arabella is absolved of any criminal charges because she is, like Elisabeth d'Aulnières, an upper-class woman. Arabella's asylum is a private facility, unlike the terrible conditions and sexual exploitation Grace describes. Feeling devoted to her mistress for saving her life, Bessy takes up a job working as a kitchen maid in the asylum until she is promoted to attendant. It is here that Arabella functions as a mother for Bessy (476, 488) and the two are able to share a relationship outside of patriarchal restraints and society.

Similarly, Elisabeth in *Kamouraska* is depicted as imprisoned, both physically and psychically, in her everyday life prior to her actual imprisonment. Elisabeth, however, never meaningfully relates to the social restrictions that women across different classes and cultural backgrounds are subjected to, such as not being able to own property or participate politically. Her personal, internal, and fragmented voice expresses a narrow social definition of femininity

associated with middle-to-upper-class respectability and reputation. Identifying with notions of love, marriage, and children exemplified by Queen Victoria (Hébert 40, 133), Elisabeth has 11 children: two from her first husband, one by her lover, and eight by her second husband (4). Anolik argues that "fantasy has its limits in posing resistance to the actual dispossession of women" (108) and that, although "warning female readers of the dangers of patriarchal systems, the Gothic avoids endorsing any truly revolutionary resistance to these systems" (109). This is clear when, finding herself unable to cope with the realities of her dismal and violent life with Antoine, Elisabeth turns to her lover Dr. Nelson. She invents him as a fairy-tale inspired rescuer, much like Simon Jordon imagines himself to be in *Alias Grace* by freeing Grace Marks from prison.

Hébert, heightening Elisabeth's imprisonment through tensions between French and English as languages and as peoples in Canada throughout the novel, describes Elisabeth facing charges for murdering her husband. She is read her indictment in a foreign-tongue, the same tongue of her American lover. The charge is one of the few instances of English in the original French text: "The indictment … Court of King's Bench. Session of September 1840. The Queen against Elisabeth d'Aulnières-Tassy" (Hébert 2). Like her fellow Patriotes, Elisabeth has rebelled against the Queen. Hébert suggests that Elisabeth cannot embody the traditional and antiquated French ways associated with her husband, Tassy, or embrace a foreign rigid Victorian gender identity; nor can she escape the limits of the Gothic narrative–all of these imprison women.

Murray Sachs adds that "Kamouraska" is also the name of the Québec town in which Hébert saw "the word 'amour' imprisoned within the walls of the harsh sounds of the two *k's*." (115). Thus, desperate to escape her husband's violence and to experience what she considers ideal love with Dr. Nelson, Elisabeth organizes Antoine's death and never expresses guilt, sadness, or regret. The only emotions of regret and loss she shows occur when she reflects on Dr. Nelson escaping across the border: the border symbolizes finality as it separates physically and emotionally; her hopes for a future together are dashed. Unsurprisingly, Karen S. McPherson describes Elisabeth as "a haunted narrator" (107), who commits to romanticized ideals of love and ideals of honour (49). *Kamouraska* is, thus, not a celebration of the domestic and Victorian ideals but is an argument against gender restrictions, unrealistic notions of romance, and expectations within the family, especially those which deny woman a public-political role by confining her to the domestic realm.

Conclusion

A revamping of the eighteenth century woman's Gothic novel, these works continue to express the past as dark, supernatural, fairytale-like, sexed, mysterious and criminal. Devoted to the mid-late nineteenth century, each work narrates a historical figure publically accused of criminal activity or murder. In Morrison's *Beloved*, the murder occurs as an act of love devoted to familial and personal escape by a mother; in *The Observations*, Arabella, suffering from madness, murders her servant's mother in the belief that she is protecting-

mothering Bessy from a future of prostitution and poverty; and in *Alias Grace*, we can see a desire for escape from a life of drudgery as a servant. Hébertin *Kamouraska*, however, brings to light the restrictions and destructive forces of a mother committed to the ideals of femininity defined by a patriarchal society. In addition, each work reexamines the relationship between mistress and maid, which I explicated through the femino-centric topics of the servant as criminal, red velvet, matricide and othermothering, the servant as prostitute and the mistress as murderer. Expressing recent transnational fears and concerns about rebellious and violent women, the novels reveal the dynamics and convergence of class, sexuality, and race through a distinct gendered lens that powerfully protests against the exclusion of women from history.

CHAPTER NINE

FEMINIST MOTHERING: THE WOMAN'S WAR NOVEL

> History does not happen of its own accord. It is up to us to build it
> – Luce Irigaray, *I Want Love, Not War*

There is a common belief that only men can write authentic war novels (Higonnet, "Cassandra's Question" 144). Margaret Higonnet believes "the a priori identification of war with masculinity symbolically exiles women from war fiction" (160); thus, "no other genre is so highly gendered. The exploits of men in the formation and defense of a people or nation, though they may provoke the 'tears of women,' do not justify their tales" (144). Women historical novelists and transnational feminists (Cockburn, Gibbons, Fenton Stitt, Higonnet, Liston Liepold, Logsdon-Conradsen) recently have been re-evaluating and contesting the genre. Actively addressing the persistence of patriarchal violence and militarism in the lives of women, the genre's masculine parameters and notions of an authentic narrative are being challenged by contemporary women's writing.

Most women's historical war novels concentrate on the time frame between the American Civil War (1881-65) and, the period that appeals most to women writers, WWII (1939-1945). War novels also typically fall within at least one of the following six categories: 1) women's contributions as nurses in war, for instance Hilary Green's novel *Never Say Goodbye* (2006), in which Diana, who serves in the FANY program, is also an agent for the Special Operations

Executive. 2) women's resistance during WWII against Nazi Germany, both within Germany and Occupied Europe. Examples include the women in Thaisa Frank's *Heidegger's Glasses* (2010), the protagonist Elsie in Sarah McCoy's *The Baker's Daughter* (2012), and the sisters in Lucretia Grindle's *The Villa Triste* (2010), who, in Nazi-occupied Florence, Italy, undermine the occupation.
3) civilian life on the North American and European homefront during WWII. For instance, in *Gone to Soldiers* (1987) by Marge Piercy, American women's sacrifices are narrated. As Angela Huth emphasizes in her British novel *Landgirls*:

> If half a million men were withdrawn from the munitions industries to fight, and the industries had to expand by one and a half million, who would work in the factories to equip the newly swollen forces? Answer: women. A million and a half of them would have to leave their children, their kitchens, their darning, jobs such as running a local post office, and go into the factories. (148)

4) women as persecuted victims of WWII, seen, for example, in four novels on the Japanese occupation: Anne Valery's *Tenko Reunion* (1985) is about the internment of western women, after Singapore falls to Japan. Belinda Alexandra's *White Gardenia* (2002) narrates a woman arriving in a village on the China-Russia border after fleeing the Russian Revolution. Facing imminent occupation by the Japanese in WWII, she has to return to Russia and leave her child Anya behind in China. Rani Manicka's *The Rice Mother* (2004) describes a Ceylonese woman who, after marrying, moves to Malaya before World War II

and *The White Pearl* (2012) by Kate Furnivall also discusses the occupation of Malaya. 5) the breakup and separation of families either through death, adoption, remarriage, relocation, or evacuation. Rosie Alison's *The Very Thought of You* (2009), Catherine Hall's *Days of Grace* (2010), and Ruth Hamilton's *That Liverpool Girl* (2011) all cover the topic of familial separation by evacuation and *The Lost Wife* (2011) by Alyson Richman chronicles two Jewish lovers in Prague prior to the war and their miraculous reunion years later in New York. 6) the immediate post WWII years in which family members attempt to reunite or reconcile, for instance *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) by Susan Abulhawa, *Sky Burial: An Epic Love Story of Tibet* by Xinran, and Rosalind Laker's *The House by the Fjord* (2011), which describes the visit of an English war widow to a friend in Norway in 1946.

The recent popularity of women's writing on war suggests the genre is being reconceptualised to suit the needs of women. Differing from earlier writing such as Margaret Mitchell's sumptuous historical romance *Gone With the Wind* (1936), which is set in the South during the American Civil War, post 1970 novels, as the categories above suggest, recuperate the lives of women actively engaged in and experiencing the devastation and hardships of war but also the possibility for post-war forgiveness and reconciliation. The novels analyzed here–*Obasan* by Joy Kogawa (1981), Angela Huth's *Land Girls* (1994), *Louisa* (2001) by Simone Zelitch, *My Enemy's Cradle* (2008) by Sara Young, *Suffragette Girl* (2009) by Margaret Dickinson and Robin Oliveira's *My Name is Mary Sutter* (2011)–adhere to what Higonnet calls subversive war writing. These

women’s writing displaces “stock conceptions” by contesting “the boundaries drawn between battlefront and homefront, war and peace, public and private, white and black, nation and people, men and women. By mining such boundaries, these texts explode the narrow conceptions of war on which their own exclusion from the literature of war has rested” (“Cassandra’s Question” 151-2). Half of these novels portray women as heroic participants on the battlefield and homefront (*My Name is Mary Sutter*, *Suffragette Girl*, *Landgirls*), while the other half portray women as anti-war trauma victims and survivors of the Second World War (*Obasan*, *My Enemy’s Cradle*, *Louisa*).

The woman’s historical novel alerts us to how war can radically transform, challenge, reinforce, or put into crises traditional gender expectations. Stereotypical images of women as “maternal, emotional, and peace-loving” are complicated by the “monstrous” woman capable of violence (Sjoberg and Gentry 1). Such is the situation in the few women’s novels on women involved in battles and physical fighting, such as the protagonist, Emily, an RAF pilot, in *The Lady in the Spitfire* (2006) by Helena P. Schrader or Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), which describes the Mirabal sisters, who, opposing the dictatorship of General Raphael Leonidas Trujillo in 1950s and 60s Dominican Republic, are violently murdered. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry suggest that the woman who commits violence is “incompatible with traditional explanations of all women as the ‘peaceful people’ whom ‘war protects’ and who ‘should be protected from war’” (3); a “woman is expected to be against war and violence, but to cooperate with wars fought to protect her innocence and

virginity" (4). While identifying how gendered tropes, particularly motherhood and the maternal, are used dichotomously either to valorize soldiering and legitimize conflict and combat (even for causes such as abolishing slavery, fascism, or Nazism) or to invoke an anti-war stance (see, for example, Maureen Lee's *Martha's Journey* (2010), in which a mother walks from Liverpool to London to protest the government allowing underage boys to serve as soldiers in WWI) is worthwhile, the focus in this chapter is on how war contributes to what Andrea O'Reilly refers to as feminist mothering ("That is What Feminism Is" 191).

Feminist mothering challenges feminists claims from the 1960s and the early 1970s (Beauvoir, Friedan, Morgan) that argued motherhood is "a bitter trap' for women" (Shulamith Firestone, qtd. in Nathanson 244) and/or "the very source of women's oppression" (Nathanson 244). By contrast, feminist mothering today re-validates motherhood as a viable feminist choice, evident in women's historical novels. In these maternal texts, mothering is central to one's identity but is "understood as lived resistance to the normative –stereotypical – expectations of both motherhood and womanhood" (O' Reilly, "Introduction" 5). Seeking to "redefine motherwork as a socially engaged enterprise that seeks to effect cultural change through new feminist modes" (7), in the first group of texts on heroic women, two of the novels (Oliveira's, Dickinson's) portray the feminist aunt as ostensibly resisting but then choosing the role of mother. Meanwhile, Huth's novel challenges the image of the idealized farmwife Mrs. Lawrence who, acting as a stand-in mother, is loved but rejected as a viable

figure by the protagonists in their future lives as mothers. In the second group of maternal texts on persecuted war victims, the biological mother, as in the former group, is either absent or dead. There is an added exploration of betrayal, which is central to understanding this kind of feminist mothering. Kogawa's work is a search by a daughter for the mother who disappeared; Young's novel is about a woman who raises her Jewish child with an ex-German soldier and Zelitch's text portrays a Jewish mother-in-law stepping in as mother to her German daughter-in-law. To better grasp the complexity of feminist mothering in women's historical war novels, I examine the femino-centric topics of an ethic of care theory, maternal mortality and the aunt, maternal reconciliation, mothers as foreign enemies, and the homefront.

Ethic of Care Theory: Nurses on the Frontlines

During the Victorian Era, women were expected to be in "the domain of the home and serve as the ornamental wife" (O'Reilly, "Maternal Activism" 7). This belief resulted in the "invention of full-time motherhood" (7). Restricted to middle-class white women, "this gendered schism converged to construct mothering as *essentially* and naturally the identity and purpose of women, and the family as fundamentally a private unit separate and distinct from the larger, political and social world" (7). Defying preconceptions, for instance women's physical and emotional weakness when compared with men, for their times and places (the American Civil War and World War I respectively), the feminist

heroines of Oliveira's and Dickinson's novels pursue entering and transforming the strictly male profession of medicine.

Both Mary and Florrie challenge traditional gender roles for women and reveal an emerging feminist consciousness, which Judith Stadtman Tucker calls "a feminist ethic of care." Stadtman Tucker writes that "as with maternalism, a feminist ethic of care designates caring for others as an essential social function. But rather than valorizing maternal sensitivity and altruism as an innate vital resource, a feminist ethic of care aims to liberate caregiving from its peripheral status and reposition it as a primary human activity" (212). This conception of care is supported by Oliveira in *My Name in Mary Sutter*, when she writes of the historical women who:

> Braved disease, despair, devastation, and death to nurse in the Civil War hospitals ... nearly twenty women became physicians after their experiences nursing in the Civil War; it is to honor them and their collective experience that Mary Sutter lives. (xiii)

In the novel, the protagonist, Mary, is a famous mid-wife–"*she is good, even better than her mother*" (Oliveira 1)–and muses that "everything of consequence that had ever happened in her life had been because of babies" (173), though she never gives birth herself.

Midwifery runs through Mary's maternal family: "her mother had been a midwife, and her mother before her, in a line that extended back to medieval France. Her great-great-great-great-grandmother had once delivered a dauphin" (Oliveira 21). Though she is adept in midwifery, Mary, an avid reader and

learner of medical texts, desires to attend medical school and become a doctor (7, 29). A shift towards the medicalization of childbirth in the novel coincides with an increasing historical trend away from women's importance in the birthing process. The shift to the authority of male physicians possibly explains Mary's determination to become a surgeon. Judith Mintz suggests that in Canada, for instance, "by the mid twentieth century, physician attended hospital births were normalized and midwifery care had become all but obsolete" (39). Thus, Oliveira's work, reappraising mid-wives, historically and contemporaneously, suggests that "midwifery is a vital part of the motherhood movement. Midwifery, … puts mothers at the centre of the family and birthing process" (Mintz 37-8); this is evident when Mary assists Dr. James Blevens, who in the midst of a difficult birth, requires her expertise.

An authority in birthing matters, Mary requests to be apprenticed as Dr. Blevens' medical student (Oliveira 9), but he refuses under the ruse of joining President Lincoln's war against the South: "I'm going to enlist. They'll need surgeons" (8). Dr. Blevens isn't the only man, however, to enlist. Mary's younger brother Christian and the husband of her twin sister, Jenny, Thomas Fall, with whom Mary is in love (75), also join. The war, as other women's historical novels suggest (such as Julia Gregson's *The Water Horse* (2004) about a Welsh woman who works as one of Florence Nightingale's nurses during the Crimean War or Katharine McMahon's *The Rose of Sebastopol* (2007), in which one of the protagonists nurses the wounded of the Crimean War, while the other finds and cares for her army surgeon fiancé), precipitates the work of women.

Mary's own involvement takes shape when she reads a news article from Miss Dorothea Dix, Female Superintendent of Army Nurses. Miss Dix calls on "ladies to serve in [the hospitals] in the tradition of Florence Nightingale in her recent successful work caring for British soldiers in the Crimea" (83). Renouncing the stigmatism and conflation of "camp follower as prostitute" (Sjoberg and Gentry 44), Miss Dix uses a maternal feminist argument espousing women's superior ability to care and nurture. Florence Nightingale, being the quintessential example, convinces the President to allow women to serve as nurses in the war.

Despite her mother's trepidations, Mary arrives in Washington City ready for service (Oliveira 89). Rejected by Miss Dix on the basis of her young age and her lack of formal references, Mary is, nevertheless, determined to work in the hospitals (100). She eventually secures herself a meager position working for Dr. Stipp in the Union Hotel Hospital (118). As for teaching her to become a surgeon, he, like all the other doctors, outright refuses (131). Oliveira, depicting the dire conditions Mary is working within, includes a Report from the Sanitary Commission (1861). It states: "there are no provisions for bathing, the water-closets and sinks are insufficient and defective, and there is no dead-house. The wards are many of them over-crowded, and destitute of arrangements for artificial ventilation" (128). Mary's wish for being more useful comes when Dr. Stipp, desperate for aid, must perform his first amputation (147).

Working from *The Practice of Surgery*, Dr. Stipp, with Mary by his reluctant side, performs the first of what will later become thousands of amputations (Oliveira 149). Stipp tells her, "Go home, Mary Sutter. You don't

need to be here. You don't need to witness any of this" (154). Mary, determined to contribute to the war effort, proves she is as capable and emotionally strong as a man. Mary muses:

> No one, not even Mr. Lincoln, could ask anything more of them. Albany would think well of her, too. The woman who had gone to war. And she would go on delivering babies. She would apply to medical schools and wait for their letters of rejection. Her life would be certain. Safe. And with time, the noise of the saw might diminish, and she would no longer hear boys crying for water, for their mothers, for release. (155)

Resolved to continue working to show how a feminist ethic of care "can expand the language of care as a public good beyond the maternalist paradigm" (Stadtman Tucker 201), Mary recognizes "she had left the world of women, and now all she had was tomorrow, and men, and their unreason" (Oliveira 156). The casualties of the war affect Mary most deeply when she learns that her brother Christian has died (183). Though her mother, Amelia, begs her daughter to return home, especially because Jenny is due to give birth–"*I am her mother, not her midwife, and I trust only you*" (183), Mary refuses.

Oliveira highlights the predicament women with careers face: as Mary's family situation worsens, her professional situation improves. Seeing first hand Mary's commitment to the war and saving men's lives, Dr. Stipp overlooks traditional gendered divisions of labour and trains her as a surgeon (Oliveira 193, 222). Yet, when a patient dear to Mary's heart dies, she decides she must return

home to assist with Jenny's birth. By the time she arrives, however, Mary sees on the bed "a man who had planted one knee between Jenny's splayed legs. He was gripping silver handles that disappeared into Jenny. *Forceps*. Jenny's mouth was gaping, her eyes staring unseeing at the ceiling" (242). Dismissing the surgeon, Mary decides to "open her pelvis. Unhinge it at the notch" (243). Oliveira suggests that Mary, like many contemporary women, believes that "misogyny is, and always has been, systemic in obstetrics" (Christensen 90). Envisioning a feminine-centric and more nuanced approach between midwifery and biomedical technology, she rejects the aggressive and tool dominated techniques of her male peers and, though she desires to be a surgeon, she works to find alternatives that are more beneficial to the mother and child.

The outcome is that the baby, a girl, lives, but Jenny, whose last word is "*Mother*" (Oliveira 285), dies. The emphasis on the maternal is clear and "Mother" can be read as referring to Jenny's newly earned social designation, her biological mother Amelia, and even a paradigm shift to a new definition for that word in women's lives. Unfortunately for Mary, Amelia cannot forgive her for not coming sooner and reprimands her behaviour. Grief-stricken, Mary returns to Washington and, with the army in short supply of men, decides to go to the field and work alongside Dr. Stipp as one of the few female nurses and the sole female surgeon at the front (289, 338).

In *Suffragette Girl*, Florrie Maltby also works on the front lines, but not before spending several years prior to WWI as a Suffragette in London. Paraphrasing Lukács (Dickinson 24), Diana Wallace believes that World War I,

in particular, made it concretely possible "for [*women*] to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see history as something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them" (*Woman's* 25). This sense of history, reflected in novels like Sandra Birdsell's *The Russländer* (2001), in which the Mennonite protagonist Katya narrates her family's immigration to Canada from tumultuous 1910 Russia, is also seen when Florrie ponders her sense of history from a gendered perspective. She wonders, "Begin? Where should she begin? The war? No, no before that. When had it all started? And then she remembered. It had all started the day she'd refused to marry Gervase" (15). Florrie's refusal to marry her best friend Gervase in Lincolnshire, England, 1912 not only defies her father's orders but also traditional expectations of women to become wives and mothers.

In reaction to her more pressing desire to go to London with Gervase' sister Isobel to join the Suffragette Movement (Dickinson 19), her father forebodingly tells her, "Go then. I wash my hands of you. I just hope your brother never disappoints me in this way" (45). Florrie challenges patriarchy both privately and publically when she joins the Suffragettes. Despite peaceful demonstrations, however, England's political system remains unaltered; no woman, not even property-owning women, are permitted to vote, resulting in the implementation of violence and more extreme measures (50). Rebelling against Florrie's father, her grandmother Augusta claims, "We can't change the past, Edgar dear. But we can change the future. And that's just what your lovely daughter is trying to do. She's trying to make the world a better – fairer – place

for women. You should be proud of her, not condemning her and trying to marry her off to the nearest available eligible bachelor" (73). Florrie's involvement in the Movement becomes public knowledge when, "caught slashing a painting in the National Gallery" (87), she is arrested and sentenced to prison for twenty-eight days (89).

In prison, Florrie's militant tactics continue and she goes on a hunger strike. Similar to Kate Walbert's *A Short History of Women* (2009), which describes a woman who starves herself to death for women's suffrage, after two weeks Florrie is force-fed by a tube inserted into her nostril (Dickinson 95). For the next two years, Florrie's and Isobel's activities within the Movement resume until, in 1914, both are arrested for "trying to hand in a petition to the King" (127). Upon release from prison, they are told about the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife being assassinated: "war looks inevitable now" (133). Dickinson writes, "Mrs Pankhurst feels that, if war does break out, we should suspend our activities for the duration of the war. England's need is greater than our own. We should devote ourselves to serving our country in a time of crisis (135). Florrie and Isobel never question the patriarchal nature of the war, nor if their feminist belief in equality is at odds with an involvement in war. As Wallace points out, during this time "the sense of sisterhood between women developed by the suffrage campaigners … is lost at this point, as women constructed themselves instead as 'sisters' to their soldier 'brothers'" (*Sisters and Rivals* 23). With the men in Isobel's and Florrie's families volunteering for the war, the women turn their feminist endeavours away from the vote towards working in the hospitals.

Isobel declares: “Gervase dear, you can’t possibly go, because I’m going to offer my services as a nurse. Lady Lee says they’ll be badly needed” (Dickinson 150). Determined to earn her qualifications, under the guidance of Sister Blackstock, Florrie is admitted as one of a handful of nurses to go to France. Gervase warns, “you’ll be in as much danger as the men in the trenches” (191). Much like Mary in Oliveira’s novel, Florrie is shocked by the devastating effects of the war upon the soldiers (195). Working under Dr. Ernst Hartmann, Florrie goes to the Front to set up a field hospital (214) and takes on the dangerous job of driving an ambulance for the wounded between stations (224). As Higonnet notes, “when a woman enters a field hospital, she enters an in-between zone, both of the war and not of it. Wartime nursing is an ambiguous domain, quasi-domestic and maternal but in the public service. It is a role that calls on women to care for men as well as to cure them. Should a nurse restore a man’s ability to fight and wound others, or should she as a nurse-writer try to cure society of the disease of war?” (“Cassandra’s Question” 156). Thus, Oliveira and Dickinson highlight a paradoxical situation for women in war: women’s activities, both on the battle front and the homefront, can lead to feminist opportunities and social change such as new professions, rights, and the “birth” of citizenship (Moura and Santos 588), but only at the expense of men and women risking and losing their lives.

Maternal Mortality and the Aunt as Mother

In *My Name is Mary Sutter* and *Suffragette Girl*, the two protagonists, Mary and Florrie, enact feminist mothering by becoming mothers via adoption. When Mary's brother Christian, who has been fighting in the American Civil War, dies (Oliveira 183) and her sister Jenny dies from complications during child birth, Amelia, Mary's mother, is left with only one daughter and granddaughter (248). Amelia initially blames Mary for Jenny's death (248) because she didn't return to perform as Jenny's midwife when summoned and Mary returns to the front broken-hearted. Jenny's death also causes Thomas, the father, to desert the army (265), but he is found by patrolling cavalry: "the judge ordered him returned to his regiment. By two o'clock that afternoon, Thomas Fall was back at Fort Marcy standing on a barrel in the middle of the fort near the bomb-proof for everyone to see" (266). As the war intensifies, Amelia, with Jenny's daughter Elizabeth in her care, re-examines her position, using maternal language, in regards to Mary:

> A hundred times over, she'd relived Elizabeth's birth. A choice changed here, a detail there. It was impossible not to despise herself. What mother chastises one twin for the death of another? Insatiable, a mother's need to save her children. Any means possible, including, it would seem, betrayal. Elizabeth would be dead now, but for Mary. (317)

While Amelia considers writing to Mary for forgiveness, Mary is mustering courage for performing another amputation. She "cut off thirty-five legs a day," but recognizes that the man on her table now is Thomas: "He opened his eyes,

fearing death, and instead saw Mary Sutter, aproned and bloodied staring at him as if he were dead" (342). For Mary, Thomas "was Christian and Jenny both, and Amelia too" (344) and saving his life is a chance for familial redemption. When Thomas develops a fever, Mary decides to leave the front and take him home (354). She explains that "[she's] already broken [her] mother's heart" (356) and is not prepared to do so again.

That Mary saves Thomas' life strengthens the maternal bond between the women in her family: "In their embrace, mother and daughter could feel all the members of their family gone now but for Elizabeth; they sank into one another, linked with regret and grace, as are all the reconciled" (Oliveira 358). Like so many women's historical novels, Oliveira focuses on a family torn apart by war and in the process of rebuilding.

The end of the novels skips ahead five years to 1867. Dr. Stipp is in New York standing outside of a house with an oval plaque which, "announced, *Doctor M. Sutter, Physician and Surgeon*" (Oliveira 359). Welcoming him into her home and business, Mary introduces him to her six year old niece for whom she acts as mother (360). The novel concludes with Mary, after the war, having attended Elizabeth Blackwell's School of Medicine (361), achieving her professional and feminist goals. It is only after this professional fulfillment that she is able to truly become a mother to Elizabeth and express a romantic interest for Dr. Stipp that began when they had worked together during the war (364).

Similarly, Dickinson's novel *Suffragette Girl* concentrates on several of the themes addressed in *My Name is Mary Sutter*. There is a war-time romance

between Florrie, a nurse, and Ernst, the doctor she works with at the Front and, similar to Mary who loses her brother Christian, Florrie loses her brother James during the First World War. James does not die fighting but by firing squad for attempting to desert (Dickinson 292). Unlike Thomas in *My Name is Mary Sutter*, who is shamed and sentenced back to his unit, James faces the ultimate penalty under the law. Thus, the character of James in *Suffragette Girl* is, ultimately, a combination of Christian and Thomas from Oliveira's work. Before he dies, James confides in Florrie on why he left his post. Centralizing the crossover between the domestic and war zone, Dickinson writes, "It's not like they're saying. I didn't desert my post. Someone was supposed to do my duty for me. I arranged it, but he let me down" (306). James explains that he left to find Colette, his pregnant girlfriend: her "family has disowned her. Thrown her out" (307). James claims "I *had* to see her. I had to try to take care of her" (307) and he makes Florrie promise to find Colette and take care of the baby. Reluctantly, following James' death (315), Florrie makes her way to Colette's village.

Florrie finds Colette in the midst of giving birth in an abandoned farmyard (Dickinson 323). Just as Jenny dies in childbirth in Oliveira's novel, Colette dies in Dickinson's work (326), but the child named Jacques survives. Both novels express concerns for confronting maternal mortality. These narratives show the danger women are put in when not given adequate treatment or healthcare and that this lack of care stems from cultural-political beliefs that women's lives are not as valuable as men's (Comerford 136). Resolute, Florrie brings Jacques up under the ruse that he is her own son (Dickinson 338-9) and

faces the social stigmatism of being sent home from the front disgraced, letting everyone believe the father is a deceased soldier. Her own father declares her a fallen woman and refuses to acknowledge Jacques as his legitimate heir (376).

Sarah Trimble suggests that an unmarried pregnant woman in this context is conceptualized "as a lawbreaker" (180). Quoting Nicole Pietsch, Trimble writes: "She is seen as mutinous, a rebel who knows the boundaries of female sexual propriety and maternity and actively violates them" (180). Florrie not only sacrifices her social standing but also refuses to feel the expected remorse, regret, or shame that social norms dictate. Dickinson states: "She'd promised James she would care for Colette and their child. But Colette was gone and only their son remained. But now he would be hers. Hers completely. It would be as if she really had given birth to him" (345). Though Florrie vows to be a mother to Jacques, in reality this places restrictions upon her opportunities, such as returning to the front (Dickinson 370), which she resents. When the war ends and women over the age of thirty gain the right to vote in 1918 (379), Florrie's restlessness is clear; "being a –a *mother* isn't enough" (383) and she transgresses the norms of institutional motherhood by leaving Jacques in her family's care while travelling to London for weeks at a time (381).

Jacques' health, however, symbolizes Florrie's failure as a mother according to patriarchal culture; she has rejected normative mothering and her punishment is that Jacques is ill. Gervase declares, "He needs his *mother*. Florrie, if he were fit and well and busy – robust would be the word – with a young boy's activities, it would be different. … but he's not. He's sickly. He

needs to be seen by a doctor and he needs you with him" (Dickinson 406). Rather than blame unrealistic or stifling patriarchal definitions of the "good mother," Florrie, instead, consents: "Gervase was right. She had neglected James' son" (407). Thus, the novel picks up from its opening in 1932 with Florrie and Jacques on route to Davos, Switzerland where Dr. Ernst Hartmann runs a sanatorium for patients with tuberculosis.

During his treatment, Florrie finally tells Jacques the truth about how his parents died (Dickinson 470). For Jacques, Florrie's sacrifices outweigh any anger he feels upon being deceived all these years. After Jacques receives a clean bill of health (463), Florrie, restored to a position of respectable mother, gains the courage to tell her parents and grandmother, also, the truth about Jacques not being her biological son (480). The novel concludes with Florrie, like Mary, finding happiness as a mother and aunt to her deceased sibling's child and with a man who respects her feminist principles. In a reverse of the opening, when Florrie rejects Gervase's marriage proposal, Florrie asks Gervase for his hand in marriage (485).

Both Oliveira and Dickinson suggest that marriages whose purpose "is not reproduction or the acquisition of property but the realization of flesh, spirit and History, in peace, felicity and fecundity" (Irigaray, *I Love to You* 146) celebrate a new possibility between the sexes. Luce Irigaray argues that "a real democracy must take as its basis, today, a just relationship between man and woman" (*Democracy Begin* 118). This feminist thinking can lead to a renewed civility between the sexes: "through a more emotional and physical relationship,

it could escape the exploitation of the other, male or female, avoid reducing them to being an object at one's disposal or a means of production, whether of manpower or of children" (107). Oliveira and Dickinson describe Florrie and Mary as unconventional aunts/mothers, thereby constructing a "shared maternal genealogy of siblings" (Wallace, *Sisters and Rivals* , 67). This kind of feminist mothering, predicated on romance, mutual love, respect, and civility, embodies a transnational feminist project committed to a democratic sense of love.

Searching for Maternal Reconciliation

While working for the war cause is unquestioned by the protagonists of Oliveira's and Dickinson's novels, by contrast, Kogawa's *Obasan*, Zelitch's *Louisa*, and Young's *My Enemy's Cradle* all concentrate on women who are considered the enemy and are struggling to survive during World War II. Supporting a revaluation of war novels from a gendered perspective, Paula J. Draper believes that "women's capacity to bear children and become mothers [makes] their memories and experience of survival gendered in particular ways" (405). Survivor narratives are "concerned with historical trauma and the articulation of the long-term psychological – individual and collective – effects of a historical displacement on the processes of identity formation" (Sywenky 166). In Kogawa's *Obasan*, Naomi is a third generation Canadian from Japanese descents who experiences the effects of racist nationalism when Japan joins Germany in its war effort.

The novel opens in 1972 in Alberta, Canada with Naomi as an adult and a war survivor, reflecting on her life. She pieces together the lives of her family both within Canada during the time of the war and the lives of her maternal family in Japan. Meredith Shoenut writes: "Naomi's purpose becomes to explore this political language, to question and deconstruct official versions of Canadian history, and to analyze Canada's past as though it were fiction" (481). Essential to rethinking this past is Naomi's connection to her mother. Elleke Boehmer categorizes searches like Naomi's as "the matriarchal yearnings of dispossessed women seeking their own place in nations and in history" ("Stories of Women" 3). Naomi's mother leaves for Japan during the war, but mysteriously never returns (Kogawa 204). When her uncle dies in 1972, Naomi sorts through her family's belongings while simultaneously sorting through her memories.

The past, still very much in Naomi's present, lends support to Draper's theory about the challenges in interpreting the memories of survivors of traumatic events. She writes: "Understanding history then becomes not only learning 'what really happened' but also gaining a sense of how past events continue to influence and shape the lives of individuals and groups who were in the midst of those events" (Draper 399). Aunt Emily, an active member in calling for redress by the Canadian government, has supplied Naomi with important documents. These documents acknowledge the rights of Canadians with Japanese descent and publicize the Canadian government's heinous actions during and after the war. Kogawa writes:

> Our short harsh history. Beside each date were the ugly facts of the treatment given to Japanese Canadians. 'Seizure and government sale of fishing boats. Suspension of fishing licences. Relocation camps. Liquidation of property. Letter to General MacArthur. Bill 15. Deportation. Revocation of nationality.' Whereever the words 'Japanese race' appeared, Aunt Emily had crossed them out and written 'Canadian citizen.' (34)

Kogawa, like Zelitch and Young, challenges the meaning of nationality and who constitutes a Canadian citizen as well as the geography of the Second World War–it is not being fought solely on European soil but Canadian lands.

Naomi and her family must try to survive this war at home. Because Canada is at war with Germany and Japan, Canadian citizens and residents with Japanese origins are persecuted and expelled from British Columbia in 1941. Kogawa asks: "Why in a time of war with Germany and Japan would our government seize the property and homes of Canadian-born Canadians but not the homes of German-born Germans?" she asked angrily. 'Racism,' she answered herself. 'The Nazis are everywhere'" (40). Naomi's family in Vancouver lose their property and are forced into work camps (Kogawa 86-118). Eventually, the family is separated and Naomi is shipped to Canada's interior, first Slocan B.C. and then Granton, Alberta with her brother, uncle, and aunt or *obasan*, from whom the novel's title is attributed. The novel, thus, tackles two coinciding narratives: Naomi and her family enduring threats of being sent to Japan, forced labour, racism, poverty, and loss within Canada and reclaiming the

life of her mother and grandmother who returned to Japan at the beginning of the war in order to look after her great-grandmother (71).

It is this latter story that is most relevant for understanding the role of the maternal in the woman's historical war novel. Sorting through her family's letters, Naomi sees a rare photograph of herself clinging shyly to her mother's leg on a street in Vancouver (Kogawa 50). Emphasizing the maternal bond, Naomi reflects, "where she is rooted, I am rooted" (69). Shoenut argues that "[t]he presence of her mother represents the cultural values of a 'mother country': unfaltering strength, protection, rootedness, everything that is pure and right with the world, and, more specifically, nature" (485). The novel is, thus, a means for Naomi to write back to hegemonic history through learning her mother's story; it is a way for reconnecting with the mother she has lost and for finding her own identity/autonomy as a survivor.

Eva Karpinkski, drawing on Shoshana Felman's reading of Albert Camus' novel *The Plague*, believes that *Obasan* is a "'narrative as testimony': a mode of writing capable of mediating the relationship between narrative and history, and which makes it possible 'not merely to record, but to rethink and, in the act of its rethinking, in effect transform history by bearing literary witness' to trauma" (47). Supporting this viewpoint, Shoenut writes:

> Vocalized trauma does not distort the facts … 'Narrative memory' … 'is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more

> control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self' (489).

Naomi's trauma, largely due to the loss of her mother, entails that she even imagines herself as her mother: "with my eyes averted, I am my mother pulling the drawer open to look for the black darning knob, or a spool of thread, or scissors" (Kogawa 72). The imagery of the thread is a meaningful way for Kogawa to express the link between the daughter and mother and one that, like the umbilical cord, is cut or broken when the protagonists are separated.

Though Aunt Emily declares that her mother and grandmother must be dead (Kogawa 232), Naomi discovers they did indeed survive the war. In a sense, her mother has betrayed her by feigning death. Naomi also reads a letter written to her grandmother informing her that her application to return to Canada has been rejected because Japanese nationals are not permitted to emigrate to Canada. The other letter explains that her mother, who is Canadian-born, is permitted to re-enter Canada but the Japanese child she hopes to bring with her will be refused (233). Naomi questions why her mother never wrote to the family or tried to make contact. She reflects on the year 1954, when Aunt Emily (living in Toronto for twelve years) comes to visit the family, which has recently moved off of the beet-farm where they worked to their own house in Granton (229). Hearing Aunt Emily whisper words about her mother, she sees her tie the letters in a folder. Naomi, now in 1972, after the death of her uncle, holds them for the first time (242).

She reads letters written by Grandmother Kato from Japan (Kogawa 255), including one from Nagasaki in 1949. In the letter, her grandmother describes the horrors of the atomic bombs on the city, how "men, women, in many cases indistinguishable by sex, hairless, half-clothed, hobbled past. Skin hung from their bodies like tattered rags" (261). Just as Naomi is separated from her mother, so too does her grandmother describe being separated from her daughter during the bombs. Her search for her daughter, Naomi's mother, continues until one evening she sees a disfigured woman:

> Her nose and one cheek were almost gone. Great wounds and pustules covered her entire face and body. She was completely bald. She sat in a cloud of flies and maggots wiggled among her wounds. As Grandma watched her, the woman gave her a vacant gaze, then let out a cry. It was my mother. (263)

Di Brandt writes that "it is adult male violence, again, multiplied a billionfold in the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki" (115), which Karpinski argues "is responsible for Naomi's mother's disfigurement and silence" (58). Reading *Obasan* in relation to other women's war novels such as *Suffragette Girl*, *Landgirls*, or *My Name is Mary Sutter*, can we really believe only male violence is responsible for the atrocities committed against the Japanese? Is it not more accurate to suggest that it is patriarchal violence/nationalism in which women, as well as men, participate and even benefit from (rights, vote, materialistic gain, territory, etc.) that powers the war between the Allies and Japan and causes Naomi, like many other daughters, to lose her mother?

Naomi learns her mother, though denied the right to come initially, has effectively chosen not to return to Canada. Naomi comments, “Silent Mother, you do not speak or write. You do not reach through the night to enter morning, but remain in the voicelessness. From the extremity of much dying, the only sound that reaches me now is the sigh of your remembered breath, a wordless word. How shall I attend that speech, Mother, how shall I trace that wave?” (Kogawa 265). Both Irigaray and Julie McGonegal suggest that the revolutionary potential of silence as an act of feminist mothering. Irigaray argues that “this silence is space-time offered to you with no a priori, no established truth or ritual” (*ILY*, 117). To be truly listening to another and to let another speak on their own terms without presuppositions requires silence (Irigaray, *I Love You*, 118). For McGonegal, silence intimates reconciliation and forgiveness; we “enter the realm of possibility by attending silently to her mother’s version rather than dogmatically imposing her own interpretation. … practising attentive silence is how Naomi makes possible the process of rebirth and recovery from (maternal) loss” (McGonegal 121). At the same time, Naomi’s mother symbolizes the missing voices within Canada’s war history.

Karpinski aptly notes that readers cannot ignore “the presence of racism as a trauma pervading the whole text, including Naomi’s pre- and post-war experiences” (55). The novel competes for a voice in Canada’s history, a history which has been silenced on both the national and personal level (after all Naomi’s mother prefers silence as a means of protecting her children) and is expressed in the novel through Kogawa’s play with women’s voices: Aunt

Emily's scathing speech, Obasan's few words, Naomi's mother's silence, and Naomi's narrative. McGonegal argues that "this text alternately displaces and fulfills the promise of reconciliation: that is, it actualizes the possibility of maternal reconciliation but defers the possibility of national reconciliation … reconciliation is contingent on genuine openness to the position of the other, on what Kogawa might refer to as 'mutual recognition' or 'mutual vulnerability'" (120). Naomi's narrative, bearing witness to Canada's history, "enables us to see that the nation-building project is erected on the bodies of racialized and gendered 'others'" (Karpinski 47). The certainty of Naomi's mother's death is that her name is included on an undated and geographically indeterminate plaque for the dead, whereby a Canadian maple tree, ironically not a Japanese maple, grows (Kogawa 265).

Hearing her mother's story, Naomi reimagines the life of her "martyr mother" (Kogawa 265), a Christ-like figure, with whom she feels connected and present, despite the distances of time and space: "Young Mother at Nagasaki, am I not also there?" (266). Knowing her mother is dead, Naomi's closure signals the end of her narrative. Kogawa, however, includes an excerpt in support of the fundamental rights of Japanese Canadians from "the Memorandum sent by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and the Senate of Canada, April 1946" (272). Kogawa's novel, thus, raises difficult questions about the nature of nationalism and, while the family *is* Canadian, this sense of Canadian nationalism is not without its own problems.

The novel's "repeated appeal to the myth of Canadian civility, its use of linear narrative, and its strong historicizing gesture" means that problematically it is "fatefully entrenched within the nation-state" (Zacharias 14). A strengthening of the notion of national identity is a means for separating one's self and peoples from another, much like Canadians who justified their actions against Japanese Canadians. As Edward Said warns, "nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile … All nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement" (*Reflections on Exile* 176). Rather than read Kogawa's novel as a straightforward narrative of sympathy and justified anger at the treatment of Japanese Canadians during WWII, I argue that it is a transnational feminist critique of uncritical and patriarchal nationalism. The work highlights the dilemma Naomi's maternal family faces when they return to the mother-country to care for a relative.The unfortunate reality is that Japan is Canada's enemy and both Canadian Japanese and the Japanese will face trauma and hardship as long as national and racial identity continues to be the fundamental basis of war.

Mothers on Enemy Soil

In Young's novel *My Enemy's Cradle*, which focuses on Sarah, a Holocaust survivor, national identity and the loss of a mother converge (as in many women's historical novels, such as *Sarah's Key* (2008) by Tatiana de Rosnay). Cyrla, the protagonist, is a Polish Jew sent, in 1941, to live with relatives in

Holland in order to avoid Nazis persecution. Her father tells her, "go to your mother's world. Learn to fit inside her life, and you will find how she fits in yours" (Young 7). With the Germans increasingly mandating restrictions on the lives of Jews in occupied Holland (1), the work, like Kogawa's novel, focuses on a maternal separation. Not only is Cyrla's Dutch mother dead, but Cyrla too will face the possibility of being separated from her own child.

All of this arises when Cyrla's cousin Anneke becomes pregnant by a German soldier named Karl. The family unravels in a parallel fashion to the political order (Young 22). The reader learns Karl has another fiancée in Hamburg and is "being sent back to Germany" (22-23). With increasing German checkpoints, Cyrla, a half-Jew (though her identity is masked by her blonde hair), is, nonetheless, at risk: "the world was cracking in two, and I was falling into the void" (26). Cyrla's uncle, learning that his daughter is pregnant, sends the family into panic, until he declares, "I have found a solution … A maternity home" (42). Ordered by her father into a historical Lebensborn facility, Anneke is told the Germans will take her in until the child is born and, after the birth, the baby will be adopted by a German family (142).

Cyrla's Jewish activist friend and lover Isaak clarifies,

> Those are dark cradles. '*Have one baby for the Fürer'* is the slogan. All German women, whether they're married or not, are expected to have children. Every place they take over, they will want to fill with their own. And they'll always want troops. … Babies aren't

> babies to the Nazis, Cyrla. They're resources. And now they're taking them from occupied countries'. (50)

Taking control over women's bodies through the maternal is, thus, a means for furthering Germany's territorial gains.

When Anneke, however, performs an abortion at home using a knitting needle (Young 172), she disrupts and challenges Nazi power by refusing to give birth to a German child. Anneke's death also gives Cyrla the chance to survive by taking her identity (66). The aunt, as in *My Name is Mary Sutter*, *Suffragette Girl*, and *Obasan*, plays an important maternal role and, supporting the decision, risks her own life. She claims, "I've lost one child. I will not lose another" (68). Though Cyrla miraculously becomes pregnant by the time the German soldiers come to collect her for the Lebensborn home, it is unclear if the father is Isaak or a German *Obershütze* who rapes her (121). Cockburn argues that rape by the German forces during WWII was extensively practiced "on both Western and Eastern fronts" (192) and she attempts to "bring to the issue of sexual violence in war a language" (189) that expresses how "war rape is characteristically collective, and being a soldier very much involves identification and 'belonging.' Rape in war, like war itself, is nothing if not social" (189). The practice of rape further connects with bodily control over women during times of war.

A twist in the novel is that Cyrla is not entering a home in Nijmegen, Holland, but one in Steinhöring, outside of Munich (Young 128). Trapped in the country of her enemy, Cyrla describes a particularly terrible visit by Heinrich Himmler. Himmler tells the women, using patriarchal nationalistic rhetoric,

“You carry within you our nation’s greatest wealth Germany’s future strength … Every war involves a tremendous letting of blood. It is the highest duty of German women and girls of good blood to become mothers, inside or outside the boundaries of marriage” (159-60). He likens the soon-to-be mothers to brave soldiers who also risk their lives and blood. This suggests sacrifices for the war effort by both sexes on both the battlefield and homefront are necessary.

After Himmler’s visit, Cyrla’s time passes rather uneventfully until the home makes contact with Karl, the father named in Anneke’s paperwork (Young 208). For Cyrla, Karl symbolizes everything she hates about the Germans; he is a soldier, like the one who raped her, and she holds him responsible for abandoning and causing her pregnant cousin’s death. Karl, however, seems genuinely ignorant of Anneke’s fate until Cyrla tells him about how her uncle arranged for Anneke to come here (226): “You killed her, Karl. You murdered her. You broke her heart and left her alone, so she tried to carve your baby from her body and she bled to death. That’s how you murdered her” (227). For several weeks Karl seeks Cyrla’s forgiveness and friendship until he finally tells her, “Listen to me. I didn’t walk out on Anneke. I swear to you I didn’t know she was going to have a baby.… I told her I was leaving for Germany and that I wanted to end things because I wasn’t in love with her” (267). Though Cyrla still holds Karl responsible for Anneke’s death, she lets him help in planning her escape (269). Karl even offers to marry Cyrla (274) or adopt the child straight after the birth so that Cyrla can use Anneke’s papers to get back to Holland.

Cyrla, however, knowing the pain of being sent away by family members believing they are acting in her best interest, refuses to give birth to her son on German soil (Young 270). She cannot face betraying her Jewish peoples: “The German girls often married their boyfriends, of course, but I hadn’t heard of any girls from other countries doing it. It was one thing to sleep with the enemy. Quite another to marry him and move to the Fatherland” (277). Refusing to marry Karl, even after learning his story prior to being conscripted by the Germans, she does slowly begin to trust and care for him (303-4, 339). As German persecution against the Jews intensifies, Cyrla’s life as well as that of her unborn Jewish child’s become increasingly endangered. Her identity is finally compromised after a small velvet bag containing some of her belongings is stolen (341). Nine months pregnant, Cyrla phones Karl knowing she must flee (342) and he drives her to the Dutch border.

Young writes:

> They were on him. I lay in the muddy ditch and watched as two cars and a jeep skidded to circle him. Soldiers ran from each, shouting, guns and lights drawn. Karl stood calmly at the center of the chaos. He held his arms out straight, giving his wrists up to them. For the briefest second as they bound his hands behind him, in the arcing beam of a flashlight, I thought I saw the faint curve of a smile on his lips. Then they dragged him away. (354)

The novel concludes in 1947 with Cyrla and her daughter Anneke standing on the doorstep of Karl’s sister’s house (Young 355). Cyrla explains how she

managed to make it to England with the aid of papers Isaak prepared for her prior to his death (358) and, from Erika, she learns that Karl is alive, though the Nazis broke his hands and imprisoned him in a work camp for the remainder of the war (357). Reuniting with Karl in an unnamed place after departing from Hamburg, Cyrla remarks, "We have been apart so long! People can be lost to each other in so many ways … The brush drops from his hand. And in his eyes I see my home" (360). Young's novel, like Kogawa's, ends by invoking the metaphor of space and imagination premised on forgiveness and reconciliation. Cyrla, a half-Jewish woman who faces Nazi persecution during the war, finds her home unexpectedly and controversially within the love of a former German soldier.

Mother and Daughter-in-Law: Identities in Crisis

Like Young's novel *My Enemy's Cradle*, *Louisa* by Zelitch tackles Jewish identity in terms of space and a sense of home; examining the complexity of national, religious, familial and racial identity, Zelitch opens with the narrator, a Jewish Hungarian woman named Nora and her German daughter-in-law, Louisa, leaving Hungary after the war has ended and arriving at a refugee camp in Israel, 1949. Zelitch suggests that prior to 1949 the nation of Israel did not formally exist, evident when Louisa claims, "'But you're an Israelite,' she cried. I stroked her hair and whispered, 'Shh, shh. There's no such place'" (142). That the land is to be recognized as a nation, however, is foremost in the mind of many Jews in this context. During the war, Nora's cousin, Bela argues, "What do you want us

to do? Get into our Jewish airplanes and bomb Berlin? We don't have Jewish airplanes. We don't have an army. We don't have a state. And that's why we're here–not to save Jews but to build a state where we can be Jews" (Zelitch 287). Jewish identity is thus at the core of the novel, not only in the sense that Nora is declared an enemy of Germany but also because Louisa as a German is considered the enemy in Israel (6).

Faced with outrage from the other refugees ("Poles, Slovaks, Romanians, Greeks, even the British at Cyprus" (Zelitch 5)), Nora explains that similar to Karl in Young's novel, Louisa has saved her life: "I'd lost my parents and my husband and my son. I had only Louisa. I owe her my life. It was Louisa who had kept me hidden during the German occupation" (4). She confesses "for this was Louisa's story from the start; she was its heroine. It was Louisa who threw herself into forbidden love, who saved my life, and who saved my cousin's life, I suspect" (357).

In Israel, Rabbi Shmuel Needleman asks Louisa why has she followed her mother-in-law (Zelitch 41), to which Louisa replies, "Because I love her" (41). Louisa, like Naomi in *Obasan* and Cyrla in *My Enemy's Cradle*, loses her biological mother (she is disowned by her parents), but she effectively adopts her mother-in-law as her new mother. She is likened to the biblical protagonist Ruth: "the daughter of a cursed nation, far from home, clinging to her mother-in-law and taking on her people and her God" (42). Committed to staying in Israel, Louisa desires to become a Jew and to speak Hebrew (43), a language neither she nor Nora speaks (128).

In fact, German is the common language between Nora and Louisa and is Nora's preferred language when she writes her cousin Bela (Zelitch 6), a Zionist, who has been living in a commune in the area since 1925 (6) and to whom Nora intends to locate. The polyphonic narrative fuses several languages (English, Yiddish, German, Hungarian, Arabic) to highlight the impact of the Holocaust upon diverse cultures–and unfolds when Nora cannot find the telegram she has been keeping in her sock, which has Bela's new address (9); apparently, the old kibbutz he founded is no longer on any lists (127).

Without Bela's address or contact, Nora has no definitive plan for resettlement (Zelitch 19), which highlights the refugee's permanent stasis in dislocation. In the process of Nora searching for her cousin, the novel switches between her past reflections and her present situation with Louisa in the camp. The reader learns that Nora grew up in Kisbarnahely but was forced to move to Budapest when her father was murdered in 1919 during the revolutions of the Romanians against Hungarian communists and Jews (76). The Hungarians "were shot, hanged, or exiled" (76). While living and working in Budapest, Nora meets her husband Janos (92), who, after marrying, confesses, "I'm a Communist. My friends are Communists" (103). With Janos working secretly in Russia and, essentially, an absentee husband and father, Nora lives in Budapest with her son Gabor, an amateur composer, who, one day in 1943, meets Louisa, a German singer (133).

Partly for German protection (Zelitch 256), Gabor reluctantly marries the pregnant Louisa (228) (though she later miscarries (259-60), symbolizing that a

Germany-Hungary union will never come to fruition). However, a victim of the war (267, 314), "in March of 1944, Gabor died. He died along with many young men pulled from trams or found in train stations or airports in the days after the Germans invaded Budapest" (314). After Gabor's death, Nora is forced to live in a Yellow Star House (314) and, realizing her imminent danger, hides in Louisa's cellar until the end of the war (56). Following the war's ending, Zelitch describes Nora's brief reunion with Janos, who also survived the war, but then her decision to leave him in order to locate her cousin in Israel (379). As already noted, Nora cannot initially find Bela and it is only towards the end of the novel that the reader learns Louisa, who has stolen the telegram, is secretly meeting with Bela, now known as Jonah (311).

The novel, thus, follows closely the biblical tale of Ruth, a Moabite woman and enemy of Israel who transforms herself and becomes a direct ancestor of David, King of Israel, "from whose line will come the Messiah, may it be in our lifetime" (Zelitch 216). Louisa forsakes her German family and nation and, by doing so, is forgiven for her "German" sins. Accepted as a convert to Judaism, she marries Jonah, adopts the new name Leah, and gives birth to a girl (381, 382). Resonating with novels like Walker's *The Color Purple* and those discussed here, Zelitch suggests identity is fluid: being a mother or being Jewish is not necessarily dependent on one's blood or birth, but on one's state of being, one's choice of self, and the love one has for others. Zelitch shows this transformation through Louisa, a German girl living in Hungary during the war

who casts off her former identity in order to join her Jewish mother-in-law in Israel to live as a Jew.

The War at Home

Juxtaposed with the life of a foreign woman on enemy soil, Huth's novel *Land Girls*, like Oliveira's *My Name is Mary Sutter* and Dickinson's *Suffragette Girl*, focuses on and gives credence to the war effort of women, in this case three young patriotic British Land Girls in World War II named Prue, Stella, and Agatha. Literary descendants of Mary Sutter and Florrie Maltby, with a shortage of men to do the farming, women during WWII took up men's positions. This storyline is similar to such works as *This Time for Keeps* (2009) by Dee Williams, which is about a young London woman who joins the Land Army after her parents are killed in an air raid and Julia Stoneham's *Muddy Boots and Silk Stockings* (2008), in which Alice Todd, a young single mother, is tasked with looking after several Land Girls, who, prior to their arrival at Hallows Farm in 1941, are strangers. Huth's work focuses on the arrival of three lands girls to the Lawrences. The Lawrences, and their son Joe, an asthmatic denied a chance to fight (Huth 171), though uncomfortable with undermining gendered labour on their Dorset farm, out of necessity call upon the Land Army plan (36, 137).

Huth reads the running of the farm as an essential part of the war effort, equal to the combat, and she blurs the line between civilian and soldier: "Think about what you are doing. Someone's got to organize the massive job of feeding the country. Hallows Farm is making the sort of contribution you shouldn't

undervalue" (Huth 172). She suggests that, just as not all men fought on the battlefield, not all women (like Mary and Florrie) remained on the homefront. The homefront and battlefield were sites occupied by both sexes.

Huth uses the traditional domestic work of women like Mrs. Lawrence as a mirror for men's battle activities. Higonnet identifies this technique in Mary Borden's *Forbidden Zone* (1929) in which she domesticates war by writing "'just as you send your clothes to the laundry and mend them when they come back, so we send our men to the trenches and mend them when they come back again'" ("Cassandra's Question" 156). Huth, recuperating this technique, "translates the whole machinery of war into the language of the housewife" (156) and upholds the traditional role of women in the domestic sphere as not only equal to women entering into fields previously held by men but also the fighting of men on the battlefield. For instance, Mrs Lawrence is admired and respected by all of the girls. Ag comments:

> This is what it must be like every day for Mrs Lawrence, she thought: sudden silence, the looming of domestic plans, lists of tasks to be accomplished by nightfall. There was no freedom from the discipline of deadlines: food must be on the table by midday, no matter how much ironing. The pile of socks to be darned must be kept under control; the grading of eggs, in the stone-chill of the scullery, was necessary before sending them off twice a week. For the first time, Ag began to reflect on the life of a housewife, doubly hard if you were married to a farmer. (Huth 208)

Feminist change, however, problematically is propagated by the war.

None of the girls desire to take up the role of Mrs Lawrence in their imagined future lives. Mrs Lawrence, thus embodies a kind of maternal feminism which no longer resonates with the lives of young British women. Huth writes:

> None of the land girls could remember a time when, if they came upon Mrs. Lawrence by chance, she would not be engaged in some form of work. She never grumbled about her endless duties. In fact, disparate jobs that occupied her, both indoors and out, from early morning till late at night, seemed to give her pleasure. She was an example of a married woman totally preoccupied by the narrow confines of her life, and happy with them. This gave the girls food for thought. Prue, whose respect for Mrs Lawrence was infinite, was not for one moment deflected by her example: to swap such a life for her own dream of servants and cocktails did not occur to her. Ag has been romantically tempted by the thought of ironing Desmond’s future shirts (all that white linen, so Lawrentian). But of late she had begun to think about becoming a barrister: she would be willing to undertake household duties, but they would have to be arranged around a post-war life at the Bar. Stella, too, was inspired by the living energy Mrs Lawrence put into every loaf and pot of home-made jam: something her own mother, a useless cook, had never instilled into her. But, like Ag, she was determined to go out

> to work when she and Philip married. Life would certainly not consist entirely of looking after his needs. Perhaps, she thought, when the war was over, a new and enlightened breed of women would feel much the same. (290)

Changes in British values, evident in gender expectations, thus, lead to increasing questions as to whether women can adequately fill the roles once held by men.

Comments throughout the novel by the farm-help Ratty express the inevitability of new opportunities for women, including signing up for the Land Army. Expected to help out with all of the chores, the girls from very different backgrounds (Prue, a hair -dresser from Manchester, Stella, a wealthy girl in love with a naval officer, and Ag, a Cambridge graduate) adapt to working long hard hours often endured only by romantic fantasy and desires (both real and imagined i.e., a local RAF dance).

While engaged in their farm work there is the initial sense of protection and shelter from the actual war. Ag notes, “we’re lucky here. Hardly aware of it” (Huth 78) and for Stella, “in Dorset, the only evidence of war was the sight of women working in the fields. She caught a glimpse of a row of land girls bent over hoes in a mangold field, and smiled” (187). The proximity of the war, however, intensifies as the novel progresses, again suggesting a rigid demarcation between war and peace, homefront and battlefront, is false.

After a few weeks, an early siren signalling a raid warning (Huth 103) is juxtaposed with the equally disappointing notice that Prue reads in the chemist’s

shop: “*Sorry, no lipsticks or rouges*” (110). By the end of the novel, however, the reality of war hits home: Prue learns that her pilot boyfriend Barry has been killed in action (282) and German bombs begin falling in the English countryside (329, 336, 357). Huth writes that “a new feeling of unease, which even the hardest physical work could not quite obscure, affected everyone at Hallows Farm” (336) and:

> By harvest-time, the customary peace at Hallows Farm was disturbed more frequently by passing planes: sometimes a Spitfire, sometimes the dreaded shape of the Luftwaffe monsters. Since the occasion of the incendiary bombs, the old, foolish sense of security in remote country was never quite recaptured. Living in anticipation of the next disaster became part of daily life. (357)

Experiencing the threat of danger and hearing on the radio that the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbour (210), Ag begins to doubt whether her work on the farm is, after all, equal to the work of those men and women on the front lines.

> She tried to imagine the distant carnage, the destruction, the horror, the terrible suffering and pointless loss of life. She felt impotent, anger, fear. This was followed by feelings of equally impotent guilt at her own lot, which was comparatively safe … a place where the war scarcely touched them, but there was also never a day when she did not wonder if she should not volunteer for some less protected field of action. Should she not join the Red Cross, or drive ambulances in the Blitz, rather than milk cows and feed on Mrs

> Lawrence's secure stews. Should her courage not be tested? And yet, while the men were fighting, girls to work on the land were vital: she had chosen the job, she loved it. (210)

Huth's novel revisits the Second World War for the purpose of discussing an over-looked and undervalued event: women excelling in previously male dominant fields such as in the factory and on the farm. She suggests that, though women did not often engage in combat, their work was instrumental to the success of the Allied Forces. Huth values not only Mrs. Lawrence's traditional work, but expresses hope in imagining new opportunities for women as expressed by three British Landgirls. The novel shows how times of war can create and lead to flexible social-political constructions of gender and mothering.

Conclusions

There is such a thing as a woman's war novel. Women's historical novels attest to the complexity of this subject matter and challenge masculinist assumptions about authentic war writing. Ranging typically from the Civil War to WWII, women are depicted on both the homefront and battlefront, essentially blurring a neat division between them. Taking up a variety of roles from nurse, surgeon, factory worker, and farmer for the war cause, we also see women enduring the hardships of war and struggling to stay alive. Novels like *Obasan*, *Louisa*, and *My Enemy's Cradle*, by focusing on the maternal, exemplify not only how families can become dislocated, separated and lost to one another during wartimes but also their ability to endure and survive. *My Name is Mary Sutter*,

Suffragette Girl, and *Landgirls*, by contrast, show that women's war efforts can lead to unprecedented opportunities, such as entering new professions and gaining citizenship. The femino-centric topics of ethic of care theory, maternal mortality and the aunt, maternal reconciliation, mothers as foreign enemies, and the homefront create a fluid maternal genealogy of war. In all of these feminist works, the nation and national identity is put either implicitly or explicitly into question. A transnational maternal genealogy seeks a beyond the nation and criticizes national boundaries for separating women, particularly during patriarchal wartimes. Thus, transnational feminist works seek postwar solidarity, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

CHAPTER TEN

LOVE FOR/AGAINST ART: REBIRTHING OUR FOREMOTHERS

Only that which has no history is definable
– Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

This final chapter surveys transnational novels on women artists. Following in the feminist footsteps of Anna Banti's pioneering novel *Artemisia* (1947), post 1970s novels, in an attempt to create a female artistic tradition that has been forgotten, overlooked, ignored, and rejected, have been avidly recuperating and rebirthing the lives of historical women artists. While some novels take the approach of focusing on the hidden life of a male artist's wife or mistress–such as Tracy Chevalier's *Girl With a Pearl Earring* (1999), Sylvie Matton's *Rembrandt's Whore* (2003), Agnes Selby's *Constanze, Mozart's Beloved* and Juliet Waldron's *Mozart's Wife* (2001), the last two of which both write the life of Konstanze, the wife of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the women remain defined by their relation to men of genius. I call women's art novels those that centralize and celebrate the woman artist; three examples include Sarah Bayliss's *Utrillo's Mother* (1987), which narrates the life of Suzanne Valadon, a nineteenth century Parisian painter whose success was overshadowed by her son Maurice Utrillo, *The Tale of Murasaki* (2000) by Liza Dalby is a fictional biography on Murasaki Shikibu, the eleventh century writer of the classic novel *The Tale of Genji*, and Donna Russo Morin's protagonist in *The Secret of the Glass* (2010) is a young Venetian woman secretly learning the art of

glassmaking, which is forbidden to women. For simplicity, the umbrella term "artist" signifies women in a wide range of arts from dance, poetry, and theater to music, opera, and art.

Establishing an artistic-literary-historical genealogy serves to displace and disrupt a patriarchal hold on the art-world that, to this day, poses a challenge for women artists. Transnationally, organized feminist activism against the art world emerged in tandem with a proliferation of women's art in the 1970s (Broude, Garrard, Westen, Reilly, Parker, Pollock). The purpose was:

> Undermining the foundations of art institutions and renowned art publications … feminism [also] established ties between women, and connected female artists with female art historians and art critics. What had begun as loose, informal networks now consolidated in alternative, more strategic, and more cohesive, forms of collaboration. (Westen 9)

Following essays like Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists" (1972), activist groups, such as the 'Guerilla Girls' since their inception in 1985, "began putting up illegal posters displaying razor-sharp one-liners and using playful forms of protest to signal skewed gender and race relations in the art world" (Westen 9). In addition, Susan McClary, Catherine Clément, and Wendy Heller have been pioneering feminist theorists of musicology and opera and Karen Nicole Barbour and Ann Daly have provided insightful feminist criticism on dance.

The woman's historical novel questions the meaning of art from a gendered perspective. In many of these works, the woman artist is faced with choosing between creation in terms of her art or by having a family and children. For example, in Margaret Forster's *Keeping the World Away* (2000), Gwen John disdains a maternal life:

> It was strange, she could not help thinking, that seeing Ida's child made her own work more important, not less so. She did not look at their baby and pine for one of her own, nor did the baby make her work seem irrelevant. On the contrary, he made it seem vital. She herself was not going to create a baby. All her creative talents had to go into her painting, all her feelings and emotions, all her ideas and plans, all her hopes and fears, all the turmoil within her, everything that was precious. (42).

In the midst of her tumultuous love affair with the sculptor Auguste Rodin she writes that "[a]ll around she saw women artists whose work seemed to stop by giving birth–look at Ida, look at Edna, look at Dorelia. None of them producing anything now except sketches" (Forster 61). Thus, deciding between motherhood/marriage and being an artist is at the forefront in these novels.

In addition, each work shows the challenges women artists cross-culturally and cross-historically have faced in having the merit of their work recognized. These novels also strongly suggest that art can change lives; Westen, referencing Lucy Lippard's view in the 1970s, argues that "the influence of feminism did not extend only to art itself, but also to discussions about the role

of art in society, as more and more artists were striving to bridge the gap between art and life … feminist art meant art that was engaged in society" (11). Thus, in the woman's historical novel, art is a powerful means for political self-expression and social contestation.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read the woman artist in relation to Plato's infamous "Allegory of the Cave" and Sigmund Freud's analysis of it as a "female place, a womb-shaped enclosure, a house of earth, secret and often sacred" (93). Gilbert and Gubar point to "the plight of woman in patriarchal culture, the woman whose cavern-shaped anatomy is her destiny. Not just, like Plato's cave dweller, a prisoner of Nature, this woman is a prisoner of her own nature" (Gilbert and Gubar 94). Yet, the authors also gesture towards another aspect of the "womb-shaped cave" – full of mythic possibilities and rebirths. They write: "The female artist makes her journey into what Adrienne Rich has called 'the cratered night of female memory' to revitalize the darkness, to retrieve what has been lost, to regenerate, reconceive, and give birth. What she gives births to is in a sense her own mother goddess and her own mother land" (99), which the authors compare to a lost Atlantis of women's literary heritage.

Lucia Aiello argues that Gilbert and Gubar "develop an archetypal theory of matrilineal artistic heritage that can be traced back to the 'mother-goddess-myth' of the Cumean Sibyl" (251). The Sibyl not only speaks and dances as the god Apollo's mouthpiece but also she transgresses the gods by scattering leaves

that need deciphering. The leaves are a symbolic source for women's creativity because she can "reconstruct the shattered [and scattered] tradition that is her matrilineal heritage" (Gilbert and Gubar 98). It is not just a matter of reconstructing the lost voices of the Sibyl: "what belongs entirely to her [the female author] is not the mimetic enactment of the role that once was the Sibyl, but the poietic conception of a new form of art, and therefore of a new time where the new Sibyls can speak in their own voices" (Aiello 254). The novels in this chapter recognize the unique and rebellious power of women's artistic voices and, in doing so, create a transnational genealogy. I survey *Kabuki Dancer* (1972) by Sawako Ariyoshi, Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), *Becoming Madame Mao* (2001) by Anchee Min, Rosario Ferré's *Flight of the Swan* (2002), *Frida's Bed* (2008) by Slavenka Drakulić, and *The Four Seasons* (2009) by Laurel Corona.[29] The femino-centric topics discussed include dance as transcendence, orphans and opportunity, education, theatre as politics, subversive women artists, and sister rivalry in relation to maestros.

Dance as Spiritual Transcendence

Dance, perhaps the only medium discussed here, has traditionally been perceived, in differing cultures/time-frames, as an art form suitable for women because the "female dancer epitomizes the cultural stereotype of femininity" (Barbour 29). An "object of beauty and desire" (Daly 279), she is idealized for being "upright (straight), lean, compact, youthful, able-bodied, and feminine"

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[29] The original Spanish title of Ferré's Puerto Rican novel is *Vuelo del Cisne*; no translator is named for the English edition I use. Airyoshi's original Japanese title is *Izumo no Okuni* and is translated into English by James R. Brandon.

(Carol Brown, qtd. in Barbour 29). In the woman's historical novel, by subscribing to an ideology of femininity, a dancer can achieve the status of a celebrity, seen for example in Ariyoshi's and Ferré's novels. Thus, dance becomes a most suitable medium for exploring gender representation. For the women in these novels, dancing, in its corporeality, leads to communing with the divine. In *Kabuki Dancer*, Ariyoshi writes: "Okuni danced and sang in a blackness that obliterated the boundary between earth and sky. Except for a single point where her foot touched the earth, Okuni's entire body reached out to fill the firmament around her" (296). Communing with the divine, however, depends on an eventual rejection of romantic love and motherhood.

Both Okuni in *Kabuki Dancer* and Anna Pavlova, the Russian heroine of Ferré's novel, marry their managers early in their respective careers and neither has children (Okuni miscarries and Pavlova has an abortion because she was "too young to bear children and the abortion made me [her] sterile" (Ferré 106). The protagonists take their failed romantic relationships as inspiration for their art, which raises it to a new level of incomparable merit. This conflict of interest between the purity of art and the interference of love and children, however, is best shown in Ferré's work.

Patricia Vilches writes that Pavlova and Masha Mastova–the narrator, Pavlova's confidante, and a dancer in her troupe–escape from domestic violence while living in early twentieth century Russia but then self-inflict violence on themselves when they become ballerinas. Vilches clarifies:

> *Sin embargo, encontramos que es el ballet mismo el que se convierte en uno de los opresores maximos de la subjectividad femenina en Vuelo del cisne, puesto que si bien libera a la mujer de la ubicuidad tradicionalista, la convierte en sujeto victimizado por las duras tareas y contorsiones que se requieren del cuerpo.*
> However, we find that it is ballet itself which becomes one of the ultimate oppressors of female subjectivity in *Flight of the Swan*, since although free from the ubiquity of woman's traditional role, the subject becomes victimized by the hard physicality and bodily contortions required to be a ballerina. (102)

Ferré suggests that Pavlova only experiences spiritual transcendence by subjecting her body to violence.

She confirms:

> *Pero, esta es una libertad coartada por la subyugacion del cuerpo femenino a los entuertos fisicos que debe sufrir la bailarina al tratar de aparecer como un ser etereo, si bien ese arte conlleve una violencia congenita de sufrir y soportar.*
> But, this is a freedom constrained by the subjugation of the female body to physical pains that the ballerina must suffer all the while appearing ethereal; so well this art conceals an inherent violence of suffering. (Vilches 107)

Pavlova does not sacrifice her dedication to her art until she arrives in Puerto Rico, the setting of the novel in 1917.

Ferré writes, “Madame embarked on her first South American tour with her company, of which I [Masha] was part, on February 10, 1917. Victor Dandré, Madame’s husband and manager had persuaded her to take this trip while we were still performing in New York” (8). Unable to make the Atlantic crossing because of WWI, the troupe heads to South America because “several nations there–including Argentina and Brazil–remained neutral and wanted no part in the bloody European war” (Ferré 9). Dandré is described by Masha as a difficult figure, but one who is essential to Pavlova’s success: “None of the dancers cared for Mr. Dandré very much, and we felt sorry for Madame, who, in spite of being a star, couldn’t live without him. He took care of her as if she were a child, and lavished attention on her” (14). Pavlova’s mother explains to Masha how the young Pavlova met Dandré after performing at a benefit gala (46). Agreeing to meet the middle-aged “Frenchified Russian” Pavlova declares, “Our economic problems are over, Mother: now we won’t have to starve or sell our home because of the strike. I’ve finally found the protector the Maryinsky Imperial Ballet School always expected me to have” (47). A marriage of convenience, Dandré handles the business side of the performances, including turning Pavlova into a celebrity, which allows Pavlova to focus on her art.

For Pavlova, “[d]ancing was a spiritual experience … [t]he body was the harp of the spirit, the medium through which [the dancer] achieved union with the divine” (Ferré 16). Striving to achieve perfection and “spiritual transcendence” (32) with her troupe, Masha recounts, “one day she [Madame] asked us to kneel before the holy icon of the Virgin of Vladimir and made us

take a vow: 'A career and love are impossible to reconcile. That's why, when you dance, you must never give yourself to anyone" (22). Madame even has hers and Dandré's marriage certificate burned, commenting, "How could I belong to Dandré and at the same time give myself to my art? My duties as a dancer were sacred. As an instrument of God, my body had to be free" (107). Madame, however, breaks her own vow (23, 113, 185-6, 200) when she meets Diamantino Márquez, a man half her age who "was looked upon by many as El Delfín, the rightful heir to the [Puerto Rican] throne on which the American governor now sits" (76). When Diamantino joins the troupe as an extra violinist, Pavlova is transformed.

Masha reflects, "I had never seen her dance like that, her sweat-slick body curling and uncurling, her body turned into a sign that could only be deciphered by another body's mute language. She forgot all about our sacred mission. Under Diamantino Márquez's appreciative gaze, Glazunov's *Bacchanale* burned sublime" (Ferré 89). Ferré suggests that lust/love leads Madame to become unprincipled; she becomes animalistic, less disciplined but also more free. Masha quickly realizes that Madame is, for perhaps the first time, choosing romantic love over art. Madame tells her, "the dancing was important, but it wasn't everything. 'One must constantly give birth to oneself, become one's own creation,' Madame said" (104). The affair, like Diamantino's impact on Madame, however, is short-lived (Madame "believed Diamantino had died a hero's death, persecuted by the police for being a revolutionary" (256). After a few months and with Diamantino presumed/being dead, Madame, Dandré and

the troupe leave the island for South America (260). Some years later, Masha, who stays behind in Puerto Rico to marry and raise a family, sees Madame for a final time whilst visiting in New York. Madame asks, "why cry, Masha, darling? You have a baby and I have my art. What a wonderful thing is love! The world is irreversibly transformed by it" (262). Ferré stresses that a woman cannot be an artist and a wife/mother. Art entails suffering and sacrifice, but Pavlova, like John in Foster's novel, does not question this patriarchal structuring or have regrets, instead she celebrates her choice.

Orphans and Artistic Opportunities

The choice between art and love is also exemplified in Corona's *The Four Seasons*. The work narrates the life of two sisters, Maddalena and Chiaretta, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Venice. Beginning in 1695, the young girls arrive at the Ospedale della Pietà: a convent, orphanage, lace making center, and music school. Timothy S. Miller argues that orphanages, like the Pietà, were springing up throughout Italian cities as early as the mid-fifteenth century (37) and "these Western orphanages … focused specifically on saving unwanted babies" (37-38). The Pietà, in particular, is renowned for preparing an orphan for adult life through its music school.

Abandoned by their courtesan mother, the girls are found with a brief letter and an ivory comb (Corona 5, 186). Like Ahdaf Soueif's novel *The Map of Love* that describes a tripartite tapestry, this comb is comprised of three pieces, one for each daughter and the mother (whose piece fits in the middle). Unlike

Soueif's book, however, the pieces–the family–remain fragmented. The mother never returns for her children and her portion remains absent and separate.

This novel suggests, like other women's historical novels pertaining to art, that being an orphan or having/living with the absence of a maternal figure is not unusual. For example, in *Li Chin* (2010) by Shin Kyung-sook, Chin's father never returns from war (36) and her mother dies from tuberculosis (35). Rescued by Dame Sŏ, her mother's cousin, Chin is taken to the royal palace where she becomes a "*dame de la cour*" 'woman of the king, a lady of the court'. She is taught to read and write and is later hailed as a brilliant dancer in the Korean court before becoming the first Korean woman to move to Paris (under the pretence that she will legitimately marry the French diplomat Victor Collin de Plancy) (Shin 190).

The sisters in Corona's work are taken in as orphans by the Pietà and, as a sign of ownership, branded with a "P" on the bottom of their heels (6-7). Music is their only solace; in the coro, Chiaretta sings and Maddalena plays the violin. Corona writes, "Chiaretta's voice climbed higher, and Maddalena went with her like an echo. Then they were together again, finishing in unison, their music rising and falling like the sound of God breathing" (163). Though Maddalena is content, especially after being chosen to receive lessons from the priest/composer Antonio Vivaldi, the Congregazzione's new violin teacher (56, 83), Chiaretta relishes opportunities to perform in Venice. She seeks a life outside and beyond the convent's walls either as an opera singer (49, 67, 174),

what at this time was a "vibrant form of public entertainment" (Glixon and Glixon vii), or a rich man's wife (68).

In the former, a woman is deemed unrespectable in her "vocality and unfettered sexuality" (Heller 25), but she is publically visible in her profession. The wife, by contrast, is respectable, but Venetian wives were relatively invisible and their public role "highly restricted" (Heller 14). Though the opera heroine's voice, such as the historical protagonist Annina Giró, who struggles to become an opera singer in Sarah Bruce Kelly's *The Red Priest's Annina* (2009), disrupts and threatens dominant ideology, Heller clarifies that in the end "virtue was to be conceded to women based on their silence and chastity" (13). Maddalena notes, "until then it had felt as if her life and Chiaretta's were entwined into one existence, but now she could not deny that Chiaretta's was taking its own path, one that wasn't always going to include her" (77). Similar to Barbara Quick's *Vivaldi's Virgins: A Novel* (2008) which depicts women violinists whose lives change when Vivaldi becomes the new violin instructor at the Pietà, Maddalena's music thrives under the guidance of Vivaldi. She tells him, "I think if I did not have music… She could not even finish the thought" (Corona 94). Vivaldi responds, "we are kindred spirits … we both see that music is poetry" (88); though he has romantic feelings for his student, he never acts upon them (940). Thus, while Maddalena suppresses her romantic love (318, 323, 331), she is permitted to continue pursuing music. By contrast, Chiaretta faces choosing between the convent or marriage and the loss of her right to perform.

Engaged to one of the Congregazzione's sons, Chiaretta is told that "husbands must sign an oath that any bride coming from one of the ospedali will never sing or play an instrument outside her home" (Corona 108). Not only will she be prohibited from performing in public, Chiaretta will also have to leave her sister (168). This separation occurs when Chiaretta marries and moves into her husband's family home (209). Coming to terms with her husband's frequent absences, Chiaretta finds herself looking out the window one day at the gondolas below. Hearing the melody of a solo she learned at the Pietà, she is overtaken by the urge to sing. When her husband hears her, however, he shouts, "Sing inside for me, for my family. Sing if I say you can. But until then, keep your mouth shut!" (215). Chiaretta comes to realize that her dream of being an opera singer and a wife are incompatible (218).

Women's Education

In the women's novels discussed, education is linked with women's sexuality and artistic ambition. The Ospedale della Pietà is instrumental in training young musicians in Corona's *The Four Seasons* (2009), Pavlova's monetary donation to Masha sets up a prestigious ballet school in Puerto Rico, and Okuni's passion for training dancers in late sixteenth century Japan is unrivalled. Alvarez's novel *In the Name of Salomé*, however, gives us the clearest insight into the relation between art, women's education, and sexuality. Alvarez writes about the lives of Salomé Ureña (1850-1897), the famous Dominican poet and her daughter Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña (1894-1970), a Hispanicist educator in the

United States and Cuba. Novels on women writers like the Ureñas, however, are not as forthcoming as one might expect; notable exceptions include *Las libres del Sur: una novela sobre Victoria Ocampo* (2004) by María Rosa Lojo de Beuter, Alica Gaspar de Alba's *Sor Juana's Second Dream* (1999), about the seventeenth century Mexican nun-writer-poet, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Laura Fish's *Strange Music* (2008) and *How Do I Love Thee?* by Nancy Moser (2009), (both depict poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning), and Susan Sellers recreates the sibling relationship between artist Vanessa Bell and author Virginia Woolf in *Vanessa and Virginia* (2009).

Alvarez's novel switches between its two narrators, covering Salomé's life until her death at a young age from consumption when Camila is only three years old (296) and then Camila's transnational life. After her mother's death, Camila's family goes into exile in Cuba and she later moves to the United States. The novel's ending shows an older Camila returning to her maternal root (her mother and the Dominican Republic) and her addressing the reader for the first time in the first person. It is, however, through the mother's, Salomé's, voice that we first sense both the patriarchal control by men over the women in their lives and the need for women's education.

Salomé, a poet celebrated for writing nationalistic poems in a masculine style, is continually asked by her philandering husband Pancho (Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal (1859–1935, the president of the Dominican Republic briefly in 1916) to suppress her personal desire for the greater good of the nation; in response she tells him, "I am a woman as well as a poet" (Alvarez 177),

suggesting there is little room for femininity in either the poetic tradition or the nation. Alvarez intimates that political change in the Dominican Republic is not possible without engaging women and the feminine as political equals to men and masculinity. As long as women remain considered inferior and subordinate to men, privately and publically, the Dominican Republic will remain politically fragile and vulnerable.

Pancho, essentially, betrays Salomé in the novel when he goes to Paris to study medicine and has an affair with another woman; it is analogous to betraying his Dominican Republic, his *patria*. Alvarez also describes how Pancho has his brother Federico spy on Salomé and act as a paternal stand-in—this act is echoed later in the novel when Salomé's son, Pedro spies on his sister Camila. Pedro suspects Camila of having an affair with a man, but is, instead, awakened to her lesbian relationship with Marion. Uncertain of her sexual identity, Camila, however, represses her desire for Marion. Alvarez, thus, emphasizes the restrictive roles women in Dominican societies are forced to play and that women must be empowered through both education and sexuality.

The former *musa de la patria*, Salomé comes to reject her political poems in favour of personal poems and a peaceful revolution brought about through education (Alvarez 79, 134,182). Salomé remarks, "I felt up to the hard work of rebuilding *my patria*, girl by girl" (271) and definitively states:

> I had lost heart in the ability of words to transform us into a patria of brothers and sisters. Hadn't I heard that Lilís [the dictator president] himself liked to recite passages of my patriotic poems to

> his troops before battle? ... The last thing our country needed was more poems. We needed schools. (187)

Salomé's secondary school for educating girls to become teachers, the first in the country (175), is continued by Camila, who teaches first in the United States at Vassar College and then in Cuba, working to build a *patria* through women's education.

Retiring from her position at Vassar College, la Professora decides to return to Cuba, the country of her childhood, spent with her exiled family. Camila declares, "*I think it is time now to go back and be a part of what my mother started*" (Alvarez 35) and "I'm going to join a revolution" (47). Drawing strength from her own mother's resolve to continue educating despite her illness (264, 298, 301), Camila spends thirteen years in Cuba teaching "at the university at night and in factorías during the day. Weekends, [she] joined [her] young compañeros, writing manuals and preparing materials for the teachers who came in from the rural schools" (347). She recalls, "literature for all. … My mother's instituto had grown to the size of a whole country!" (349). Like her mother before her, Camila believes not in Fidel Castro's military revolution but that the "real revolution could only be won by the imagination. When one of [her] newly literate students picked up a book and read with hungry pleasure, [she] knew [they] were one step closer to the patria [they] all wanted" (347). The patria Camila envisions necessarily includes the rights and participation of women. One day, to a group of women sorting coffee beans, she impulsively abandons her lessons on the great male thinkers like Karl Marx and, instead, recites from

memory an unpublished poem by her mother (Camila's brother Pedro by contrast chooses not to publish any of his mother's personal and intimate poems).

The poem is about her sleeping son Pedro, whom she is watching so intently that she cannot read a word of the book in her lap (Alvarez 348). When the women realize the poem was written not only by a mother but by their instructor's mother, "the women began to clack with their wooden scoopers on the side of their tables, until the din of the room drowned out the compañera, shouting for order, in the name of Fidel, in the name of the revolution" (348). After her time in Cuba, Camila returns to her mother-country, the Dominican Republic. She reflects, "It's continuing to struggle to create the country we dream of that makes a patria out of the land under our feet. That much I learned from mother" (350), a sentiment that suits the novel's ending. Camila is visiting her family's cemetery and overseeing her own future gravestone but, because her eyesight is poor, she asks a young boy to read the inscription for her. Alvarez writes, "Not a word from him. Finally, it dawns on me. In Cuba, he would know how to read. He would not be picking weeds on a schoolday" (352). The boy is from Los Millones, which Alvarez argues is "named not for the millionaires who do not live there but for the million poor who do" (353).Taking his hand, Camila traces the letters of her name for him, *Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña*, suggesting that Camila's life is carrying on the work and name of her mother, and she coaches to boy to repeat the words "until he gets it right" (353). Emphasizing the importance of education, particularly for women, Alvarez's

work questions and challenges patriarchal and nationalistic discourses on national identity.

"Theatre is Political and Politics is Theatrical"[30]

Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* emphasizes that the theme of love versus art found in women's historical novels is political. Metanarrative lends itself particularly well to this genre, which seeks to politically intervene in masculinist discourses. Intra and extra textually, art is used as a political tool. The following novels take place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, within which political turmoil runs parallel with familial upheaval and unrest. In Alvarez's novel and Ferré's *Flight of the Swan*, the struggle for national independence in relation to women's lives is at the forefront; Alvarez focuses on the Dominican Republic's separation from Spain and Ferré's work centers on Puerto Rico's change of hands from Spain to the United States. While these novels raise important questions about national identity, national independence/sacrifice, and how women as artists contribute to the national discourse, the impact of a woman on both art and politics is best seen in Min's novel *Becoming Madame Mao*.

Min's narrative begins in 1991, just prior to the former first lady of Communist China's suicide whilst in prison. One of the unique aspects of this work is its innovative style that switches between first person accounts by Madame Mao and a third-person narrator–though there is certainly slippage and ambiguity between the two as quotation marks are absent. Eric Hayot notes,

[30] This quotation is from Xiaomeni Chen and his observations in China.

"The effect is to suggest either that the first-person narration emerges from the imaginative power of the external narrator or that the external narrator might be the projection of Jiang Qing [Madame Mao] as novelistic character" (620). This technique also shows how the "I" of the text perceives and is perceived by others; thus, there is a private self, the first-person, and the public self, which explains the third person. For an infamous figure like Madame Mao separating one's private self from a public self would be near impossible. This style also makes differentiating between historical fact and imagination difficult, but has the effect of reclaiming Madame Mao from both history and literature as simply "a white-boned demon."

Min humanizes Madame Mao by imagining her defense for her controversial political career. The work follows more or less a chronological account of Madame Mao's past, coming full circle back to 1991. What is unique about Min's retelling is her interpretation of Mao's life as a tragic actress. Min imagines Madame Mao's consent to play what she identifies as a distinct feature of Chinese history: a tragic role for exceptional women. Min writes, "That's Chinese history. The fall of a kingdom is always the fault of a concubine. Why should Comrade Jiang Qing be an exception?" (qtd. in Hayot 618). One can read Min's portrayal of Madame Mao either as regrettably confusing/conflating life with a stage–thus, she is always and necessarily playing the role of a doomed heroine–or in existentialist terms, she brilliantly knows life really *is* only a stage but takes up her condemned role ever more passionately. Madame Mao's roles as an actress both in theater and film are truly no less a reality for her than her

infamous life as "the most powerful woman in China during the late 1960s and '70s" (Min 7). Art and politics converge and imitate; they are inseparable.

Likewise, Madame Mao repeatedly envisions herself as a literary leading lady. In her early years with Mao in Yenan, she likens herself to Lady Yuji: "Sitting by her lover the girl is touched by the operatic quality of her life. Events transform in front of her eyes. On the stage of her mind, Mao becomes the modern King-of-Shang and she is his lover, Lady Yuji. She sees herself follow the king. Ever since she was a little girl it has been her dream to play Lady Yuji" (Min 138). Madame Mao's successes in embodying the role of tragic heroines onstage and offstage stem from several key events in her life that are unique to women.

Madame Mao uses not only her life to inspire art but art to inspire her life. For example, in feminist terms, she translates into a series of operas and ballets, such as *The Women of the Red Detachment* and *The White-Haired Girl* (Min 7), the pain she endured as a child when her mother tried to bind her feet. The irony here, which we see in Ferré's novel *Flight of the Swan*, is that ballet is an art form that is particularly brutal and physically demanding of women's bodies.

As a child, Madame Mao also witnesses the violent relationship between her mother, a concubine, and her abusive father (Min 5). Without any resources, her mother eventually runs away with her daughter and leaves her for good to be raised by her grandparents (12). Living with her grandparents proves fruitful for Madame Mao as she is able to forget her pain through the operas her grandfather

and she attend (13). Identifying with the pain of the heroines in these operas, her grandfather gives her a new formal name: Yunhe, "'Crane in the Clouds'. The image is picked from his favorite opera, *The Golden Pavilion*. The crane is the symbol of hope" (14). In loving opera so much, however, she ruins her chances for life as a respectable woman by running away and joining a theater troupe: "I decide that I shall be an opera actress so I will get to live a heroine's life on stage" (15). Believing she is destined to become a star, Madame Mao aligns herself with an experimental theatre group of underground Communists (18). Despite Yunhe's success in her first role, in the year 1930, the theater is shut down (22). Madame Mao's interest in the Communist Party, nevertheless, intensifies when she is introduced to Yu Qiwei, the student leader and secretary of the underground Communist Party on [Shan-dong University] campus (25).

Enrolling herself in classes and working in the library, Madame Mao officially becomes a member of the Communist Party. She tells Yu Qiwei, in gendered terms, that "the true poverty is having no choice in life. No choice but to get married, for example. No choice but to be a prostitute or concubine, to sell one's body" (Min 28). Mao's thoughts are related to her and her mother's experiences, which are unique to women, as seen in other women's historical novels such as *El infierno prometido: Una prostituta de la Zwi Migdal* (2010) by Elsa Drucaroff in which Dinah, a Polish Jew in the 1920s, after being raped and bringing shame to her parents, is taken by a Jewish man named Hersch Grosfeld to Buenos Aires to work as a prostitute. Following her marriage to Yu, Qiwei Madame Mao begins performing for a small left-wing troupe–"I help create anti-

Japanese plays and take them to the street" (30)–and believes herself to be risking her life for China. When her marriage fails, Madame Mao moves to Shanghai (39), where she combines her love of acting with her political ideals by making political films. She knows "China is under invasion. The public is sick of ancient romance and is ready for inspiring roles from real life" (45). When arrested, however, Madame Mao, controversially, signs a paper denouncing her role as a Communist (47) (though, historically, she denies ever signing the paper). Released in 1934, she gives herself a new name, Lan Ping (48), which coincides with her big break; she plays Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House* (51).

Identifying with the character of a stifled housewife, "on stage she lives out her eternal despair. Nora's lines fall from her lips like words of her own. *I've lived by performing tricks, Torvald, and I can bear it no more*" (Min 55). Following her success in the play, Madame Mao moves onto acting in low-budget anti-Japanese films (78, 86). Unsatisfied with minor roles, she moves to Yenan, where she has heard that Mao Tse-tung, a famous Communist, resides. In Yenan, Madame Mao performs in some small operas, the aim of which is to make the Communist hero fall in love with her. Succeeding in her romantic endeavor, she becomes pregnant (144) and marries Mao in 1938. Her new marriage entails a new name, Jiang Ching, given to her by her final husband (158). Though the party refuses to allow her to actively participate in politics, she concedes that "to be Madame Mao will be her victory" (148), unwittingly becoming somewhat of a Nora figure in relation to Torvald. Essentially, like many of the heroines in this chapter, Madame Mao considers her husband a god.

Suffocating in her domestic life, Madame Mao resurfaces after Mao falls ill in 1947. Trusted to do his bidding, Madame Mao begins working in a stereotypical feminine and unassuming/unthreatening role, as a secretary (Min 175). Through her ambition, however, she climbs her way up the political ladder. She is careful to emphasize to her detractors that she has given up a life of drama and luxury as an actress for her commitment to a Communist China. Min writes:

> For a decade, she [Madame Mao] has worked to create a perfect image of herself through the operas and ballets. A heroine with a touch of masculinity. The woman who came from poverty and rises to lead the poor to victory. She believes that the minds of the Chinese have been influenced. It's time to test the water –the audience should be ready to embrace a heroine in real life. (314)

Thus, Madame Mao's power reaches its heights when she is no longer on the stage but behind the stage.

Art, for Madame Mao, is a means to be Mao's Communist propaganda machine. She claims, "to me art is a weapon. A weapon to fight injustice, Japanese, Imperialists and enemies alike" (Min 90). Resolved to maintain her husband's reputation, Madame Mao sets to work on controlling the media: "I see printing machines rolling, voices broadcasting and films projecting. I feel the power of the media. The way it washes and bleaches minds. I can feel the coming success" (214). In Shanghai, the political campaign continues and she trains what she calls a "'cultural troop'. A troop that Mao will need to fight his ideological battles" (215). Min writes that, in 1966, "in Mao's name I [Madame

Mao] organize a national festival –the Festival of Revolutionary Operas … I make the operas bear my signature and personally supervise every detail, from the selection of the actors to the way a singer hits the note" (240). Art not only upholds Mao's power but also what she perceives is her own. She uses the media to solidify her status as the foundation for her husband's success. Min writes of a newspaper article that claims, "Without a guardian angel like Comrade Jiang Ching, China's future will shatter" (223) and she becomes known as the head of the infamous Cultural Revolution.

The separation, or lack thereof, between fiction and reality is manifest in the Cultural Revolution. Min argues that "in truth, for Madame Mao, there is no line between living and acting. The Cultural Revolution is a breathing stage and Mao is her playwright" (284). That Mao is her playwright suggests that he is still, ultimately, the man in power and Madame Mao is subject to his whims and desires–she is merely an actress on Mao's stage. This becomes clearer after Mao's death in 1976 (Min 325), when Madame Mao seizes the opportunity to claim power for herself but is defeated. A month after her husband's death, Madame Mao, declared an enemy of China, is sentenced to prison and awaits execution (336). Min writes of how, with her death sentences always commuted at the last minute, Madame Mao works in prison ironically making dolls to be exported to capitalist markets from 1976-1991 (337).

Amy T.Y. Lai points out that paradoxically, though Madame Mao identifies with Ibsen's Nora "who refuses to be a pampered doll and a slave to her husband" by subversively sewing her name "Jiang Ching" inside the doll's

clothing, she effectively "turns herself into a doll. By others, and by her own self-fashioning, she has been fashioned into a disposable object" (565). Just prior to her suicide in 1991, and blurring life as art and art as life, Min writes:

> It is time to empty the stage. Remember, you will always come across me in the books about China. Don't be surprised to see my name smeared. There is nothing more they can do to me. And don't forget that I was an actress, a great actress. I acted with passion. For those who are fascinated by me you owe me applause, and for those who are disgusted you may spit. I thank you all for coming. (337)

Thus, Min's novel joins Mao's narrative as an innovative metanarrative.

The Subversive Woman-Artist: Maternal Roots

Women's historical novels suggest that the woman as artist is subversive to society. The emotional impact of art upon an audience also plays an essential role in this subversion. Madame Mao's appropriation of the means of media production bolsters her and her husband's political career in China by appealing to the masses; Anna Pavlova's poetic dances in Ferré's *Flight of the Swan* have life-changing impact. Ferré, via her Russian ex-patriot narrator, Masha, tells the reader:

> Madame, on the other hand, never danced simply for the money. She wanted to give everyone the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of ballet, even those who had no money … Europe was being torn apart, but compassion and love were still possible; that was

> Madame's message. *The Dying Swan*, the solo piece that made her famous all over the world, was a prayer for peace. (21)

Madame performs the piece whilst stranded in Puerto Rico during the war. Madame is told: "[you are a] poet in your own right" (Ferré 71). In both Ariyoshi's *Kabuki Dancer* and Drakulić's *Frida's Bed*, however, the woman as subversive artist is connected with her sexuality and the maternal.

In the Translator's Note to *Kabuki Dancer*, James R. Brandon comments on Okuni's innate desire to dance, in a way startlingly similar to Drakulić's interpretation of the maternal as a natural root in relation to Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. An old woman in the text tells Okuni: "Lewd women, *kabuki* women, take money for singing and dancing. *Kabuki* women are plants that haven't got roots in the ground" (Ariyoshi 80). Brandon believes, as a whole, Ariyoshi is really asking of her text, "Does something grow from singing? After dancing, is something left? Is a *kabuki* woman a plant without roots in the earth?" (6). The temporal and fleeting nature of Okuni's art mirrors her life of wandering, suggesting that she is indeed without roots.

A sexually and economically "loose" woman is a *kabuki* woman; the practise of her art is not a stable or credible profession, but Okuni's effect on her audiences complicates this reading. Okuni knows that "people need food, a place to sleep. These needs aren't satisfied watching people dance or hearing them sing … Yet tired as she was, Okuni felt the desire to dance racing like a fire through her body to her toes and fingertips" (Ariyoshi 82)–"she existed in her dance alone" (295). Okuni transforms the traditional definition of kabuki, which, in the

text, has clear gendered and sexualized connotations as “a word used in Izumo to mean strange, indecent, improper” (19), into a celebration of new artistic expression. Okuni says, “If I’m a woman who likes to dance, does that make me a *kabuki* woman? Can this bright, happy feeling be bad? Don’t be angry, Granny. Perhaps I *am a kabuki* woman” (20). Her appropriation of the word also occurs when her sister Okaga tells her: “to run away from a promised husband is what a *kabuki* woman would do” (56). Okuni replies, “If it’s *kabuki* for me to be the wife of Sankuro, the man I love, instead of Kyuzo, someone I hate, than I’m glad to be called *kabuki*” (56). Okuni, however, also desires to turn her innovative art into a respectable form; she strives to touch “a man’s heart more than … his body” (15) and continually entrances her Japanese audiences with creating unexpected comic-erotic roles, many of which involve cross-dressing (26, 45, 115, 280, 308).

For example, performing for their patron Kanbei and his guests in Kyoto, Okuni is described as holding an unrivalled sway over her audience. After changing from her monk’s robe into a beautiful kimono:

> No one spoke. It was a silence of men struck dumb with admiration–for the brilliant kimono suddenly revealed by an ingenious theatrical technique, for the beautiful full face that appeared in an instant from beneath the black lacquered hat, and for Okuni’s effortless, leaping dance steps that melded perfectly with her soaring voice. The transformation of Okuni was so splendid, so

> attractive, and so unexpected, that for some time the guests did not speak. (Ariyoshi 51)

Okuni's appeal to her audience's emotions and her own self-identification with the word "kabuki" free of an equation with prostitution (183, 229, 244, 300) leads to a gradual transformation of the term.

Ariyoshi notes, "While in the past *kabuki* had meant someone who was eccentric, and in Izumo the word had been used to shame a person who deviated from the norm, it now indicated a trend setter in the foreign fashion" (132) of "sleeveless vests, bloused pantaloons, round hats, velvet belts, Kirishitan crosses and rosaries of the Southern Barbarians" (132). This new trend for men dressing in foreign western fashions inspires Okuni to incorporate the clothing into her performances and to impersonate men, which has a profound effect upon her audience (Ariyoshi 134). Okuni's true success, however, besides her innovative techniques, is that she performs for both the rich and poor and with equal enthusiasm (137, 177, 204, 337).

The popularity of Okuni's theater leads to yet another shift in the definition of kabuki in the text. Singing and dancing prostitutes adopt the name "Courtesans' Kabuki" for economic and social influence: "Troupes of theaters, one after the other, in Sakai Ward, Fukiya Ward, Hirokoji Alley in Nakabashi Ward, and in other parts of Edo" set up a flag "proclaiming itself Best in the World" (Ariyoshi 274). Ariyoshi writes:

> The white flag in front of the theater simply meant 'Kabuki is performed here.' The universal use of the phrase signified the

> important fact that Kabuki no longer belonged to Okuni personally. What she had created as a private artistic expression now belonged to the public. In the future, Okuni would be only one of many dancers and performers shaping the direction of Kabuki's artistic growth" (274).

Disheartened, Okuni bitterly laments that "By now, any street performance, dance, or even puppet play was indiscriminately called Kabuki" (300). The novel concludes with Okuni returning to her birth village, the Iron Mountain, to dance a final time. Making her way alone through the mountain pass, she remembers a question once asked of her: "How long are you going to dance?" (343) and her confident response: "Until the day I die" (343). With this knowledge, she closes her eyes, the snow falling around her, she awaits death and dreams of her life as a Kabuki actress.

Similar to other feminist writing on the lives of great women artists (for example Lynn Cullen's *The Creation of Eve* (2010) about Sofonisba Anguissola, Susan Vreeland's *The Passion of Artemisia* (2002), and *The Painter from Shanghai* (2008) by Jennifer Cody Epstein, in which a former child prostitute, Pan Yuliang, becomes an influential painter in China), *Frida's Bed* takes up the theme of art and self-expression in the life of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907- 1954).

Maternal imagery is a connecting thread throughout the narrative. Blurring the line between reality and dream, Danielle Knafo argues that Kahlo "transformed her canvas into a mirror in which she reflected a world of exquisite

tensions, stark beauty, stoic strength, insidious will, and layered self-definitions" (Knafo 6). An epigraph to Drakulić's novel written by Kahlo reads, "*Mi pintura lleva el mensaje del dolor*" 'My painting carries the message of pain.' Frida's pain, not only psychical, stems in part from suffering from polio as a child (3) and a street-car accident.

Drakulić writes:

> Her right leg, the lame one, had been broken in eleven places and her right foot has been dislocated and crushed. Her lower spine was broken in three places, her collarbone was broken and so were two ribs. Her left shoulder was dislocated … A long metal rod–the handrail–had ripped into her stomach near her left hip and come out through her vagina. (15)

Unable to express herself verbally after the accident, Frida's mother Doña Matilda, hopes painting will ease some of her teenage daughter's boredom and pain.

Given her father's old paints and brushes (Drakulić 20), Frida begins painting not only "sketches, studies and portraits of the people around her, but mostly of herself. This was no longer a pastime. Painting completely absorbed her. She assiduously studied the history of European art, especially the work of the great Renaissance masters, and she practiced the steadiness of her hand" (25). For Knafo, Frida's relationship with her mother and motherhood is instrumental in her art. Doña Matilda's lack of emotional support for her daughter is a constant source of pain, characterized by Frida as "unavailability,

loss, and rejection" (76). This tumultuous relationship, expressed in her self-portraits, shows Frida's shifting conception of motherhood that moves from her own mother to herself as a potential mother and, finally, to the role of symbolic mother.

Knafo writes:

> For Frida, the self-portrait represented an apt, almost self-evident, means by which she was able to act as a mirror to herself, reflecting her need for self-definition while simultaneously attempting to achieve it. Through her art Frida succeeded in repeating the mother-infant dyad with its mutual gazing reciprocity. Creating her double in her self-portraits, she became her own mirror. (78)

Frida's talent manifests itself when the Maestro, historical Mexican painter Diego Riviera and her future husband, sees a small exhibition of her work: "You must paint, he told her seriously. He was looking at her paintings as if he could not get enough of them. It was as if he could not entirely separate the paintings from the unusual person who had done them" (30). The Maestro continues to support Frida's painting for "he recognized her talent, that *something* in her paintings that was personal, intimate, painful and completely individual and distinct" (45). The paintings referenced in the novel by Drakulić highlight Frida's confessional style, such as *My Dress Hangs*, which Frida paints during her first time in New York City:

> It looks so forlorn, this Mexican dress hanging there above the garbage and the smokestacks, the skyscrapers and the stock

> exchange, above the church spire with its dollar sign…. Not a living soul inhabits this painting. There is nothing strange about that. What is strange is that Frida is not in the picture. To anyone who knows her, this absence, this relinquishment of self, comes as a surprise. Instead of doing her usual–painting herself to confirm her own existence–she is simply no more (Drakulić 47-8).

This absence in Frida's work is juxtaposed with an increasing number of self-portraits, such as *The Henry Ford Hospital* and *Self-Portrait with a Doll*.

These paintings are testimonies to her miscarriages because "for her painting self-portraits was a kind of magical rite, a kind of exorcism" (Drakulić 51). Her search for herself through her mother is explored on the canvas, but she also holds the idea that art has a creative, mother-like power. In paintings like *My Birth*, "Frida shows how she gave birth to her art–the only arena in which she was able to express, rework, and master the conflicted relationship she had with her mother and her own body" (80). Therefore, Drakulić reads her creative art as a substitute for her inability to physically give birth to children:

> Using painting as her medium for self-expression, Frida painted a broken paintbrush, wounds on the leg, a carved-out heart, blood gushing from slashed veins, a body pierced with arrows, herself dead, herself planted in the earth. She painted fetuses and miscarriages, white bloodstained sheets and birth–legs spread open, an infant's head peering out. There was nothing gentle or sweet

> about the scream of the woman giving birth, about the cry of the child–she herself–being born. (52)

Frida's paintings are inspired by her pain, both physical and emotional. This is evident when Drakulić argues:

> Had there been no accident there would have been no painting. Or life with Maestro. She would have been a country doctor –she had wanted to study medicine. She would have been somebody else. The experience of pain and all of those operations was the connecting thread between her life and her art, tying them together like a surgeon sewing up a wound. They were like an umbilical cord, the paintings nourished by her placenta, sucking in her life. (126)

Painting is an overwhelming primordial force, evident in Frida's final engagement with motherhood. Knafo suggests that this comes near the end of Kahlo's life when, after her mother's death and unable to conceive her own child, she literally and visually embraces Diego, her husband, as a child.

In several works, such as *The Love Embrace of the Universe*, Frida depicts herself as Diego's mother: "*she is the mother who rocks him, takes care of, and protects him*" (Drakulić 89). In other works, she herself is held by a precolonial earth goddess, a maternal *raíz*, (a reference to her wetnurse) (Knafo 86). Resonating with Ariyoshi's novel, the symbolic mother and the maternal (93) are a connecting thread throughout Drakulić's novel and Frida's paintings

and culminates in the work *Roots*. Described by Drakulić as linking the maternal and nature to Frida, green lush plants grow out of her body:

> Thin veinlike little roots spurt from their tips, full of blood. It is only a matter of time before all of her blood seeps into the thirsty soil. Her heart has already been bled dry, so has her womb; you can see a part of the landscape through the hole that is in its place. (128)

This physical view of a dying Frida speaks of her desire. Drakulić writes: “how can people understand her suffering unless this painting jolts them into experiencing it for themselves?” (128). The painting’s effect upon the artist and the audience is essential to Frida’s philosophy of art. Drakulić writes of the viewer’s identification with her work: “anybody could identify with her and feel her pain as *his own*. However dramatic they were, her paintings elicited empathy but also immediate identification with one’s own suffering.… When the Maestro looked at her paintings he saw his own pain as well” (121). Art’s ability to translate both the painter’s inner experience and the viewer’s own suffering is clear. Though Frida respects the Maestro, the critic who has the greatest influence on her is American painter Georgia O’Keefe:

> In New York in 1938, O’Keefe, took Frida by the hand –her own was warm –and led her to the painting *My Birth*. She stood there, looking at the painting. Nobody ever dared to paint this before. You’ve painted something that is never supposed to be seen, that nobody ever dares to witness because they are shocked by a woman’s power to give life … Frida felt that after just one look at

> her painting, this woman, whom she had never met before, had shown a level of understanding that she had always dreamed of. (81)

O'Keefe's and Frida's experiences of reality as gendered, and as women artists connects them in a way that others, Drakulić suggests, cannot share.

Commanding her energy, Frida believes that "[s]he had to paint because the emotional pain she felt–which seemed to have settled like sediment on top of her old, physical pain–was too strong to contain" (Drakulić 76). She continues to suggest: "my paintings were a guide into the world of show and duplicity. Painting was the only safe place for me, a place of truth, a refuge. The only place where I could really be myself" (98). The novel concludes with Frida, like Okuni in Ariyoshi's text, in constant pain and no longer able to work. Her "body was being eroded by infection and … [her] spirit was being eroded by drugs" (157). She chooses to take her own life by overdosing on her medication (162). Drakulić writes, "she was no longer the Frida they knew because what was now was not her. Only her paintings were her" (162), suggesting, once again, the powerful nature of art as a subversive means for women to express themselves.

Maestros as False Idols: Sisters as Rivals

Novels like Katherine Govier's *The Printmaker's Daughter* (2011)–in which Oei, the daughter of renowned Japanese artist Hokusai, renounces traditional domesticity by committing herself to her art, remains faithful, at the same time to the will of her father by relinquishing any credit for her work–confirm that the

choice between art or love and a family is at the centre of many women's historical novels. As a whole, these narratives are about sacrifice and suggest that a pursuit of art comes at a romantic and often reproductive cost: the two appear irreconcilable. In all of the novels discussed in this chapter, the quest for artistic genius is at the forefront of each woman's mind. This quest, however, becomes complicated by the men, considered maestros, in each woman's life.

Samantha Haigh clarifies:

> Women are thus unable to relate to each other as subjects, nor can they experience desire in their own right. They must exist in a mode of masquerade, experiencing desire only as it is situated by male desire, and relating to other women only via men. Rivalry for the desire of men, is for Irigaray a prime example of such a female relationship, and it is a rivalry which begins with mother and daughter. (63)

Most of these novels describe an older, wealthy, and prominent figure, a god, a replacement father, a maestro, in relation to a younger, poor, inexperienced and emerging woman artist.

In Ferré's novel, Pavlova's husband Dandré fulfills this role and in Corona's novel *The Four Seasons*, the Maestro is Vivaldi, whom Maddalena secretly loves (361). Gwen John, in Forster's novel, for example, has a secret and passionate affair with the sculptor Rodin. As Rodin's lover, however, Gwen's drive to create her own art dwindles: "Alarmingly, she had no desire to produce any work at all. She no longer wanted to paint. Why should she? She was happy

and fulfilled without striving to convey emotion and feelings to canvas. It was enough to pose for her master–she liked to call him that, *mon maître*–and make love with him afterward" (Forster 56). When Rodin distances himself, Gwen wonders if life would have "meaning without her master at the center of it? But he was not at the center now, perhaps never had been" (66). Without Rodin, however, Gwen completes some of her best work, a theme echoed in Ariyoshi's *Kabuki Dancer* and Drakulić's *Frida's Bed*.

Frida, problematically, also refers to her future husband, Diego Riviera, as the *Maestro* and makes him the center of her world. When the Maestro, "the most famous painter and ladies' man in all of Mexico" (Drakulić 38), visits her studio, he asserts her artistic talent. Drakulić comments that "after art, politics was the second most important thing in his life, but for her … ideology was less important than the opportunity it gave them to be together" (30). She continues, "In those first years of marriage Frida only dabbled in painting. She was untrue to herself, ignoring her talent, the very thing that had captivated the Maestro. He became more important to her than painting" (40). Even "the papers wrote about her as his charming wife, not as a painter" (41). Coming to terms with the Maestro's womanizing and affairs, including with her own sister, Frida realizes:

> What a waste of time … I took away from my painting, the only thing I cared about, to make him love me, to seduce him, to be by his side" … There was no balance in our relationship. It was me who needed him, me who was always hungry, always wanting attention, wanting reassurance. In my world, he was the source of

> light and warmth. He was my food, my drug. He was my obsession.
> Why did I let myself become so utterly dependent on him? (74-75)

In all of the novels discussed here, the artist's romantic life is challenged by their lovers' affairs with other women. In both *Frida's Bed* by Drakulić and *Kabuki Dancer* by Ariyoshi, however, the other woman is a younger sister.

In Ariyoshi's novel, the protagonist Okuni, a pivotal founding member of Japanese Kabuki, meets her lover's secret wife, Oan, in Kyoto 1591. Having recovered from a miscarriage with Sankuro's child (Ariyoshi 69), Kabuki stays near Shijo Bridge where she and her troupe meet Oan, Sankuro's legal wife (91, 93). Okuni slowly realizes, "this is Sankuro's house. This is where he stays when he comes to Kyoto. I've been in a fool" (92); likewise Oan learns that the much younger Okuni is her husband's lover (93). Okuni "wanted to shout, I've won, Sankuro is mine, he will never leave me" (94). Okuni pragmatically says, "Please understand. Sankuro plays the drum and I dance. Sankuro doesn't want to change this. He and I will never be apart. You must understand this" (95). Following Okuni's proclamation, Oan disappears "like a ghost" (95). In Drakulić's work, Frida also "steals" the Maestro away from his former wife Lupe and marries him (34). Drakulić notes that "her victory would be short-lived" (37) as she soon learns the bitterness Lupe feels when the Maestro sleeps with not only many other women but also her younger sister Kity.

The sister is an ambivalent literary figure; she is simultaneously loved and envied. Frida describes going to inform Maestro that she is pregnant (her third time as she has miscarried twice before) but, when she opens the door to

Maestro's studio, she sees them together (Drakulić 66): "She [Kity] was lying in the bed, naked, beautiful –so much more beautiful than Frida. … For the first time Frida saw her sister through the Maestro's eyes, the eyes of a man and an artist" (68). Bárbara Mujica's *Frida* (2001), for example, is written from Kity's point of view, because she often gets overshadowed by Frida. Frida sees Kity's youth, physicality, and fecundity as juxtaposed with her own illnesses, disabilities, and infertility. She knows that Maestro has lovers, but when she discovers Kity is one if them "something inside Frida changed forever" (69). Following the betrayal, Frida cuts Kity, for all intents and purposes, out of her life. Diana Wallace, though focusing on British novels (1914-39), calls these situations, which "set up a test of gender loyalty" and involve two women and a man, an "erotic triangle" (*Sisters and Rivals* 5); "the rival sisters novel is a special version of the triangle novel where the complex play of similarity and difference between women is doubly intensified" (*Sisters and Rivals* 8). This type of rivalry occurs in both Drakulić's and Ariyoshi's work on women artists.

Wallace's insights that "blood sister relationships so often conflict with the ideal of sisterhood" and that there is a "tension between similarity and difference, closeness and separation, friendship and rivalry" (*Sisters and Rivals* 7) are relevant. Drakulić describes Frida's condition as "an empty womb, wounds, back pain and the feeling of having been completely abandoned" (72). Dejected, Frida moves out of her apartment adjoining the Maestro's and takes up a series of lovers, including Leon Trotsky (108). In the cathartic painting *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, Frida sits, holding a pair of scissors: "She has

already chopped off the long silky mane that the Maestro loved so much and black locks of hair are strewn all over the floor. … She is dressed like a man again. She is punishing the Maestro. Your Frida is gone, Frida is telling him in the picture" (Drakulić 78). A similar situation occurs to Okuni after her sister Okiku joins her and Sankuro's troupe (Ariyoshi 159).

Okuni trains her sister in song and dance and the pair perform to much acclaim until Okiku catches the eye of a certain Lord Tokio (Ariyoshi 182). Propositioned to prostitute herself to Lord Tokio, Okuni argues that "being a *kabuki* dancer isn't a disgrace" but an art, and one which does not entail selling one's body for money (183). Okiku refuses to listen and the relationship between sisters becomes strained. Sankuro, however, admires Okiku's determination. Okiku tells Sankuro, "Okuni doesn't have ambition. I'm different. I want to do better than dance in *this* place … I'm younger than Okuni. Teach me. I can dance to your drum better than she does" (189). During a particular performance in which Sankuro displays his affection for Okiku, Okuni hears the audience clapping: "She fought to keep calm. It was not just Okiku's success. She thought of the hot summer when Oan had been driven to madness. Okuni had been younger than Oan and Sankuro had needed her. She had driven Oan away" (195). She resolves, "I am not Oan. I won't go mad. I won't be driven away by Okiku" (195). Like Frida who sees Kity and the Maestro together, Okuni sees Okiku and Sankuro making love under the stage (199) and is described by Ariyoshi as "exhausted from running, empty, her emotions washed away. She

knew now that all things in this world change … Her anger toward Sankuro was gone; her grudge against Okiku had been washed away" (200).

> As a final act of cleansing, Okuni realizes that because she and Oan and Okiku were women they suffered, and because Sankuro was a man, he did not. I want to be a man, she thought, and then shuddered, as if she had touched some deeply hidden, unconscious yearning. Not hesitating for an instant, she combed back her long, straight hair and cut it to shoulder-length with a knife. … She ignored the woman's kimono Omatsu had laid out for her. Instead she put on the large man's kimono Kanbei had given Sankuro, but which he had never worn. (201)

This symbolic and cathartic gesture signals Okuni's transformation. When Okuni's troupe moves on to Kitano, Okiku and Sankuro stay behind and the sisters never see one another again (251).

While the rift between Okuni and Okiku is permanent and Okiku later dies an ignoble death in Yanagi Ward (the prostitute's district) (Ariyoshi 292), Frida forgives and reconciles with both the Maestro and Kity (Drakulić 159). Admitting the betrayal "shattered all [her] illusions" (159), she notes of the Maestro:

> You were my obsession, my fixation. I equated your name with happiness. Of course you couldn't work miracles, because it wasn't in your power. It is my fault, Maestro, that I turned you into a god, gave you the role of the god and then was disappointed when you

> didn't act like one. What a poor little fool your Frida is, so unbearably demanding, so unbearably unhappy. (154)

As Frida prepares to die, she recounts with tenderness Kity's devotion through her life-long battle with illnesses and operations and blames herself for loving the Maestro too much; though she also recognizes that, without this love, her artistic genius, evident in her paintings, might never have been expressed.

Conclusion

Women's historical novels on artists emphasize continual anxieties about the role of the woman artist in society. Artists are rule breakers, nonconformists, and their work is often politically charged. Choosing to be an artist, these works suggest, comes at the expense of marriage and children. Love and a family block artistic expression, so procreation is manifested through art and artistic production. There is a questioning of the woman as sexual object, as she is molded by the men/maestros in her life (both off-stage-canvas-page and on-stage-canvas-page) and she struggles to become a subject in her own right. Feminist novels recuperate women who, against the odds, were able to commit their lives to art. At the same time there is a discomfort with the lengths each woman goes to in order to achieve her goal, such as having to sacrifice love and family. This implicit criticism and dissatisfaction with patriarchal society is evident when analyzing from a transnational perspective the femino-centric topics of dance as transcendence, orphans, education, theater and politics, subversive women, and false idols. Within patriarchy, women artists in a variety

of mediums ranging from dance, opera, film, theater, and literature, have been ignored, belittled, exploited, and forgotten. The woman's historical novel effectively re-evaluates women's work and establishes an alternative maternal genealogy that combats and contests patriarchal control not only over the art-world but also women's lives in general.

POSTSCRIPT

This comparative study on the contemporary woman's historical novel (post 1970) suggests that a transnational feminist perspective is most suitable for studying the medium. No longer are women novelists writing from a specific national origin nor are they focusing on a single nation in their works; instead, women writers are exploring lives both past and present that travel beyond and contest national borders. Gender, rather than nationality, is the common thread that ties the works in this genre together. Thus, a sense of gender solidarity or a gender consciousness, which I deem a maternal genealogy, experienced within and outside of the text crosses and defies national boundaries. Women's historical novels, furthermore, reject masculine master narratives, which erase or downplay women's contributions to history. Like postmodern theories of history, the novels also challenge what constitutes history and who makes history, but, unlike postmodernism, women's writing is unique because it holds onto a shared sense of gender and historical reality. Continuing to acknowledge and analyze this transnational corpus is, therefore, imperative in creating a transnational feminist knowledge project and for expanding and updating the genre. By revealing how the contemporary woman's historical novel creates a maternal space or matria within the genre of historical fiction, an unexamined women's literary tradition and its recent development is recognized. This study contends that previous scholarly criticism has been inadequate in understanding women's historical fiction and specifically how writing back through our mothers is a political act which has the power to contest and disrupt patriarchal history,

literature, and society. An initial foray, this feminist project creates a transnational maternal genealogy of contemporary women's historical fiction, but there is still much more work to be done.

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