THINKING THROUGH THE (M)OTHER:
READING WOMEN'S MEMOIRS OF LEARNING

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Abstract

In this dissertation I examine the dilemma that for a girl to become a separate and thinking self she must at once identify with and repudiate her mother. Reading closely psychoanalytic theories of learning, language, gender, and subjectivity, I demonstrate that a girl's capacity to think and symbolize begins in an infantile and conflicted relation to her mother. I inquire into how this dilemma complicates the affective stakes of the intellectual life for women, arguing that this conflict at the origin of thinking and symbolization puts the intellectual woman at risk of estrangement from her own gendered identifications. To study the dimensions of this problem, and to consider how it haunts the conflicts women confront in their work in the university, I examine academic women's memoirs published in and around the "Memoir Boom" of the 1990s (Gilmore, 2001; Miller, 1997). I employ psychoanalytic and symptomatic reading to notice how each memoir I've chosen tells a story about the ambivalence at the heart of a woman's commitment to a life of the mind (Britzman, 2009; Gallop, 1992). Psychoanalytic theories of matricide, reparation, and entrance into language organize my readings of the memoirs. I argue that the memoirs both describe and enact the academic woman's gendered dilemma, the paradox of identification and repudiation that structures a woman's capacity to think, read, and write. With this study I contribute to feminist conversations about women in higher education by insisting that the vicissitudes of the inner life affect women's sense of belonging and 'at-home-ness' in the academy. I argue that since the capacity to think is haunted by the first conflict that the mother's otherness poses for the self, women – including, or even especially, feminist scholars – cannot solve the problem of conflict through thinking. Instead, we must examine how the conflicts originating in the inner life organize our objects of intellectual inquiry. To demonstrate this point, I consider how my own subjective history of aggression and gratitude inform the dissertation itself.

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So I find myself, from the start, faced with something of a paradox: my mother is both here and not here. And perhaps, despite the conundrum, this is actually a good place to start.
– Lynne Huffer, 1998, p. 1

Introduction: The Academic Woman's Gendered Dilemma

Women academics must negotiate a difficult dilemma. A woman's life as a thinking and symbolizing subject begins in an infantile relation to her mother. And yet, to pursue a passion for her work of thinking and symbolization she must demand a kind of independence – a separateness – from her mother. In order to establish a mind of her own, a woman must tear herself away from her mother. As thinking women we confront this ambivalent structure: how can we avow our indebtedness to our mothers while also insisting upon our capacity to use what they have given us in order to make for ourselves a new kind of world? Because a woman's subjective identity is tethered to her mother, and because her thinking life is contingent on separating from her mother, the life of the mind always puts her at risk of estrangement from her gendered self. This dilemma drives our intellectual work of reading and writing and indeed, is our object of inquiry, par excellence.

In this study I investigate the ways in which the psychical dramas which structure the mother-daughter relationship repeat in women's experiences of a life of the mind. Motherhood not only offers a fertile metaphor for thinking about generational conflict in the academy or how we rely on the labour of others to forge our own successes, for instance; our literal experiences of being mothered also shape our capacity to understand ourselves as thinking subjects. A woman's thinking life forever carries with it the complex history of her psychical relationship with her mother. This psychical relationship includes a violent destruction of the mother, one that is necessary to the infant's ability to recognize her own subjectivity. But this destruction has its

price, particularly for the girl child whose self is modelled upon the parent whom she must destroy. Julia Kristeva (2000/2001) recommends that we turn to psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's work to think about this conundrum, for Klein's theory describes "the pain that precedes the capacity to symbolize that same pain in order to get beyond it and to re-create that infinite fantasy known as life" (p. 14). Klein can help us to consider the terrible guilt that attends the inauguration of our thinking lives, and the concomitant pleasure that such a life can bring us. In this dissertation I ask: how does this difficult and deeply ambivalent psychical history *feel* as it structures and informs a woman's sense of herself as a thinker? Where do we see evidence in women's academic careers of the way that the mother – and our destruction of her – inhabits our thinking lives? And, given these conditions of our thinking, what does it mean for a woman to pursue an intellectual life?

Madeleine Grumet (1988) brings into sharp relief the gendered stakes of the need to separate from the mother: "The male repudiates those feelings and actions that he associates with femininity in order to achieve maleness; the female repudiates her mother in order to participate in the public world" (p. 170). The particular trouble for the girl subject is that in separating from her mother, she separates from the beloved parent to whom her processes of gendered identification as a subject are tethered. Thus, the dilemma: in the course of the girl's developing subjectivity – and as a condition of entering and leaving her mark on the world – she must repudiate the subject whom she is also charged with becoming. In her (1988) book *Bitter Milk*, Grumet notes that this paradox which lies at the heart of the individual girl's subjective development echoes through women's academic lives. For instance, although in *Bitter Milk* she argues for education's return to the mother and her body, Grumet must also acknowledge that her academic authority to advocate for this return is tangled up in education's institutional disavowal

of the mother's body. Grumet's call for a pedagogy and epistemology that begins here – with the admission of the mother's erotic body and the labour of reproduction – is only legible because it exists within an academic context which functions through what she calls "masculine epistemology" (p. 16). In other words, Grumet recognizes that her avowal of the significance of the mother to thinking is contingent first on her repudiation of her.

To investigate how this conundrum plays out as a condition of women's work in the academy, I bring psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity and language into conversation with some of the preoccupations that constitute the field of women in higher education. I explore how the inner world both shapes and haunts the thinking woman's subjectivity, providing a new way to examine the conflicts and desires which, as women, we encounter in our academic labour. I ask: how do women navigate the risk of gendered alienation we might feel in relation to our work in the university, an institutional context that tends to be organized around a male norm of experience? And, in light of this risk of alienation, how can we understand the intellectual woman's longing for, pleasure from, and passion about, a life of the mind? I ask how the very possibility for women's identifications as academics begins from unconscious, conflicted relations to gender and language which make tenuous the subject position of the thinking woman.

While the questions of where thinking comes from and of what those origins have to do with one's gendered subjectivity can be posed of any intellectual pursuit, for the purposes of this study and its scope I primarily explore the implications of these questions within the terrain of the humanities, or of what Jane Gallop (1992) terms the "literary academy" (p. 3). This choice reflects my interest in examining the gendered stakes of a passion for language specifically, of a desire to make a career from language. I further focus my attention on the broad field of the

humanities by considering a particular subset thereof – that which Miglena Nikolchina (2004) describes as the "feminist discursive field" (p. 5). Certainly, not all women working in the academy or in the humanities are feminist scholars, and even the theorists included in this study do not necessarily all identify as feminists. Yet, each theorist here offers us new ways to think about gender identity and equality, and most center questions in their work that are pertinent to women's lives. I'm interested in the way that the structure of the academic woman's dilemma – the problem of her dependence and independence in relation to her mother – repeats in the kinds of familiar conflicts that can structure the experience of the academy itself for women. As a kind of case study of the dilemma's implications, I examine these repetitions particularly as they affect feminist theory as a discursive field, and Women's Studies as an academic (inter)discipline in the university.

In fact, the case study plays an important role in this dissertation. In her (1986) book, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, Carolyn Kay Steedman offers this description of the case study:

> The written case-study [– the narrative form that Freud is described as inventing –] allows the writer to enter the present into the past, allows the dream, the wish or the fantasy of the past to shape current time, and treats them as evidence in their own right. In this way, the narrative form of case-study shows what went into its writing, shows the bits and pieces from which it is made up, in the way that history refuses to do, and that fiction can't. Case-study presents the ebb and flow of memory, the structure of dreams, the stories that people tell to explain themselves to others. (pp. 20-1)

Steedman makes a case for memoir as one such study of the ways in which our inner lives give shape to all of our (hi)stories and affect the ways that we tell those stories. If the broad discursive fields of feminist theory and Women's Studies work as institutional cases in this study, I read memoirs by academic women as more particular and intimate case studies for examining how it feels to live the academic woman's gendered dilemma, and how that dilemma structures a

woman's capacity to narrate her life of the mind. While the dilemma is my object of inquiry in this dissertation, women's memoirs are my objects of study.

In this introductory chapter I begin by asking what it means to use psychoanalytic theory to conceive of the gendered subject of the thinking woman. Next, I explore some conversations occurring among feminist theorists studying women in higher education. I argue that conflict is built into our very capacity to understand ourselves as thinking women. A psychoanalytic theory of conflict offers the field of women in higher education a way to understand how ambivalence structures the affective experience of the intellectual life for women. I then turn to a discussion of my methodological choices in this dissertation, and particularly to my use of memoir for studying the academic woman's gendered dilemma. And finally, I include outlines of my chapters.

Psychoanalysis and the Question of Gender

According to Joan Wallach Scott (2011), psychoanalytic theory asks us to approach the concept of gender as an interminable question, rather than as a determined meaning capable of explaining a definite set of truths about the world. Scott writes that as a feminist historian, she has felt dissatisfied with her past uses of the concept of gender, which often gets "treated as a known referent instead of a way to get at meanings that are neither literal nor transparent" (p. 5). Psychoanalysis, she contends, can help us conceive of gender in its "mutability" and ambiguity because "It's a theory that posits sexual difference as an unresolvable dilemma" (p. 5). Nancy Chodorow (1978) agrees that "Psychoanalysis developed out of the discovery that there was nothing inevitable in the development of sexual object choice, mode, or aim, nor was there innate masculinity or femininity" (p. 154). Though she espouses this view of psychoanalytic theory as capable of preserving gender's ambiguity, however, Chodorow herself has been critiqued for

using psychoanalysis to understand the origins of some very conventional stories about gender. In her (1978) book *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow asks how women come to mother. She argues that the reproduction of mothering can be explained by the internalization of social norms and structures and that these very structures, and the processes of their internalization, can be understood through psychoanalytic theories of personality development. According to Chodorow, mothers reproduce mothering by raising girls whose sense of self is organized through relationality and care-giving, and boys who understand their selves through structures of individualism and competitiveness. When *The Reproduction of Mothering* was first published, some feminist scholars directed critiques at Chodorow's study of gender, arguing that through her use of psychoanalytic theory, Chodorow does not account carefully enough for how gender is a social category and how our sense of a gendered self is profoundly influenced by social structures and their material consequences. For instance, Adrienne Rich (1980) argues that Chodorow elides the significance of the social reproduction of compulsory heterosexuality for women in her discussion of the reproduction of mothering, writing that "Chodorow's account barely glances at the constraints and sanctions which, historically, have enforced or insured the coupling of women with men and obstructed or penalized our coupling or allying in independent groups with other women" (p. 636). Rich's point is that Chodorow reproduces normative gender scripts by inadequately interrogating how femininity and heterosexuality get bound together through matrices of sexism and power. Rich's concern is that Chodorow's use of psychoanalytic theory renders natural certain assumptions about femininity, including the relation between femininity and heterosexuality, a relation Rich regards as politically and socially organized. In her critique that Chodorow's use of psychoanalytic theory reifies what she calls "a mystical/biological heterosexual inclination" for women, Rich points to a common worry that

psychoanalytic theory renders simple and stable, rather than complex, the experience of living in the world as a sexed and gendered subject (p. 637).

Scott (2011), who views psychoanalysis as giving us precisely a vocabulary for gender's complexity, reads psychoanalytic theory as a description, rather than a prescription, of human behaviour. Like other enigmatic objects and concepts that psychoanalysis describes, Chodorow (1999) explains that in *The Reproduction of Mothering* she is "not describing a universal or essential story but a pattern" of how the subjective experience of gender often manifests in the social world (p. xv). Defending Chodorow's work against criticisms of gendered stereotyping or essentialist assumptions, Grumet (1988) reminds us that though "Chodorow's patterns may not provide the score for my song of motherhood or for yours[,]…the tune of her theory may remind us of our own perhaps unsung tunes and theories" (p. 11). Resonating with the views of Scott and Chodorow, Grumet goes on: "That is the way that general interpretations function in psychoanalysis" (p. 11).

I argue that women's gendered processes of making a thinking self involve identifying with the mother's feminine position, but also necessarily separating from and repudiating that position. In this argument I am implicitly indebted to Chodorow (1978) who posits that while boys come to view the mother as other, an object of desire whose lines from the self are distinctly drawn, girls experience an on-going intensity in their relationship to their mothers because of their identification with her. Even as girls separate from her in the course of their growing up, these lines of the self remain blurred (see also Grumet, 1988). Like Chodorow I, too, seek to describe and better understand a gendered social and psychic pattern: the pattern around which I've organized my inquiry concerns what we can know about the ambivalent origins and conditions of thinking for women. In these ways I identify, through my work, with Chodorow's

story of gender. Given that Chodorow's work raised significant questions for feminist scholars like Rich, it's important to scrutinize how I use psychoanalysis to consider gender. Does my study of gender hold open the possibilities that psychoanalysis promises for reading gender as mutable and ambiguous, or does it foreclose those possibilities?

Scott's (2011) description of gender's enigmatic status is helpful for articulating both what I imagine is at stake in my project of the academic woman's subjectivity, but also the limits of my very use of the category of 'Woman' to undertake that project:

> Gender is…not the assignment of roles to physically different bodies, but the attribution of meaning to something that always eludes definition. What psychoanalysis helps illuminate is the ultimate unknowability of sexual difference and the nature of the quest for knowledge of it, by way of fantasy, identification, and projection. The vertigo that ensues for the [scholar] deprives her of the certainty of her categories of analysis and leaves her searching only for the right questions to ask. (p. 6)

Scott's reading of psychoanalytic theory invites self-reflexivity. At the outset, here are some of my questions for psychoanalysis about gender: How and when does gender get woven into the fabric of how we understand our selves? How – or perhaps why – is language inadequate to the task of saying something meaningful about gender, and what could that inadequacy have to do *with* gender? What or who do I mean by 'Woman,' the gendered category with which I persistently identify throughout this work by my use of personal pronouns? What fantasies organize my identifications when I lay claim to that category? What is the relationship between the trouble psychoanalysis poses for the category of 'Woman' – that there is nothing innate about such a category – and the critique that has been levied at that category by feminist scholars, that 'Woman' is an "ideological composite other constructed through…discourses," which cannot hold the heterogeneity of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability that constitutes the lives of actual women (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19)? What kind of difference can my psychoanalytic

orientation for thinking about gender allow, and what kind of difference might it elide? Does my choice to study feminist women academics in particular entail a collapse of 'Woman' with 'feminist' throughout this work? What could that collapse be symptomatic of, or, what is the gendered wish bound up in such a slippage?

In this and other studies that examine the impossible category of 'Woman,' we should read too-certain or prescriptive or essentialist or overdetermined statements about gender as indicating a wish, fantasy, or question about gender, that "unresolvable dilemma" which drives "the quest for knowledge of it" (Scott, 2011, p. 5; p. 6). At times, and regardless of my intentions to use psychoanalytic theory to hold open the concept of gender, my work with the category of 'Woman' might reinscribe normative stories about gender: can we read these slips as performative of the very theory I advance here? For, as I explore throughout this study, refusing the infinite subjective possibilities – the otherness – to which 'gender' and 'Woman' might refer is one way to defend against the threat that the (m)other's difference poses to the self.

Women in Higher Education

My work in this dissertation with the significance of the mother's otherness for the thinking woman's self joins and contributes to existing conversations occurring among and between feminist scholars who theorize women's roles in the literary academy. In this section I reflect on how my study informs and is informed by four such conversations. First, I ask how feminist studies of women in higher education think about the project of gender equity in the university. I argue that questions about the achievement of gender equity must include questions about how we live gender as an affective experience. Second, following the conception of gender as a question of affect, I inquire how it feels for women to seek a place for ourselves in the university: what would it mean for a woman to feel at home in higher education? Next, I turn to

feminist debates about the roles of conflict and difference for feminist scholarship: must we overcome conflict and difference in order to work well with one another, or are conflict and difference essential to our capacity to do new and provocative work? And finally, I examine some recent reflections on the implications of generational conflict for feminist scholarship. That generational conflict is particularly fraught within the history of feminist theory hints at the significance of the conflict that the mother's difference from the self poses for the thinking woman's subjectivity. Throughout this study, I contribute to these interrelated conversations about gender and conflict as they affect women's experience of higher education by inquiring into the affective conditions of women's intellectual labour, and examining the effects of those ambivalent origins.

An urgent question organizes the feminist field of women in higher education: how can we achieve gender equity in academia? Despite the implementation of policies to limit institutionalized discrimination against women, the lived reality for women in the university is that gender inequity remains alive and well (Glazer-Raymo, Townsend & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). For instance, Judith Glazer-Raymo (2008) points out that in 1972 the United States passed the Higher Education Act (HEA), which "[extended] equal employment opportunity, equal pay, and anti-bias laws to women at all covered colleges and universities" (p. 2). In spite of this enshrinement of gender equality in law and policy, Glazer-Raymo notes that, particularly with the on-going decline of tenure-track employment, women continue to experience academic labour as more precarious than men. Women must also navigate the conditions of university work which are implicitly organized around a male norm: writing forty years after the passage of the HEA, Elizabeth Currid-Halkett (2012) warns against a "troubling talent drain" as junior female scholars increasingly withdraw from academia because they feel that, for women

specifically, a successful career in the academy is at odds with the possibility of family life (online). In her (1989) essay, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering," Elizabeth Ellsworth identifies the problem that liberatory discourses – she is concerned specifically with the discourse of critical pedagogy – cannot address the affective experience of feeling marginalized within the institution as long as those discourses are rooted in dominant norms of experience. Glazer-Raymo, Barbara K. Townsend and Becky Ropers-Huilman, editors of the (2000) collection, *Women in Higher Education*, point out an important shift in feminist policy analyses which resonates with Ellsworth's findings: "Feminist policy analyses have evolved from critiques of discriminatory practices and incremental policy modifications replicating traditional social science techniques to assertions that conventional approaches used to describe and explain the policy cycle are gendered" (p. xii). The disparity between the purported intentions of policy and the affective reality of women's work in the university demands that we ask: what would gender equity in higher education look like, beyond such quantifiable factors as women's representation in faculty, administrative, and student bodies, pay equity between women and men, or the implementation of policies pertaining to sexual harassment or maternity leave, for instance? Gender equity must be more complex than policy alone can allow. Gender and its conflicts have *affective* implications for women in the university, not only material implications; in addition to considering what equity in higher education would look like, we need a way to theorize what it would *feel* like. Although my work in this study is not to offer specific strategies for effecting social change toward increased gender equity in the university, I contribute to this conversation by arguing that women's experience of academic life has affective dimensions which shape our sense of belonging in the university. Because of the complexity of the inner

world of gender, thinking and language, questions of policy and representation alone cannot paint the whole picture of women's experiences of higher education.

Nancy K. Miller (1997) poses enigmatic and affective questions about the possibility of gender equity in higher education: "Can a woman, more precisely, *how* can a woman be at home in the university? Or can't she?" (p. 983). Like gender, "home" is an affective concept; Miller's questions suggest that women occupy an ambivalent relation to the university. They remind us that "home" is both a place of belonging and pleasure and one of dissatisfaction and estrangement. Home is also a gendered concept. Grumet (1998) explores the relationship between home and school and the gendered implications of that relationship where home is the domestic, feminine and familial realm, and school is the child's introduction to the public, masculine realm. Going to school entails the child leave her mother in order to meet her father out in the world:

> Mothers, responsible for the daily existence of their children and intimately connected to them through the experience of conception, gestation, birth, and nurture send children to school so that they and the children can venture into the world and become independent of one another. Fathers, for whom paternity is inferential and transitive, always mediated by the body of the woman, long to claim their children. They send their children to school so that they can learn the names and laws of the public world and appropriate the identities that the fathers have constructed for them. (p. 24)

Although Grumet describes the experience of children leaving home to attend school, I extend her discussion to ask: what compels a woman to make a career from this experience of leaving home to attend school? Under these gendered circumstances, can school become a home for women intellectuals? What is lost and what is gained when we leave home to go to school? By exploring the extent to which a woman can feel at home in the university, we can begin to

theorize how women's experiences in academia are not just governed by policies, they are structured by affect.

The ambivalence inherent to an individual woman's capacity to feel at home in the university repeats in the uneasy positions that feminist theory and Women's Studies occupy within the academy. Introducing *Women in Higher Education*, Glazer-Raymo, Townsend, and Ropers-Huilman (2000) note that many feminist theorists of higher education ask what institutionalization does to feminism and what feminism does to the institution. For instance, Jane Gallop (1992) contends that feminist theorists often reject the institution of the university as 'home,' believing that institutionalization ruins feminism. Gallop comments upon the irony of this feminist position:

> The word 'academic' itself is more often than not pejorative rather than descriptive. I notice that academic feminists accuse other academic feminists of being 'academic.' This sort of aggressive dissociation clouds our understanding of how we got here. None of us just woke up one day to discover that she had a Ph.D., a full-time academic job, much less tenure. This disavowal of the academic also deflects us from the question of what we ought to and could do now that we have a voice within the institution. We don't seem very able to theorize about how we speak, as feminists wanting social change, from within our positions in the academy. (p. 4)

Feminists' and feminism's relation to the academy as home is ambivalent; Gallop's reflections on women's institutional complicity – no one just wakes up to discover a set of institutionally recognized accomplishments – evokes the university as at once a site of belonging and a site of estrangement for women. Ann Braithwaite, Susan Heald, Susanne Luhmann, and Sharon Rosenberg (2004) contemplate how the intellectual and institutional project of Women's Studies absorbs and projects the ambivalence of the scholars whom it houses. Braithwaite, Heald, Luhmann and Rosenberg argue that Women's Studies is such a fraught field because it is made from conflict, including from conflicts with institutionalism itself. The authors encourage us to

interrogate these conflicted conditions of Women's Studies and feminist theory as a way to better understand the affective problem of a sense of unhomeliness for women in the university.

What would it be to think of conflict and difference not as obstacles to our capacity to work as women academics both together and alone, but rather as the very grounds of possibility for our academic work? Jessica Fields (2013) agrees that conflict is integral for feminist communities, including intellectual ones: "Feminist activists and scholars are routinely in conflict with one another, even as we share aims, convictions, and commitments. Our conflicts help to generate, direct, and amend our concerted movements toward intellectual insight and social change" (p. 492). Without conflict there would be no impetus to thinking or action. The conflicts which shape feminist scholarship enact a repetition of the conflict that inaugurates a woman's very capacity to think and to symbolize: the first conflict with the mother and the problem of the intolerability of her difference for the gendered self. Conflicts with other feminists can feel so intolerable because the first conflict with the mother feels intolerable; we may rush to resolve these conflicts at the expense of their generative theoretical potential. For instance, Braithwaite, Heald, Luhmann, and Rosenberg (2004) argue that feminist scholars working in the field of Women's Studies often work to disavow the differences and conflicts which constitute that field, but that this work of disavowal is detrimental to the field:

> our major concern…is with how the (what we see as necessarily) multiple narratives of Women's Studies are currently being written out in a number of feminist theorizings, pedagogies and practices, in favour of singular stories and set meanings. Our aim here is not to produce another singular story of the field; rather, each of our essays takes as its starting point the understanding that there are many Women's Studies and that attending to how a multiplicity of identities and positionalities continually redefines this project called Women's Studies is one of the strengths of the field. (p. 29)

The authors notice how stories about the field allow feminist theorists to avoid confronting the way conflict organizes, pushes, and incites their work; "singular stories and set meanings" function to disavow differences among feminist theorists. In her (2011) book *Why Stories Matter*, Clare Hemmings argues that stories about the field of feminist theory fall into particular discursive categories, reinforcing Braithwaite, Heald, Luhmann and Rosenberg's critique of the single story of Women's Studies. Yet, as Hemmings reveals, these reductive discursive categories themselves repeat and perpetuate a conflict which has shaped Women's Studies and feminist theory and praxis from the beginning: generational conflict.

The history of generational conflict within feminist theory again raises the significance of the conflict that the mother's difference from the self poses for the thinking woman's subjectivity. Hemmings (2011) highlights how generational conflict informs the very structure of scholarly feminist conversations and debates. She notices that Western feminist theory tends to proceed along particular discursive lines: narratives of progress and narratives of loss dominate the field. Generational conflict haunts these narrative structures: progress narratives tend to be employed by junior feminist scholars who imagine that Women's Studies is steadily ridding itself of the exclusions that have marked its history. Hemmings argues that theorists who deploy progress narratives cannot notice the debt that they owe to the founding mothers of feminist theory and Women's Studies. In the rush to include, progress narratives exclude the important contributions of the intellectual mothers of the field. Loss narratives, on the other hand, operate through a reversal of this kind of discursive aggression. More senior theorists who tend to draw upon these narratives imagine a loss of intellectual rigour in the field, and of political action. These theorists appear resistant to change in the academic terrain of feminist theory, and resentful that junior scholars take their work in new and unanticipated directions.

Braithwaite, Heald, Luhmann, and Rosenberg (2004) employ the trope of "passing-on" to examine Women's Studies as both a series of gifts and of losses. Junior scholars owe a debt to senior scholars who pass on the legacy of their labour. But "passing-on," in its reference to death and dying, also names the violence of junior scholars toward their intellectual mothers that Hemmings describes with her study of progress narratives. In my dissertation I offer a new way to think about what is at stake in the project of passing-on the possibility of intellectualism between women. I argue that it matters for women's affective experience of education-as-home that our first human difference is from the mother. For a woman whose identifications rely upon alignment with and repudiation of the mother this difference arrives as a violent rift in her gendered subjectivity, in her very sense of being a thinking self. The mother is more than a metaphor for generational difference among academic feminists. Rather, this first difference from the mother fuels the debates that have raged among feminist intellectuals for decades: it is because of our primary difference from our mothers – so crucial to our subjectivity and our capacity to *be* intellectual women – that our conflicted encounters with the differences of our feminist intellectual mothers become so difficult to tolerate. How do we defend against this difference in our work, and where can we see evidence of how our defenses shape and inform the discussions in which we are – often painfully – engaged with one another? I contend that working to identify and tolerate the ambivalence inherent to women's intellectual relationships can hold open the possibility of a new take on our old conflicts.

Methodology: Reading Women's Memoirs of Learning

In her (2004) article, "Literature as Sex Education," Jen Gilbert makes an argument for the novel as a mode of sex education that can hold open ambivalence, ambiguity, curiosity, and questioning, inviting our unruly interpretations and identifications. Extending Gilbert's question

of what the aesthetic object can offer our learning, I ask: what kind of education is the memoir? For Grumet (1988), a curriculum theorist, stories of women's lives offer a kind of life raft on a sea of curriculum theory that is dominated by men and male-oriented concerns. Unsettled by how curriculum studies cannot or will not account for the embodied experience, the sensual and emotional worlds, of learning and knowing, Grumet and her feminist colleagues "turned away from the generalizations and methods of social science as we sought a method and a language to draw these worlds into curriculum theory" (p. xv). Grumet insists on the authority of our personal experiences in the world; after all, education, Grumet reminds us, is "a human project" (p. xv). Susan Heald (2004) agrees that women's memoirs, specifically, are a mode of feminist education, one relevant to my project of attending to gender equity in the university as an affective reality: "women's autobiographies have challenged the sense of men's experience as normative," writes Heald (p. 45). Grumet centres women's experiences in her vision of the feminist's scholarly study, one which does not disavow the body and the emotional world:

> For data we turned to autobiographical accounts of educational experience. For methods of analysis we turned to psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and feminist theories. As we study the forms of our own experience, not only are we searching for evidence of the external forces that have diminished us; we are also recovering our own possibilities. We work to remember, imagine, and realize ways of knowing and being that can span the chasm presently separating our public and private worlds. (p. xv)

Not only for Grumet, but also for feminist memoir theorists such as Helen M. Buss (2002) and Nancy K. Miller (1997), the epistemological significance of the autobiographical form, and of the memoir in particular, is that it can recognize the "complex interrelationships of reason and emotion, self and others, private and public experience," and the mind and body that education, as an institution with a patriarchal tradition, can disavow (Buss, 2002, p. 164). To this list of

"complex interrelationships" that memoir invites us to examine, I add our conscious and unconscious processes.

Resonating with Steedman's (1986) view of the memoir as psychoanalytic case study, Miller (1997) argues that memoirists are "not interested in some simple notion of truth. What matters are stories, stories that can render a certain experience" (p. 990). By reading memoirs as case studies that variously communicate the complex significance of their authors' stories, I not only attend to and analyse the conscious and unconscious movement of the text, but also my own responses, identifications, and refusals as an academic woman reader. To examine the texts in my study I read each one psychoanalytically, becoming a slow reader, a close reader (Britzman, 2009; Gallop, 2011). Deborah Britzman (2009) argues that if we can notice where our attention turns as we read, this movement can tell us something about our inner, affective life – about how it feels to be a reader, and about how reading helps us to think about how we feel. Such a promise is significant to my study which asks how it feels to be a woman whose career has been made from acts of reading and writing.

Jane Gallop's (1992) discussion of her method of "symptomatic reading" elaborates Britzman's concept of psychoanalytic reading. "'[Symptomatic] reading,'" writes Gallop, "squeezes the text tight to force it to reveal its perversities….[It] can be at one and same time respectful, because closely attentive, and aggressive, because it wrests secrets the author might prefer to keep" (p. 7). In its respect and its aggression, symptomatic reading, as a methodology, figures and repeats the central dilemma under examination in my study: the problem of how to repay the great debt we owe to the mother when such repayment requires our repudiation of her. Importantly, Gallop warns that: "The danger in symptomatic reading is that it tends to constitute the reader as having superior awareness, a level of higher consciousness than the poor writers

who provide grist for her mill" (p. 9). One way to mitigate this danger – it cannot be avoided altogether – is to recognize that in my dissertation, while I aggressively reveal the secrets of others, I also reveal secrets that *I* would prefer to keep. As such, Gallop's concept of symptomatic reading reminds me that I am subject to the dilemma I describe, and that in fact, the dilemma shapes my every attempt to describe it.

The memoirs I examine in this dissertation – and my readings of them – describe and enact women's complex relation to subjectivity, learning, and language. They have emerged from in or around what pundits have called the "Memoir Boom" of the 1990s (see Gilmore, 2001; Miller, 1997). For Miller (1997), the memoir boom signals "a return to story" (p. 981); the 'boom' itself suggests that storytelling and narrative have important roles to play today in our thinking and learning about the world. "Whatever the reasons," writes Miller, "[there] seems to be a renewed urgency to add the story of our lives to the public record" (p. 981; p. 982). There is also an urgency to consider the affective stakes of the academic life for women and the memoirs I have selected allow me to explore the relationship between these two senses of urgency.

Writing about the tensions and conflicts that inform feminist and poststructural literary criticism in the early 1990s, Gallop (1992) argues that:

> If it is a contradiction to be an academic feminist literary critic in America in the late twentieth century then that contradiction will manifest itself in our writing. And if certain symptoms recur in a number of feminist critics, these textual symptoms may point to some sort of inner conflict, shared but not sufficiently recognized. (p. 8)

My turn to academic women's memoirs which emerged from the boom that began around the time of Gallop's writing allows me to examine this enigmatic "inner conflict" to which she refers. What symptoms recur for women academics – particularly for feminists – and how might we understand this recurrence? José Esteban Muñoz (2006) notes that when the aesthetic object

resonates with the reader's identifications – conscious and unconscious – "recognition flickers" (p. 680). In this study which draws upon women's memoirs, I employ psychoanalytic reading to follow these "flickers" with the intention of more "sufficiently" recognizing something about the academic woman's gendered dilemma.

Chapter Outlines

The body of my study is composed of four chapters. In Chapter Two, "'She died like this': Matricide and Women's Memoir Writing," I explore the impossible conditions of women's gendered subjectivity and our capacity to think, asking how we negotiate that impossibility in our everyday and intellectual lives. To consider what is at stake in the problem of matricide as the inaugurating condition for women's thinking selves, I enter into a textual conflict between two academic women memoirists, Carolyn Kay Steedman and Helen M. Buss. Through this conflict I examine how the dilemma of matricide as a component of a woman's gendered and thinking self informs her capacity to write critically about the work of other women theorists, and her capacity to represent her "personal mother" in her writing (Buss, 2002, p. 86).

The question of how to represent one's mother in writing is precisely what drives Chapter Three, "The Reparative Narrative: Reading and Righting Our Mothers." In this chapter I turn to the concept of reparation, arguing that the interminable effort to repair for one's inaugurating matricidal act drives women's work of constructing narratives of the self. I consider how crafting aesthetic objects – and memoirs specifically – represents an ambivalent yearning to return to a state of oneness with the mother and her body. In bell hooks's (1997) memoir *Bone Black* I read the liminal images which convey her passion for a life of language and the mind to explore the way that these images also exist in relation to her profound desire to honour her mother. Hooks's memoir is an extended reparative love letter to her mother, and one that seeks to atone for

hooks's refusal to inhabit her mother's life. One of the effects of this refusal is the way in which hooks and her memoir – and indeed her career – are haunted by her mother's absent presence.

In Chapter Four, "Between the Mother-Tongue and the Name-of-the-Father: Women's Dilemma in Language," I extend my analysis to consider how entrance into language, while offering its own compensatory pleasures, nevertheless entails a girl's repudiation of her mother and a turn to her father. Yet, her turn to the father reminds the girl of her femininity and her concomitant estrangement within the symbolic. Alice Kaplan's (1993) *French Lessons*, a memoir about her lifelong passion for language and symbolization, helps me think about this dilemma. In *French Lessons*, Kaplan figures the ambivalence inherent to a woman's passion for language through her description of her futile wish, as an Anglophone, to master French. Kaplan's lament of how she feels not-quite-at-home in the language she longs for signals the unspeakable estrangement from the self at the heart of the intellectual woman's gendered dilemma.

In my fifth chapter, "Feminist Accused of Difference from the Self," I consider what is at stake in one well-known case of women encountering the limits of language in the context of the university. Jane Gallop's (1997) memoir *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* has generated much debate, and I examine one recent critical reading of it, that of Cynthia G. Franklin (2009). According to Franklin, Gallop's behaviour in the course of events that the memoir describes, and her writing of the memoir itself, are symptomatic of her "crisis in authority," one that attends feminism's institutionalization in the academy (p. 144). I argue that Franklin and Gallop and I are all implicated in the tangle of identifications that *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* evokes for the thinking woman. I go on to read Gallop's memoir as a difficult tale of the affective and interpretive casualties that attend a daughter's necessary and violent use and

rejection of her mother in order that she might develop a mind of her own. I argue that *Feminist Accused* packs such an affective punch because it tells a story that feels strangely familiar to any woman making a career out of language.

In Chapter Six, "Thinking Through the Dissertation: Conclusions" I revisit the dilemma and the implications of my analysis. Returning to my questions for psychoanalysis about gender, I ask whether my focus on the relevance of gender to women's lives comes at the expense of important analyses of other human differences. Specifically, I consider how I might better think about the relationship between the social category of race and our processes of subjectivity. I propose that my struggle to integrate critical race theory and psychoanalysis constitutes a site of "difficult knowledge" in my study, and I ask how the analysis I've developed here can help me better make sense of the moments in my work where meaning seems to break down (Pitt & Britzman, 2003). And finally, I conclude with a discussion of conflict and fantasy as necessary to women's intellectual life, reflecting on how conflict and fantasy shape my own work, including my questions for my future study of the academic woman's gendered dilemma.

Thinking through the mother's complex role in a woman's capacity to conceive of herself as an intellectual gives rise to new kinds of questions and objects that can help us better understand the emotional terrain of life in academia for women. The pleasures and conflicts which structure a woman's life of the mind are foundational to her gendered subjectivity: the very origins of women's thinking subjectivity are ambivalent. In this dissertation I theorize the affective world of the academic woman, arguing that such a task is urgent to a woman's capacity – my own included – to make a home in the university.

Chapter Two: "She died like this": Matricide and Women's Memoir Writing

It was so expected and so unimaginable, that dead body lying on the bed in Maman's place….It was still Maman, and it was her absence for ever.
– Simone de Beauvoir, 1964/1965, p. 100.

Introduction

"She died like this" (Steedman, 1986, p. 1). Such is the first line of Carolyn Kay Steedman's memoir, *Landscape for a Good Woman*. Beginning like this, with the death of her mother ("She"), Steedman's memoir allegorizes the significance of the mother's death for the daughter's life-writing. Drawing on the work of Melanie Klein (1937/1964), and on some of the ways in which Klein's concepts have been taken up by Julia Kristeva (2000/2001), Miglena Nikolchina (2004), and Alice Pitt (2004; 2006), in this chapter I argue that it is the psychical event of matricide that inaugurates one's entrance into symbolization, language and subjectivity, and that a study of the affective conditions of women's intellectual and academic work must begin with a consideration of the role of matricide in thinking. Of course, Steedman did not actually kill her mother; "this" does not refer to a literal murder. But that Steedman begins her work of memoir with this statement of her mother's death gestures toward an uncomfortable idea: the possibility that a daughter will write a book rests upon the psychic murder of the mother. Unconscious violence inflicted upon the figure of the mother is a central and gendered condition for women's intellectual success, and this can be a most terrible and difficult condition for the feminist academic woman to ponder.

Pondering the psychical event of matricide as a condition for the daughter's intellectualism is the task of this chapter. Just as the capacity for thought begins with the fantasized murder of the mother (Klein, 1937/1964; Kristeva, 2000/2001; Pitt, 2004; 2006), the substantive work of this dissertation will begin with a thinking-through of the role of matricide

as a formative psychic event in a daughter's life, and of the implications of that act of matricide in the daughter's work. In the first part of this chapter I explore the concept of matricide and some of the ways that it has been drawn upon by theorists to consider women's relationship to the life of the mind. Engaging with this history of the concept, I argue that matricide is a condition of women's intellectual labour and that it has implications for how women who have made a career from a passionate relation to language – that is, out of a love of reading and writing – think and feel about our work. To investigate the dynamics of matricide in women's academic work I go on, in the second part of this chapter, to enter a conversation around Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* in which contemporary feminist academic writers engage (Buss, 2002; Pitt, 2004). I offer my readings of this conversation and of the memoir writing of one of its participants (Buss, 1999). Through my reading practice, which is informed by the methodological concepts of "psychoanalytic reading" (Britzman, 2009, p. 58), and "the bond of reading" (Felman, 1993, p. 14), I demonstrate that thinking about how matricide animates women's reading and writing and our affective relations to these activities can offer us new ways to read one another's life-writing and to read our own affective and theoretical responses to such work.

Between Love and Hate: Matricide and its Relation to Thinking

Melanie Klein, dubbed "the mother of psychoanalysis" by Julia Kristeva (2000/2001, p. 135), allots much significance to the mother in her theorizing (see, e.g., Britzman, 2009; Hinshelwood, Robinson & Zarate, 1997; Kristeva, 1980; 2000/2001). In her (1937/1964) work "Love, Guilt and Reparation," Klein makes a claim that seems very ordinary and self-evident, but which has complex implications for women's experiences of thinking and for our desire to think. Klein writes that "[because] our mother first satisfied all our self-preservative needs and

sensual desires and gave us security, the part she plays in our minds is a lasting one" (p. 59). Indeed, as Kristeva (2000/2001) puts it, "The Kleinian universe…is dominated by the mother" (p. 114). This significance of the mother, considered alongside Kristeva's contention that Klein's "innovation emerged as a *psychoanalysis of the capacity to think*" (p. 43, original emphasis), suggests that Klein's theory offers us a study of the intersection of these two preoccupations of "The Kleinian universe": What is the role of the mother in the development of one's capacity to think? And, what is the gendered significance for women's thinking of the role that the mother plays in one's capacity to think?

Klein (1937/1964) contends that the part that our mother plays in the development and workings of our mind is informed not only by the intense love that as infants we feel towards her, but also by an intense hatred. Our dependency on our mother gives rise both to love and hate which springs from the fear and frustration associated with our dependence. It is in this ambivalently passionate relationship to our mother that Klein locates the inauguration of thinking and its imaginative possibilities:

> The baby's impulses and feelings are accompanied by a kind of mental activity which I take to be the most primitive one: that is phantasy-building, or more colloquially, imaginative thinking. For instance, the baby who feels a craving for his mother's breast when it is not there may imagine it to be there, i.e. he may imagine the satisfaction which he derives from it. Such primitive phantasying is the earliest form of the capacity which later develops into the more elaborate workings of the imagination. (p. 60)

Not all of our phantasies are as creatively benign as this example appears. In fact, even this phantasy, where the baby imagines the devouring satiation from her[1] mother that she craves, is

[1] Although Klein uses masculine pronouns to describe the infant, I use feminine pronouns; after all, it is the girl baby with whom I'm concerned. If my use of feminine pronouns creates confusion between my references to the infant and to the mother, this confusion – and any anxiety it might provoke, whether my own or my readers' – is instructive of the point: separation from the mother gives rise to particular confusion and anxiety for the girl subject, and these affects will certainly manifest in language.

already ambivalent in its intensity: "because this love, during the oral phase, is a love of devouring that is heavily laden with sadistic drives, the feeling of losing the good object is buttressed by a feeling of guilt over having destroyed it by assimilating it" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 76). While the baby imagines devouring the mother out of her love for her and her recognition that she works to satisfy her needs, this love is a sadistic one; the infant's love and dependency are marked by psychical aggression directed toward the mother. And, as Klein (1937/1964) explains, "as soon as aggression wells up he feels he is injuring her" (p. 117). The inaugurating mental activity of the imagination is contingent, furthermore, on deprivation, on a fear of being left alone: "in order to think, one must first lose the mother" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 130). This sense of being left alone implicates the infant in her own abandonment: at the dawn of imaginative thinking, which is conditional on the loss of the mother, the infant imagines that the mother is gone because she has devoured her; she is lost because of her destructive thinking – even while, paradoxically, her thinking is only possible because she has been lost.

Fears and frustrations arise from the infant's early dependence on, and love of, her mother. These include the infant's phantasized fear of the mother's neglect and/or destructive violence toward her, and the twin frustrations that the mother cannot always satisfy the infant's every desire the moment it arises and that she persists in loving others besides just the infant herself (see also Mitchell, 1974). The infant's hatred toward the mother arises from these fears and frustrations, sources of her primary terror (see also Waddell, 1998). From this hatred – a hatred rooted in intense love – emerges the infant's capacity for destructive phantasies, not just creative ones. The infant, in her rage and terror, experiences "unconscious death-wishes" toward the mother (Klein, 1937/1964, p. 85): "In his aggressive phantasies he wishes to bite up and to tear up his mother and her breasts, and to destroy her also in other ways" (p. 61). These infantile

phantasies mark the inauguration of subjectivity: the infant comes to recognize herself as separate from the mother.

Psychoanalyst Donald Meltzer (1984/2004) describes our capacity for imaginative thinking, born from the psychical dynamics that inaugurate our subjectivity, in his concept of the aesthetic conflict. For Meltzer, the aesthetic conflict organizes the human condition: after the baby separates from her mother through the birth process, she wonders unconsciously and interminably about what she would find in the mother's body if she returned there. In fact, for Meltzer, the baby's question "Is it so beautiful inside?", that she asks once she has encountered the world and its sensorial beauty for the first time, "is the very core of what we mean by 'meaning'" (p. 150). Wondering about the inside of the mother's body introduces conceptual thinking to the baby as a human being; we begin to think about what things *mean*, rather than simply experience our world on the "mechanical basis of stimulus/response" (p. 150). But thinking about the inside of the mother's body is a necessarily ambivalent affair because the baby, once born, is subject to the mother's beauty and that of the outside world but is also reminded of the mother's separateness from her self. In this way, pleasure and pain – and the creative and destructive phantasies that accompany these affects – coexist in their relation to the development of the mind, the commencement of thinking. According to Meltzer's theory of the aesthetic conflict our capacity to think and to imagine – spurred by our desires and worries about the insides of the mother – leads to our capacity and our drive to symbolize in the world: "Because the aesthetic conflict entangles doubt with loss and beauty with destruction, imagination – or the capacity to bring what is absent into symbols – must work overtime" (Britzman, 2009, p. 106).

For Klein (1937/1964) the aesthetic conflict and its relation to jealousy and rage (might there be someone whom the mother loves more than me still living inside the mother?) leads to the infant's matricidal phantasies, and these phantasies set in motion the subject's drive to symbolization. Importantly, Klein insists on the affective reality of our phantasies. In her (2006) discussion of Klein's concept of matricide, Alice Pitt agrees: "matricide in the psychoanalytic sense…[conveys] an act that belongs to fantasy but is no less violently felt than if an actual murder had taken place" (p. 87). The felt reality of our matricidal phantasies is important because it is here that our drive to symbolization arises; the "feelings of guilt" we experience after our phantastical destruction of the mother can arouse "wishes to make good" (Klein, 1937/1964, p. 65), and these wishes persist throughout the life of the individual:

> If the baby has, in his aggressive phantasies, injured his mother by biting and tearing her up, he may soon build up phantasies that he is putting the bits together again and repairing her. This, however, does not quite do away with his fears of having destroyed the object which, as we know, is the one whom he loves and needs most, and on whom he is entirely dependent. In my view, these basic conflicts profoundly influence the course and the force of the emotional lives of grown-up individuals. (pp. 61-2)

The drive to repair the psychic destruction we inflict on the mother informs all of our subsequent work in the world: we work to allay our primal guilt. Meltzer's concept of the aesthetic conflict reminds us that we work to re-find the lost maternal object whose beauty we spend our lives searching for and trying to represent in the world; our lives begin with separation from the mother, and are propelled by our efforts to find her again, informed by our worries that she is lost due to our jealousy, hatred, and violence.

Pitt (2006) describes symbolization as our "use [of] language to represent, to ourselves and to others, objects, concepts, and affects" (p. 88). Matricide inaugurates our work of symbolization: we learn to use symbolization to repair in the external world the damage we have

done psychically in the internal world. Our unconscious mind preserves this link between our destruction of the mother, the inauguration of our subjectivity, our capacity for thinking, and our drive to symbolization. We begin thinking in relation to the mother; we phantasize about her as a strategy for living with the fact of her separateness. Creatively, we phantasize the presence of her breast when it is not there, and destructively, we phantasize that we are tearing her apart when she fails to anticipate our desires. These phantasies which mark the beginning of the infant's having of a mind of her own, however, have, paradoxically, to do with the *un*thinkable: the mother's otherness from the self, and the self's violent destruction of the mother. Just as thinking begins at the crossroads of creativity and destruction, symbolization is similarly fraught with ambivalence. Kristeva (2000/2001) explains:

> Klein tells us that the ego seeks whatever means are necessary to create symbols that can become an effective outlet for its emotions, but she also asks herself why it is that we have symbols at all. The answer is simple: it is because the mother is insufficient – precisely because she is incapable of satisfying the child's emotional needs. Get rid of your mother, for you no longer need her: that would be the ultimate message of symbols were they able to explain to us why they exist. (p. 133)

Symbolization is the effort to think the unthinkable, to represent the unrepresentable, and it exists in an uneven relation to time: it allows us to return to the primary and violent scenes that mark the beginning of our lives as thinking subjects. Pitt and Britzman (2003) argue that symbolization returns thoughts long past to our present thinking: "If transference is an obstacle to representing learning in the present, symbolization allows one to return the obstacles to the archaic conflicts they represent" (p. 760). Symbolization returns us to an unrepresentable and murderous past which haunts and informs the present.

In her (2006) work with Klein's concept of matricide Pitt examines her own implication in the processes of infantile destruction, and this examination leads Pitt to gendered connotations

of these processes. Discussing matricide as a psychical event that shapes women's learning and desire to learn, Pitt examines her own history with Madeleine Grumet's feminist text about the role, both literal and psychical, of the mother in education, *Bitter Milk*. Pitt locates the resistance she felt during her first encounter as a graduate student with *Bitter Milk* in a cultural form of matricide; she acknowledges her own complicity in refusing a place in academic culture for women, and specifically the mother, through her early rejection of Grumet's text. Recognizing *Bitter Milk* now as a foundational text for thinking about education from within a feminist and psychoanalytic framework, Pitt theorizes her initial refusal of Grumet's text as a repetition of her infantile experience of the psychical event of matricide that inaugurated her subjectivity. Her original silence around Grumet's text is instructive for Pitt of the problem of "the mother as paradox": although our mothers make symbolization – our capacity for, and means of, representation – possible, the debt which we owe for such possibility is itself the unrepresentable. Silence, our inability to symbolize the work of our intellectual mothers, harkens back to this inaugural paradox. This is how Pitt understands her failure to recognize Grumet's significance from the start, for, "When we think back through those who will become our intellectual mothers, we may remain for some time in a state of wordlessness" (p. 103). The violent conditions which are necessary for women to think, speak, and write, are precisely those about which we must remain, for some time, wordless.

Although, as Pitt points out, matricide is a psychical event that "affects both sexes" (p. 88), her reading of matricide alongside Grumet suggests that, as a psychical event, it has profound effects specifically for women's experiences of learning, for our desire to learn, and for our capacity to tell a story of our learning. Grumet (1988) agrees that separation from the mother inaugurates the subjectivity and capacity for symbolization of both male and female children.

However, drawing on Klein's psychoanalytic framework of object relations theory, Grumet points out that although both the boy and the girl child must separate from their mother in order to understand themselves as subjects, the boy typically finds a model for his subsequent gendered identification processes in the figure of his father. For the girl, however, she must model her processes of identification after her mother, the same figure that, in becoming a subject, she must also separate from. An impossible task falls to the girl child: she must identify with the mother whom she must first destroy. Furthermore, "the girl will grow up to be in the position of the mother (in whatever way – actual or symbolic – she may use it), but the boy will not" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 344, quoted in Pitt, 2006, p. 97).

Kristeva (2000/2001) also explores the question of gender inherent to Klein's theory of matricide as the psychic condition for one's capacity to think and to symbolize. The implications of matricide are different in the lives of boys and men given their later identification with the father. Relative to the boy's conscious and unconscious relationship to the mother, "the little girl's destructive drives against her mother are so intense" (p. 123). The girl will grow up to be in the "actual or symbolic" position of the mother because of the way her gendered subjective identity is structured in relation to her mother and her body. In the course of the development that Freud describes with his story of the Oedipal complex, the boy, whose originary primal relationship to the mother also involved, according to Klein, envious hatred and aggression in relation to her breasts, eventually comes to "[redirect] his hatred toward his father" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 117). This hatred is a function of the boy's identification with the father and represents his developing ability to imagine himself in the role or the place of the father. Yet, for the girl, the mother remains the primary figure in this configuration of envy, hatred, and identification that organizes psychic life. As such, "it is the woman's hatred toward the mother

that endures," which drives women's lifelong "quest for a good object that eventually replaces the envied primordial object" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 118).

For Klein, the breast is the primary object of infancy, and it organizes our early psychical world. Kristeva explains that the father and the infant's fantasies about his body play a role in the early relation of envy, but that role is literally enveloped by the breast; the infant imagines that the mother's breast contains the father's penis and this is what fuels the infant's envious rage. The infant's envy is ignited by her aesthetic conflict: do the contents of my mother's body elude and exclude me? And most of all she feels rage and terror at the intolerable realization that she is not her mother's only object of love: is there someone whom my mother loves more than me still living inside her? The girl hates the mother for loving the father and for keeping his body to herself. The position the father occupies in the family romance is different for the girl who envies the mother's relation to the father, than for the boy who will one day *be* the father, whether "actually or symbolically." The girl directs her sadism toward the mother and, unlike the boy, never redirects it toward the father: "[the girl] engages in 'hate-filled phantasies' about her mother's penis-appendage" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, pp. 122-123).

The interiority of the penis in the breast phantasy is a metaphor for girls' and women's relation to female sexuality which Kristeva has discussed at length (1996/2000). Unlike the penis, an external organ that signifies and renders male sexuality visible and subject to reality-testing, women's sexual organs (like the mother's phantasied "penis-appendage") are interior. Kristeva argues that this difference positions men and women in a divergent relation to the visual and sensorial properties of meaning and meaning-making. Because psychoanalysis posits "the intertwining of sexuality and thought" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 12), the psychical relation to sexuality,

organized around the exteriority or interiority of the sexual organs, affects our thinking in the world and our relation to meaning.

Female sexuality's interiority gives renewed significance for girls and women to the aesthetic conflict. Because interiority is implicated in meaning and meaning-making for girls and women, the question that Meltzer (1984/2004) proposes as at the heart of creativity and the human condition, "Is it so beautiful inside?", takes on a particular interminability relative to female sexuality (p. 150). The girl's *own* female body is implicated in her aesthetic conflict. Pursuing the questions that drive her aesthetic conflict, the girl "[mobilizes]…internal attacks against the enigmatic interior of the mother as well as of the girl herself" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 123). These attacks bring to light the relation, for women, between creativity and the abject, the inherent ambivalence in women's orientation to symbolization and creative representations of the aesthetic conflict. The girl's efforts to at once understand and destroy the interiority of the mother's body – and, by implication, her own – emerge in her investment in creating and controlling her excrement. This is a strategy for exteriorizing the interior. Kristeva explains:

> The mother's interior continues to be the object of her daughter's destructive drives. For a woman, the concomitant of this operation is that the ordeal of reality, which seeks to discern bad objects, takes place within herself. And as for the boy, whose excremental omnipotence is less developed, he invests his penis from a very early stage. (2000/2001, p. 126)

Because girls organize their subjective identifications around the figure of the mother upon whose destruction our thinking and symbolization are contingent, our identifications will always be marked by *self*-destruction. This concept of "excremental omnipotence" signifies how women are ambivalently positioned in relation to our selves: the girl, through her sexual orientation toward interiority, seeks to (re)create the interior of the mother's body by producing something

from out of her own body; this is her attempt to control and render visible the inside. And yet this strategy, in its abjection, has the psychic effect of laying to waste the girl's sense of herself as a subject capable of symbolizing that very thing which *drives* her to symbolize, the beauty of the mother. The beautiful and the abject are inseparable in women's gendered identification with the mother: we devour and destroy her body, and this destruction fuels our attempts – always inadequate, always incomplete – to (re)produce it. This ambivalence is what the fantasy of excremental omnipotence describes.

Can excremental omnipotence offer us a metaphor for the impossible conditions of women's writing lives? The girl's wish to exteriorize her feminine interior in order to represent the beauty of her mother and her self – a wish which manifests in the abject – repeats in women's efforts to represent the mother in writing, in symbolization. The problem with such a wish is that entrance into symbolization already entails the loss – the destruction – of the mother. The woman writer fantasizes that she can control the meaning of what she writes, that she can produce and create something from the depths of her self that will express beauty. Yet she cannot help but also express something of the matricidal conditions of her thinking and writing life. The (2000/2001) work in which Kristeva discusses Klein's concept of excremental omnipotence, the fantasy that binds beauty and the abject, is a biography of Klein's life and of her genius: Kristeva principally focuses on Klein's contributions to psychoanalysis. We might reflect on the conundrum the woman writer faces when she attempts to represent her mother's beauty by examining Kristeva's task. For instance, in her role of analytic biographer, Kristeva makes the case for Klein as crucial to the history and theoretical trajectory of psychoanalysis. Kristeva, a woman analyst, is herself indebted to Klein not only for Klein's theoretical insights, but also for the work she did establishing herself as a woman in a male-dominated field: Kristeva reports that

Klein's detractors "drew attention to the inherent paradox of this woman who wanted to be a master" (p. 30). While Kristeva's interpretations of Klein's professional life represent her as a good mother to the field, her interpretations of her personal life represent Klein's failures to be a good daughter to her own mother, and a good mother to her daughter. Kristeva draws connections between Klein's personal and professional lives: could she have theorized matricide as the origin of thinking if she had no need to grapple with her own fraught mother/daughter relationships? Yet, Kristeva's focus on the maternal failures that marked Klein's life also constitutes Kristeva's own daughterly betrayal of Klein, and suggests something about how Klein fails Kristeva. What is at stake for Kristeva in her depiction and interpretation of Klein's experiences of bad mothering? Kristeva's work of producing a text that can express Klein's genius necessarily entangles Kristeva in the problem that Klein's work allows her to describe. Kristeva, by way of Klein, gives us a vocabulary for thinking about how and why a woman writer's representations of her mother are always ambivalent.

Drawing on Kristeva's works – Kristeva, in her turn, becomes the object of a writer's interpretive love and aggression – Miglena Nikolchina (2004) examines the impossible conditions of writing for women. In *Matricide in Language*, Nikolchina extends the discussion of matricide beyond its effects on the individual subject; she seeks to enter inside "the enigma of the persistent depletion of women's contribution to culture" and to "bring to light 'matricide' as the silent engine behind this vanishing, which is not a given but which is constantly resumed" (p. 1). Nikolchina introduces a new point of view for how the concept of matricide can help us consider the problems of abjection, destruction, and identification/repudiation in the lives and works of women writers. By "culture," Nikolchina has in mind women's engagements with art, literature, and intellectual life. She offers as evidence of "the persistent depletion of women's

contribution to culture" what she calls the "solitary female utterances throughout history" (p. 2): women writers have, for centuries, expressed a sense in their writing that they are of a new kind of woman, the first of their kind; they have lamented their lack of history, or their paucity of intellectual ancestresses. How can we account for this "reduplication" of singularity (p. 8)? What do we make of what Nikolchina calls "the repetitive generic loneliness" of writing women (p. 2)? Nikolchina wonders how it is that women intellectuals of different generations can write, one after the next, as though their foremothers have not existed, as though their foremothers have not made their own writing, now, possible. In the story of women's contribution to culture and the life of the mind, what has happened to our intellectual mothers? What have we done to them?

For Nikolchina, there are two insidious effects of "the persistent depletion of women's contribution to culture" which she regards as framing the political stakes of what Pitt (2006) names as Nikolchina's historical/cultural orientation to matricide.[2] The first effect is that the sense, concomitant with the depletion, that women have not contributed to a tradition of intellectualism and artistry, serves to reify "the maleness of all wisdom" (Nikolchina, 2004, p. 2). While wisdom is symbolically coded as male, the history of thought is subject to sexist revision, and women's contributions must seem extraordinary, exceptional. This ties into the second effect of the depletion that Nikolchina identifies: the present moment will always appear more "generous" to women, will always seem more willing to hear women out and to take their contributions seriously, than any given past moment (p. 2). This second effect, in particular, is

[2] Pitt (2006) distinguishes Nikolchina's conceptual use of matricide from what she regards as a more psychoanalytic approach to the concept, one which she attributes chiefly to Klein, Winnicott, and Kristeva. The crux of the difference between the cultural and psychoanalytic orientations to matricide is that "[in] the first [orientation], the mother's destruction founds a social order while in the second her destruction founds the human subject" (Pitt, 2006, p. 100). Nikolchina grounds her conceptual use of matricide in Kristeva's description of it as a psychical dynamic – but she regards the stakes of matricide as *social*. Nikolchina draws upon the concept of matricide to consider its discursive and socio-historical implications, rather than its specifically subjective, affective, or psychological implications, as Klein does.

insidious because it frames women's artistic and intellectual contributions as signalling some kind of 'gain' for women, a new and rosy outlook on women's lot, while overlooking the way in which this outlook is founded on violence, on a cultural complicity – which includes the complicity of women – to vanish (or, perhaps, banish) the work of the women thinkers who came before.

Nikolchina offers us a helpful frame for considering the discursive tensions and polemic splitting that can haunt women's academic engagement with one another's writing and ideas. Nikolchina argues that the women's movement as well as what she calls "the feminist discursive field" (p. 5) are caught in a violent tug-of-war between their proponents and opponents, and that this fraught divide can be understood as a "[symptom] of the fact that the conditions that produced the 'strange spaces of silence' and made the repetitive generic loneliness from Wollstonecraft to Cixous possible are still operative" (p. 2). Between the proponents and opponents of feminist discourse, the field loses and is denied ambivalence and theoretical complexity. The concept of matricide introduces a way to think about and trouble both the idealizations that accompany some women's identifications with feminism and the disavowals that structure other women's repudiation of it. In the subjective fantasy of matricide, we damage the mother not only through the destructive force of our hate, but also through the reductive force of our love, our refusal to notice a distinction between our self and the other. Of "the feminist discursive field," Nikolchina writes:

> The representations of this field, torn between the idealizations offered by its proponents and the denigrations characteristic of its opponents, tend to screen the brutality of its inherent functioning between fusion and murder. If we address this immanent dynamic theoretically, we can, I believe, enhance our understanding of the internal and external difficulties that made so many thinkers – …Kristeva included – dissociate themselves from feminism, and which have led to the repeated proclamation of feminism itself as dead. (p. 5)

To understand how feminist discourse gets torn apart in the tug-of-war "between fusion and murder," Nikolchina explicates two dynamics of subjectivity: "merginality" – fusion – and "abjectivity" – murder. She argues that these dynamics structure feminism itself, and women's affective relations to it. Matricide – understood in relation to Nikolchina's concepts of abjectivity and merginality – provides a way to consider how the reductive dichotomy of either idealization or disavowal of the complexity of intellectual offerings from "the feminist discursive field," "[facilitates] a compulsive forgetfulness that dooms a female voice to repeat incessantly its inauguration" (p. 9).

The first dynamic Nikolchina identifies, and which aligns with the problem of the denigration or disavowal of what feminist discourse has to offer is "abjectivity." The abject is Kristeva's concept which "names the disquieting and unstable division preceding the subject-object dichotomy" (Nikolchina, 2004, p. 4). It describes a horrific relation to the contents of the mother's body which arises as part of the self's process of subjectivity, of separating from the mother. With "abjectivity," Nikolchina draws the concept of the abject into a social usage: abjectivity is the repetition upon objects in the external (social and symbolic) world of the experience of abjection on the subjective (interior and psychic) world. It names the repetition of the psychic fantasy of matricide on external objects. The subject's horror of the inner contents of the mother's body is driven by her disavowal of the violence of the separation from the mother that the process of subjectivity entails. This dynamic repeats in the form of abjectivity which names a disavowal – or denigration – of the contents of one's intellectual mothers' contributions to thought. Abjectivity is a defense against a recognition that one's own intellectual career is contingent not only upon the psychical murder of the personal mother described by Klein's concept of matricide, but also upon a complicity in the vanishing of women's historical

contributions to theory and art, and thus a complicity in the reification of "the maleness of all wisdom" (p. 2). Abjectivity reduplicates the fantasy that to be ourselves, to be thoughtful and creative, we don't need our mothers. But what this defensive statement misses is the paradoxical way in which we not only do need them, but we also need their absence, the haunting that abjectivity ensures. Nikolchina elaborates this paradox: as long as women are dismissive of one another's work – particularly of earlier works that have carved out a place for their own – this dismissal "dooms the writing woman to be forever the first of her kind" (p. 9). Nikolchina's alignment of abjectivity with a political and theoretical disparagement of feminism offers a metaphor for bringing to light the difficult notion of women's complicity in the loneliness and mournfulness inherent to our intellectual circumstances: women are complicit in the abjectivity that marks our own circumstances in a sexist world.

The second dynamic that Nikolchina presents for understanding the circulation of matricide in women's relationships to feminist discourse and how we read one another's work is what she calls "merginality." If abjectivity describes the horror of one's violent separation from the mother in becoming a subject, merginality is a refusal of that separation; it is a refusal of one's own – and one's mother's – subjectivity, what Klein describes as a "love…which imperils the object" (quoted in Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 76). In this refusal, merginality names a pre-symbolic bond with the mother. As we have seen, Nikolchina warns that abjectivity leaves dead maternal bodies of thought in its wake, resulting in a woman's sense of herself as inaugurating female intellectualism, a sense that leaves uncontested a notion of the history of thinking as masculine. Merginality, she argues, may have the same effect:

> Similar results may follow from a specific kind of rhetorical technique that can be described as fusional or symbiotic, or, indeed, as osmotic *érotique du féminin*: mobilized in order to restore femininity to writing, it runs the risk of inadvertently eradicating any

> alterity. The voice of the author under discussion melts in the voice that discusses her in a 'merginality' (with an 'e') that allows no distance or difference. (p. 9)

If we refuse separation from the intellectual mother then we refuse her entrance into the symbolic; her words are our words, her meanings are our meanings. In this way, merginality ensures that our intellectual mother's contributions to thinking cannot operate prior to or outside of our own; the intellectual mother is denied a mind of her own beyond the primary subject-object symbiosis. Referring to the *individual* who cannot bear to separate from her mother in order to participate in the symbolic realm governed by the phallus, Kristeva (1996/2000) warns: "when the attraction to the shadow of the preoedipal object (the Minoan-Mycenean mother) becomes inexorable and the female subject abandons the extraneousness of the symbolic in favor of an unnameable sensoriality, [she becomes] sullen, silent, and suicidal" (p. 102). If, with Nikolchina, we extend this dilemma of subjectivity to the socio-cultural realm of the history of public intellectual and artistic life, we see how "merginality" describes a dynamic whereby women's engagements with the feminist discursive field cannot tolerate its complexity and ambivalence – its otherness – in order to encounter it within the conditions of the social. The field is rendered silent, and, within the bonds of merginality, it is not only the mother (the object), but also the undifferentiated self (the subject) who vanishes from intellectual history. Collapsed into one another, neither the subject nor object can stand on her own or articulate a distinct voice.

Nikolchina argues that abjectivity and merginality result in "inattentiveness toward the texts of the author" (p. 9). Both dynamics are driven by a woman's disavowal of her separateness – her difference and her indebtedness – from her intellectual mothers and the pain that attends such separation. This disavowal results in the refusal of subjectivity and an historical place to the

intellectual mothers. Shoshana Felman's (1993) concept of "the bond of reading" (p. 12) offers one strategy for mitigating against the problem of inattentiveness that Nikolchina identifies. Felman brings the implications of Klein's and Nikolchina's psychical and social uses of the concept of matricide together in a methodological imperative for the woman reader. Felman explains that, in the process of writing and re-writing the essays that now constitute her book about feminine desire in/and literature, *What Does a Woman Want?*, and having those essays read and re-read by various audiences, she arrived at a strange and difficult conclusion about the implications of women's desires vis-à-vis theory and literature: women do not yet have an autobiography, but instead "we have a story that by definition cannot be self-present to us, a story that, in other words, is not a story, but *must become* a story. And it cannot *become* a story except through the *bond of reading*" (p. 14, original emphasis).

Felman's claim that women do not yet have an autobiography has its origins both in a gendered dilemma of subjectivity, and in an existential, poststructural social orientation to feminist theory and practice. Felman's argument is that a story of the self cannot exist before our telling of it and others' hearing of it. Because we are human subjects, born into our subjectivity through violence, trauma, and their disavowal, our human stories necessarily invoke our unconscious and its strategies of disguise. As Felman puts it, women "cannot simply *substitute ourselves as center* [of a story] without regard to the *decentering* effects of language and of the unconscious" (n17, p. 156, original emphasis). Woman does not have an autobiography, but her story must become one, because our stories of our selves require *interpretation*, both our own and others'. Our capacity to narrate ourselves precedes our capacity to make sense of our stories of self because the unconscious and its meanings runs unevenly through time and requires others and their interpretations; our stories of the self require the reading of the other.

But Felman's claim is particular to the reading and writing *woman*. It is not that men do not also have an unconscious whose stories require interpretation, but that men are positioned in a different relationship to *language* than are women; men do not encounter the kind of "decentering effects" of language that Felman notes for women, above, because language is a function of the Symbolic, the phallic and social order. Felman points out that women face a double decentering in our stories of our selves: first by the unconscious and its effects, and second by language and its phallic function of feminine estrangement. *Language itself* – the very *words* to which we have access in order to tell a story of the self – requires interpretation in women's stories not just because it is imbued by the subjective unconscious and its meanings, but also because it exists in a social realm of meaning that is constituted around men and male bodies: "My emphasis is on the unavailability for women…of knowledge, and self-knowledge; on the unavailability, that is,…of new linguistic *structures of address*" (n17, p. 157, original emphasis). It is to rigorous and psychoanalytic interpretation that Felman refers when she argues that a woman's autobiography must "*become* a story…through the *bond of reading*" (p. 14, original emphasis). Our very reading of one another's stories – this bond *itself* – requires interpretation in light of Nikolchina's identification of the dynamics of abjectivity and merginality in women's engagements with each other's work.

Deborah Britzman (2009) draws on Klein to develop a methodological concept she calls "psychoanalytic reading" (see, e.g., p. 47). Like the bond of reading, psychoanalytic reading grapples with the trouble that the unconscious poses for our capacity to read. Britzman's story of reading posits that the difficult and intense affective experience of reading implicates our unconscious relation to the mother, specifically. Britzman's concept of reading follows the

trajectory of Klein's theory of matricide and reparation. According to Britzman, one reads to satisfy one's drive to know, and:

> Klein (1932) posits the drive to know as flowering from archaic sadism, itself a developmental requirement. In Klein's formulation there is a terrible prolepsis: knowing is first equated with destroying the object, then worrying if the object will retaliate, then wondering about one's own destructive capacities. Doubt, guilt, and grief, or depressive anxiety, accompany the desire for gratitude and reparation. (p. 49)

There is something uncanny about Britzman's theory of reading which darkly hints, via the concept of matricide, that the bond a reader forms to another woman's writing – Felman's bond of reading – is bound to her complicity in the writer's matricidal act.

Britzman performs a psychoanalytic reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* and argues that the novel itself is an allegory of the psychoanalytic scene of reading. *Never Let Me Go*, Britzman reminds us, is the story of a strange version of the contemporary world where clones are created as copies from human DNA in order to supply body parts and organs required to indefinitely preserve the life and health of human beings. In developing her theory of reading, Britzman notices that what makes this version of the world strange is precisely its familiarity; as we read the story about people who take the insides from others in order to feel like themselves again we confront, *through our very act of reading*, our complicity in this uncanny transaction, for "[reading] feels as if it begins with taking in, introjecting the text/body and projecting meanings back into it" (p. 50). In fact, the relationship between the act of reading and that of taking out the insides of the other is preserved through an etymological link: Julian Wolfreys (2000) informs us that an ancient meaning of the word "read" refers to the entrails of an animal. Wolfreys suggests that the link between this meaning of "read" and the more familiar meaning we attribute to it today comes from traditional rites in which people would seek omens by

examining the belly of the beast: they would read the reads. When Britzman (2009) advocates that we become "slow readers," she argues that we would do well to attend to our 'gut feelings' as we read; reading exists in an intimate relation to our inner lives and to the terrors, traumas and affects that reside there. "Reading leans on this archaic constellation of anxiety," writes Britzman, "for we actually need to project into the text, tear it apart before it retaliates, and then put it back together again through our 'reparative' reading" (2009, p. 49).

By drawing on Klein in her theory of reading, Britzman hints that the founding psychical event of matricide haunts our reading practices. Of *Never Let Me Go*, a novel she argues allegorizes the act of reading in general, Britzman points out that "readers have the…work of identifying with characters they will also need to destroy" (p. 47). For women whose gendered subjectivity is founded on identifying with the mother whom they must also destroy, reading enacts a haunting repetition. The etymological trace of the word suggests that reading has to do with interiority, with seeking the meaning and beauty and indeed, terror, that resides inside the mother's body/text. In the psychoanalytic scene of reading when the reader tears apart the text, rending as she reads, we are returned to Klein's enraged infant who "wishes to bite up and to tear up his mother and her breasts" (1937/1964, p. 61). Because, according to Britzman (2009, p. 50), "reading recapitulates development or even…copies development," to read is to return, again and again, to the primal matricidal scene, the inauguration of subjective development. Yet, to read is also to seek the reparation of that primal scene; we read "as atonement for the destruction and as gratitude toward the other" (p. 52). From Britzman's Kleinian theory of reading as intimately related to our developmental processes of matricide and reparation, what can we make of Felman's concept of the bond of reading?

In developing as a subject – a subject who writes, a subject who reads – we destroy the mother. But the mother must survive our destruction; after all, who else would teach us how to write and to read? Who else would read our writing? In this paradoxical formulation Felman's bond of reading alludes to two ways to think about this "bond". First, the bond of reading suggests that it is the mother's survival of the daughter's destruction which lends meaning to the daughter's story of the self; her story could not exist without her mother and without her mother's reading of it. Britzman (2009) refers to this aspect of the bond as "the power of love":

> It is the mother's love that enlivens, urging the child to risk, through symbolization, a new relation with itself and its first object. This power of love will be the significant resource for the ego to find and encounter a reality beyond phantasy and to reencounter phantasy's reading purpose. (pp. 49-50)

But if one aspect of the bond of reading refers to the bond between mother and daughter in the face of the mother's resilience of the daughter's destruction, another aspect refers to a desperate reparative act shared by women, each guilty of destroying the mother, and each worried that the mother cannot survive her destruction. For instance, Nikolchina's (2004) desire to expose the "solitary female utterances throughout history" (p. 2) – women writers' repetition that they are the first of their kind – is one expression of this second kind of bond.

Kristeva's (1996/2000) discussion of the band of brothers from Freud's *Totem and Taboo* elaborates this second notion of the bond of reading. Kristeva recounts Freud's story of civilization as told in *Totem and Taboo*: jealous of the father's social power and monopoly of women, the band of brothers collude to kill the father. Freud classifies this murder which inaugurates the social order as an unrepresentable act. In its unrepresentability, the unrepresentable act is traumatic, just as trauma is unrepresentable. Faced with the trauma of this unrepresentable act, the brothers seek a strategy for mitigating their guilt. They seek a "symbolic

act" which would unite them in a "symbolic pact," one which would solidify their bond: "that is, they ate the father and thereby assimilated him in both the concrete and metaphorical sense of the term: they became him, and he became them, and, in becoming power, they ceased to be excluded from it" (Kristeva, 1996/2000, p. 45). Kristeva points out that it is through this pact, this bond, that society is formed. Felman's bond of reading – a bond she locates between and among women – exists in a similar relation to the daughter's matricide as Freud's totemic meal does to the son's patricide. Just as the band of brothers eats the father in an attempt to at once symbolize and repeat the unrepresentable act and to atone for it, so the bond of sisters writes and reads the mother in an attempt to symbolize and repeat the matricidal act which gave rise to (and therefore precedes) symbolization, and to repair for the very destruction upon which the symbolization is contingent.

In a way that recalls the totemic meal, Britzman (2009) points out that reading is like ingesting. On the one hand it can feed and nourish us: "One of the satisfactions of a good read is that we may refind, in the mind, objects that have been lost to the world" (p. 50). But on the other hand she notes that just as food can also poison, reading can make us sick[3]; by allowing us to glimpse our inner worlds, reading can be "equated with loss and a terrible fear of destroying reality" (p. 51). Felman's concept of the bond of reading holds onto this ambivalence; it suggests collusion between the writing and the reading woman of, on the one hand, the unrepresentable psychic act of matricide upon which the possibility of women's writing and reading rests, and, on the other hand, of efforts to symbolically repair for the destruction wrought.

[3] We might think about how the infant's ambivalent maternal phantasies, stemming from her utter dependence on the mother, involve projecting her love and hate into the mother's breasts such that the mother becomes split, in the infant's view, between the good breast (she who feeds and nourishes) and the bad breast (she who neglects, persecutes and terrorizes) (see Hinshelwood et al., 1997; Kristeva, 2000/2001; Waddell, 1998).

Just as Felman asserts that women's stories can only *become* autobiographies through the generous and interpretive reading of others, Judith Butler (2005) argues that reading the other as a narratable self who is always in a state of becoming is an ethical reading practice that will "let the other live" (p. 43). In this sense, "[letting] the other live" entails regarding her as a text to be interpreted, a text whose narratable meaning is rendered through my reading.

What fails to be narratable, however, what plunges us into a state of what Pitt (2006) calls "wordlessness" (p. 103), and what raises the spectre of the writing and the reading woman's matricidal collusion, is that our very capacity to narrate – our entrance into symbolization – is contingent on our psychic *in*ability to "let the [m]other live". It is the recognition of the mother's otherness which gives rise to the psychic event of matricide, that which opens to the individual the world of others. While living in this world of others is necessary in order to engage in the bond of reading and to recognize life as meaningful, it is the intolerability of the mother's otherness, and the horror of the matricidal act, which are, for women, the unnarratable, what Felman calls "the female knot of pain" (p. 4). This is the trauma of living life as a woman: a woman requires a mother in order to have life, but in becoming a self, she must recognize the mother's otherness, which leads to her psychic destruction of the mother. In the wake of the destruction of the mother, the woman must integrate the destroyed mother as a component of her gendered identification in the world. This condition of woman's narratability is itself the unnarratable, the unrepresentable.

There is an inherent tension, then, in the bond of reading, the practice that allows women's narratives of the self to become autobiographies for, as Jen Gilbert (2009), drawing on André Green, reminds us, to read is to reach for something beyond our selves, it is to exceed our families; to read is to kill our parents (see also Britzman 2009; Kristeva 1996/2000). And, as the

concept of matricide suggests, to enter symbolization at all is to kill our mothers. Memoirs by women who have made careers from their passionate engagements with the work of symbolization – writing and reading – bring to light the daughter/author's guilt and worry that she can never repair for the violence she has done to her mother as a condition not only of her selfhood but also of her capacity to narrate the self. "There was nothing we could do", writes Carolyn Kay Steedman, "to pay back the debt of our existence. 'Never have children dear,' she said; 'they ruin your life'" (1986, p. 17). What is Steedman's memoir if not her great effort to "pay back" her mother for the fact of her existence, for her terrible worry that she has ruined her mother's life? Her mother's fraught warning to Steedman about the perils of motherhood points to the way in which Steedman is implicated not only in ruining her mother's life, but also in the gendered life that has been ruined. The warning hints at the way in which Steedman, in ruining her mother's life, has also ruined her own through her necessary entanglement in the problem – "the female knot of pain" – of women's need, in becoming thinking and gendered subjects, to destroy the mother with whom we need also to identify.

Britzman's (2009) psychoanalytic reading draws attention to how the daughter/author's guilt emerges as a conscious manifestation for the daughter/author, and to the unconscious traces and origins of our reading lives. After all, reading and writing have to do with shifting, through the use of symbolism and interpretation, between our unconscious, internal worlds and realities and our conscious, external ones. Because our meaning-making always oscillates between these two realms, "Psychoanalytic reading teaches us a lesson we already know, that we cannot let go of affected life – we are always reading between the lines, wagering meaning and deferring it" (Britzman, 2009, p. 58). Klein's concept of matricide offers me a way to read between the lines of the daughter/author's narrative account of her conscious life (which may include a discussion

of her conscious guilt) in order to mine the unconscious meanings in the text. "Psychoanalytic accounts [of reading]," writes Britzman, "insist that reading is the means for and function of our signifying interior world" (p. 49). Can the inner life of the text – its reads – direct us to the inner life of its author? Can it direct us to our own inner life? Is reading, itself, a form of the aesthetic conflict, a search for the beauty on the inside, and a worry that what we will find there will be, instead, quite terrible?

What do our intellectual mothers owe us?

Steedman's mother's warning against having children appears in Steedman's (1986) memoir *Landscape for a Good Woman*. In that text, we learn that Steedman did indeed decide not to have children. Yet, as Britzman's and Felman's theories of reading remind us, her work of writing a memoir for other women to read requires her readers to identify with and destroy her. As Steedman's women readers, can we help but position her as mother, encountering her text through the interpretive lens of our own ambivalence? As her readers, do we ruin Steedman's account of her life?

In the remaining sections of this chapter I explore the stakes of a recent feminist critique directed at *Landscape for a Good Woman*. In *Landscape* Steedman, a British historian, narrates and analyses her experience of growing up with her difficult mother, a woman whose gender and social class rendered her abjectly invisible within her historical context of mid-twentieth century industrial Britain. Steedman's mother's rage at being neglected and overlooked in the world – including by Steedman's father, a man emasculated by his social class, who exerts what patriarchal privilege he can by keeping Steedman's mother at arm's length – seeps into her sense of being trapped and abused by motherhood itself. Steedman examines what it has meant for her development as a professional and academic writing woman to have grown up with a mother

whose coldness, distance, and rage she at once identifies with and is profoundly hurt and angered by. *Landscape for a Good Woman* is a generic foremother of the "memoir boom" of the 1990s, which saw a dramatic increase in the proliferation of memoir writing, particularly among women academics and intellectuals (see Gilmore, 2001, p. 2; Miller, 1997, p. 981). Writing in the wake of this boom, memoir theorist Helen M. Buss (2002) vehemently critiques Steedman's *Landscape*. Buss's criticism reflects her own gendered dilemma as a thinking subject: while the terms of Buss's critique of Steedman are that she subjects her mother to a violent repudiation, Buss herself repeats this problem upon Steedman and her memoir. Like the infant struggling with her need to identify with and set herself apart from her mother, Buss's critique destroys *Landscape* even while it is dependent upon it for coherence and for the work that it did in paving the way for the academic legitimacy of women's memoir writing, a legitimacy upon which Buss's career as a thinking and writing woman depends. Turning next to a scene in Buss's own (1999) memoir, *Memoirs from Away*, I go on to demonstrate that her reproach of Steedman is a surrogate object for the unresolved ambivalence Buss feels in relation to her own mother. My close readings of Buss's critical writing and of her memoir writing shed light on a dynamic that animates them both: the daughter's need to distinguish herself – to tear herself away – from the mother, even in the face of her deeply fraught indebtedness to her.

The publication of *Repossessing the World*, Buss's (2002) work of theory and criticism about women's autobiographical writing, came three years after the (1999) publication of *Memoirs from Away*, her own memoir. In *Repossessing the World*, Buss offers her readings of several women's memoirs, including Steedman's (1986) *Landscape for a Good Woman*. Buss's discussion of Steedman's *Landscape* is an anxious one. Buss frets about the inevitability she feels in reading *Landscape* that "the portrayal of the mother becomes the betrayal of the mother"

(p. 97). She struggles with how she regards Steedman as "blaming" her mother for the injustices of the patriarchal world (p. 90). One matricidal movement here is Buss's destruction of Steedman; in her writing about it, Buss destroys *Landscape*. In her critique of Buss's reading of Steedman, Alice Pitt (2004) characterizes this matricidal repetition as "something of a trap," explaining that while "Steedman, according to Buss, blames her mother…, Buss, in her turn, cannot refrain from blaming Steedman for not getting it right" (p. 272). But Buss's matricidal relation to Steedman serves a second, and related, purpose for Buss. Not only did *Landscape* occupy a maternal role in relation to the memoir boom that would legitimize women's life writing as an academic genre, but it once functioned as a motherly text for Buss specifically. In *Repossessing the World*, we learn that Buss initially encountered Steedman's memoir while she was pursuing her first academic job, one whose distance required that she temporarily live apart from her husband and children. In this context, *Landscape* offered comfort to Buss who was grappling with the literal separation from her domestic sphere that her professional success required of her and with her own mother's disapproval of this arrangement. But rereading *Landscape* while writing *Repossessing the World*, Buss's relation to the text shifts; repelled by Steedman's discussion of her mother with which she once identified, Buss now rejects and disassociates from it. In this way, Buss's devastation of *Landscape* functions as a mode of disavowal for Buss. She critiques Steedman for betraying and blaming her mother in order to avoid confronting her own implication in such impulses. In Buss's conflict with *Landscape,* her worries are more personal than she can tolerate, even as she recognizes that part of her fight with Steedman speaks to her reluctant identification with *Landscape*. As Pitt puts it, "Buss admits that Steedman's unforgiving tone reminds her of parts of herself that she would prefer not to acknowledge" (p. 272). Buss's disavowal of blame and betrayal as the conditions of her own

work leads to her vehement criticism of Steedman. Through her engagement with Steedman's text, Buss avoids noticing how a difficult or even intolerable psychical condition of women's symbolization and subjective identification – the dilemma of matricide – animates her *own* work.

Buss (2002) describes the shift that occurred between her first encounter with *Landscape* and her second, more recent, reading of it. During her first reading, Buss "admired [Steedman's] openness about her alienation from her mother" (p. 89). Upon rereading the memoir, however, Buss feels disappointed by it and deems it a "failure" (p. 97). According to Buss, Steedman blames her mother for the ways in which it can be terrible to live in the patriarchal world as an underprivileged girl or woman. But, Buss argues, Steedman also draws *upon* patriarchy as a tool by which to enact this blame, and this amounts to a feminine betrayal:

> a very powerful form of the "iron of patriarchy" had possessed Steedman in the writing of her mother's life. I find the book performs a particularly pernicious brand of misogyny that, while not an active woman-hating activity, holds women and men to different standards of behaviour, which leads to a greater condemnation of women than men for similar acts. (p. 94)

For Buss, Steedman's picture of her mother is restricted by patriarchy's reification of mothers as fitting a trope either of saint, victim, monster, or "ineffective non-entity" (p. 86); in other words, Steedman's mother is denied her full humanity in her daughter's view – and representation – of her as monster.

Buss does not believe she is immune to these kinds of patriarchal stances toward the mother. She occasionally risks relating to what she regards as Steedman's anger and bitterness and her tendency to blame her mother for the injustice of living as a female in a sexist world. For instance, Buss admits to feeling uneasy designating *Landscape* a misogynist text because this analysis has emerged from an emotional reaction of feeling angry and hurt by the book. These

are emotions which Buss, as a feminist, would prefer not to encounter in her reading of other women's texts:

> These emotional reactions often happen in texts about mothers and daughters, in which what I read is that either mother or daughter has gone over to the other side, so to speak, by demanding a higher standard of behaviour from women than from men. Such a woman judges other women more harshly and lets men off easier. I think these women's books disturb me so much because I have sometimes been that kind of woman. (p. 94)

Nevertheless, Buss is determined to combat her own feelings of anger and bitterness toward her mother, recognizing that "We are encouraged…to hold our personal mothers to blame for conditions of the wider culture that too many critics of motherhood forget are not of their mothers' making" (p. 86). She wishes Steedman was similarly committed to interrogating and struggling against her unruly emotions. Although she might feel angry with her mother, Buss considers it a feminist mandate to work hard to identify the *real* source of this anger and locate it where it belongs, namely in patriarchy. While Buss regards this location of anger in its proper place as difficult, to be sure, it remains for her an achievable intellectual/emotional feminist task.

A psychoanalytic reading of Buss's argument with Steedman requires that we attend not only to Buss's conscious identifications with Steedman, but also to her unconscious identifications. What components of her gendered and academic subjectivity are at stake for Buss in the violence of her reading? Buss's critical analysis of Steedman – while working to reinforce a politicized vision that Buss has of herself as successfully struggling against the hostility she feels in relation to her "personal mother" – repeats this hostility upon *Steedman* to an extent which exceeds Buss's notice. Buss positions Steedman as mother, playing out her drive to maternal destruction upon the body of Steedman's text.

In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Steedman (1986) describes her sense of being unwanted by her mother. This unwanted-ness functions, in part, as a metaphor for her experiences of sexism and class discrimination and for the way that history does not and cannot represent these experiences; Steedman's relation to her mother repeats in her sense of being unwanted in the world. But Buss will not tolerate Steedman's feelings of being unwanted by her mother, and she names it an injustice that Steedman holds her mother accountable for her feelings of unwanted-ness. Buss insists that if Steedman's experience of being unwanted in the world as a poor female subject was also her mother's experience, then Steedman ought not to blame her mother for it, but rather to develop a kind of solidarity with her. Yet Buss, evidenced by the very fact that she feels justified naming her "disappointment" with Steedman's memoir, holds *Steedman* accountable for improving the terrain of possibilities for women's writing and reading lives even while Steedman is subject to the same poverty of women's stories as Buss. In spite of Buss's conscious efforts in her writing about her mother, a dynamic of hostility and blame towards the mother – this time in the figure of Steedman and her memoir – continues to haunt Buss's writing. We might read Buss's warning about daughters who cannot sympathetically identify with their mothers through their common position vis-à-vis patriarchy as describing something about *Buss's* relation to *Steedman*: "Such daughters are…in danger of performing another role that awaits women in patriarchy: that of the unforgiving critic of women who have not mothered well" (p. 95). Something about *Landscape for a Good Woman* evokes Buss's memories of being poorly mothered, which, as the concept of matricide reminds us, might simply refer to something as ordinary and at once traumatic as the infantile experience of recognizing that her mother loves something in the world beyond Buss herself.

‘This time her words slipped’: Scenes of Language and Loss

There is a scene in Buss’s (1999) *Memoirs from Away* that I return to often and that functions as a kind of key to my reading not only of Buss’s memoir but also of her later (2002) work on memoir theory. This scene is not foregrounded; it appears about a quarter of the way through the text, nestled among Buss’s past memories and her present analyses of them. For my thinking about matricide as the impossible condition of the thinking woman’s love of symbolization, this little scene, positioned by Buss to appear less important than it is, allows us to glimpse her gendered dilemma. In this scene, we witness the ways in which Buss’s work in the world – and the pleasure she derives from it – requires her violent separation from her mother. For Buss, this condition of her intellectualism feels intolerable, and so she develops strategies to disavow it.

Buss is sitting in her aging mother’s kitchen with her mother, Kathleen, and her adult daughter, Erica. Kathleen has recently had knee surgery and Buss is taking care of her. A few pages earlier, Buss relates an anecdote about Erica. In that story, Buss describes dreading her capacity for destruction – “that feeling of pure fear you have when you find that inside you is a terrible violence, a violence which if ever unleashed will devastate the bodies of those you love” (p. 31). Many of the memories of the past that surface in the memoir, as well as the meanings that Buss makes of those memories in the present, are connected to the therapeutic work she does with her psychiatrist. Now she acknowledges that her fear of her capacity for destruction “was what sent [her] to a psychiatrist in the first place” (p. 31). Buss goes on: “the terror almost got out. Despite my policy of no corporal punishment of children, I hit my ten-year-old daughter. Once. Hard. Across the front of her body. I screamed at her that her tears were driving me crazy” (p. 31). Here is a link between Buss’s symbolic work of meaning-making and her psychical work

of attempting to access and understand something of the interior world of the mother; as a mother, her own "terror almost got out." Erica, the daughter whom Buss hit once and hard, joins her now in Kathleen's kitchen.

Kathleen is a great storyteller and she tells her stories to show her children and their children that she holds them in her mind. Her stories form a family repertoire, and she "usually tells the appropriate stories to the appropriate child and/or grandchild" (p. 39). As Buss puts it, "I feel loved when my mother tells stories about me" (p. 43). And so, in this scene in the kitchen, Kathleen launches into one of the familiar stories that she tells about Helen[4]. It's a story about how, as a child, Helen often mispronounced words or got familiar expressions wrong. On this retelling, though, Kathleen seems to act out the story, for it is *she* who gets something wrong; she delivers the familiar familial story in a new way, a strange way. "This time her words slipped" (p. 43). Helen and Erica, listening to Kathleen, are startled by this new twist.

Kathleen tells a story about the time, during the war, that she and the children were living in North Sydney, Nova Scotia. The family had moved there for Buss's father's military duties, and when those duties took him farther afield, Kathleen and her children were left to confront the strange landscape alone, separated from family and familiarity. This separation left Kathleen isolated in every sense; referring to this period she would always be sure to remind her listener that "'I had no one of my own in North Sydney, you know'" (p. 39). During this time, Kathleen gave birth to Buss's younger brother. Telling her story to Helen and Erica, the twist comes when Kathleen suddenly asks Helen if she remembers a girl, Mary, whom Kathleen hired to care for her other children while she was confined to a lengthy hospital stay with the new baby. Helen does not remember Mary. Kathleen was desperate, she explains, and so she took on fourteen-

[4] To delineate my discussion of Buss as a theorist/author from Buss as a character in her own story, I generally use her surname to refer to her former capacity, and her first name (Helen) to refer to her latter.

year-old Mary. She was so worried about the children that she phoned home every day. She tells Erica: "'your mother would get on the phone and all she'd say was, "She beated me, Mommy, she beated me, she beated me," over and over again. Your mother used to do that. Put the "ed" on words like that'" (p. 44).

Buss captures the palpable sense of awkward and alien discomfort that seeps into the familiar scene of three generations of women, sitting in the matriarch's kitchen, telling and listening to stories together. This story has gone wrong, and "There is silence" (p. 44). The scene stumbles along:

> Mother, realizing the grammatical point of the story was in danger of becoming lost in some other value, recovers quickly. "I would get Mary back on the phone and I would say, 'Mary, you can't hit Helen,' and she would say, real surly like, 'She won't do what I tell her to.' 'Well you still can't beat her,' I'd say. I'll never forget your mother saying, 'she beated me, Mommy, she beated me.'" (p. 44)

The story of violence unfolds, then there is silence, then there is a repetition of the violence, and then, "There is silence again" (p. 44). After this second silence Kathleen regroups and gets on with the story that Helen and Erica already know. The familiar is restored.

The sense of silence that settles over me as I read this scene – a silence that, truly, I can *feel* – signals that the story describes something about the way that the symbolic fails women and about the way that women must always fail in the symbolic. Kathleen's story is a double betrayal: first Kathleen betrays Helen with violence, the kind of vengeful (if surrogate) beating she had to endure while Kathleen gave birth to someone else (and indeed, the birth of another baby for Kathleen to love also arrives as a terrible blow). But second, Kathleen betrays Helen, a professional writer, by telling a story about how she fails at and in language, leaving Helen to wonder what this symbolic failure has to do with the terror of violence – her own and others'.

This scene raises the way that, for Felman (1993), women's stories are structured by a double exclusion: first from self-knowledge by the human condition of the unconscious, and then by our gendered relation to language, a function of the masculine, social world. Felman's notion of the double exclusion plays out in this scene of failed memory, failed words, and failed storytelling. A theory of matricide and its relation to how language, for women, can be laden with both pleasure and guilt reminds us that women's processes of subjective identification are ambivalent; we might understand Buss's beating of her own daughter not only as a repetition on the daughter of this earlier, maternal, beating she had to endure, and in revenge for her daughter's matricidal treatment of *her*, but also as a repetition on Erica of Helen's own matricidal act which rendered her psychically complicit in her mother's vengefulness. This confusion of violence emerges as Buss's capacity, now, to write a story of children beating and being beaten. But because it is also a story about women's estrangement in the symbolic, it necessarily contains "strange spaces of silence" (Nikolchina, 2004, 2).

Buss (1999) describes the deferred time of this story's affective impact on her: "Nothing happens to me for a while after this particular retelling" (p. 45). To feel this story's resonance, Buss needs the bond of reading, for her conscious thinking and feeling about this scene begins one afternoon as she is "sitting on the verandah reading another woman's autobiography" (p. 45). About the emotional resonance of her mother's story slip and the way that the story reminds her of her own slip, that one hard hit of her daughter, Buss writes: "I can't let it go" (p. 45).

She can't let it go; there's something about this story that Buss wants to hold on to, to keep inside of herself. And yet, she's writing about it in her memoir, she's drawing upon the creativity that symbolization offers her in order to make something in the world, to exteriorize something interior that at once drives her and holds her back. She's trying to understand and

control the meaning that resides inside; she hopes for beauty but knows she will find terror. This is the problem of "excremental omnipotence," that ambivalent, destructive/creative relation to the inside of the mother's body (Kristeva, 2000/2001). This fantasy refers to the daughter's wish that she might exteriorize her desires for the mother to better understand her feminine identifications, and to her simultaneous horror that these identifications are composed not only of desire, but of abject repudiation too. The story that Kathleen tells in her kitchen to her daughter and granddaughter recalls the primal violence of separating from one's mother, of suffering a beating that one fears one deserves due to one's complicity in the loss of the mother, and of the ways that we relive these violent dynamics in our everyday lives: we hit our children; we fret guiltily over our violence; we hate our siblings; we slip in our speech, lose and destroy our words; we tell the wrong story. Kathleen's story brings Buss into confrontation with her history of abjection, the ambivalent and gendered relation she has to the bodies of her mother, her daughter, and her self. She should let the story go, she thinks, "put it to rest. Flush it down the toilet like this morning's healthy crap. Gone. Get on with your life. Harping on it will only make people think you are unpleasant, not a nice fiftyish professional lady" (p. 45). In Buss's shift into the second person, we hear the gendered alienation of the girl's relation to the interior of the mother's body: her ambivalent attempt to create and control beauty while bumping up against the terrible, the uncontrollable, and the destructive – the abject – puts her beside herself in horror (Kristeva, 1980/1982). And in her worry about being perceived as a "nice professional lady" resides the unconscious conditional link between her capacity to think and to symbolize, to make a professional career from a passionate relation to language, and her matricidal – quite unladylike – rage and aggression.

Conclusions: On not letting go

In the wake of all of this maternally-charged violence and silence evoked by Buss's story of a story, she insists to the reader that "It's Mary I won't let go of" (p. 46). This curious insistence is uncanny in its demand that I scrutinize my own entrapment in the academic woman's gendered dilemma. Buss's work is animated by the problem of needing at once to identify with and tear herself away from her maternal figures, both intellectual and personal, in order to make a place for herself in the world of language. My own analysis here requires that I, too, must fall into the "trap" of destroying the very object upon which my intellectual inquiry depends (Pitt, 2004, p. 272). It is Buss herself who unwittingly causes me to confront the necessary ways in which I am implicated in the structure of the problem I describe. Given my own tangle of identifications, I cannot offer my analysis of "Mary" and why it is that Helen cannot let her go without also explicitly acknowledging that *my* name is Mary. Might this be one reason that the beating that Mary delivers to poor Helen, one which comes pouring out of her mother in a story about language and its failures, so preoccupies me? That my name is Mary is perhaps not incidental to the way that Mary figures for me as the key to Buss's memoir. Because I focus my close reading on her work, Buss functions as one of the intellectual mothers who, in the conceiving-through-language of this dissertation, I must alternately destroy and revere in writing. I wonder, then, what does it mean for me to identify (with) Mary as the centre of the memoir (and indeed, as the centre of the 'World in need of Repossession')? It would seem that Helen is subject not only to yet another beating by an aggressive Mary, but also to the repetition of her mother's hostility in the form of my criticism of her work in and with language.

Buss's own explanation for why it's Mary that she can't let go returns us to her fraught reading of Steedman: her reason for wanting to linger on the figure of Mary resonates with

Steedman's reason for writing her contentious memoir in the first place. Buss seeks for Mary a story of her own, recognizing that her role in the stories of others is as a kind of embodied disavowal: "What I want for Mary is a history," she writes, but what she gets instead is an "abjectivity" (Buss, 1999, p. 46; Nikolchina, 2004, p. 9):

> In all the stories I read in my pursuit of my understanding of women in this culture I live in, the Marys are the ones who get flushed down that dark hole in the toilet of every story….They cower there in every plot, conveniently surly, blameworthy gorgons, unknown and unmourned, sucking up blame like black holes. (Buss, 1999, p. 46)

Steedman (1986) wrote *Landscape for a Good Woman*, in part, out of resistance to history's framing of *her mother* as one of these abject "Marys." Steedman argues that memoir functions as a site of theory that can return human particularities, psychological complexity, and emotional significance[5] to the anonymous, uniform figures who populate the historical and sociological studies conducted about them; Steedman delivers her own memoir through the story of her working-class mother, a story that she cannot find in historical and sociological accounts of British working-class life in the early twentieth century. She does this so that those whom history has forgotten or disavowed – those like her mother – "may start to use the autobiographical 'I', and tell the stories of their life" (p. 16). And yet, as we have seen, Buss (2002) accuses Steedman of keeping her mother entombed in the "dark hole" of history. But perhaps there is something about the mother that the daughter cannot represent (Pitt, 2006). If Steedman's memoir is an effort to represent her mother which contains her unconscious knowledge that she *must fail* to represent her mother, Buss's memoir is a great effort to disavow the conditions that drive our representations and their failures: matricide as a dynamic condition for thinking, writing, and

[5] For their (2007) discussion of "emotional significance," see Pitt and Brushwood Rose.

reading. In fact it is Buss's destruction of her *mother* of which she can't let go, but also with which she can't identify, and so her matricidal relation emerges in a destructive tearing-to-shreds of Steedman's memoir, marked as it is by maternal hostility, and in a creatively loving wish to put Mary back together again through a writing-into-history.

Chapter Three: The Reparative Narrative: Reading and Righting Our Mothers

Maybe it's from my dreams that I know about hell. The recurrent ones where the premise of the dream is to recognize that I've done something – killed someone – and while I can't remember the event, or it seemed small at the time, nothing, nothing ever can undo it.
– Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1999, p. 95

Introduction

Describing her impetus to write *Are You My Mother?* (2012), an illustrated memoir about her relationship with her mother Helen, graphic novelist Alison Bechdel cites a "narrative urgency" that surrounded the project (quoted in Heer, 2012). Bechdel felt driven to explore her relationship to her mother, including her mother's reactions to the wild success of Bechdel's first graphic memoir, *Fun Home* (2006). In *Fun Home*, a loving and intensely ambivalent memoir, Bechdel exposes details about her family's life, its secrets and conflicts. In an interview about *Are You My Mother?*, Bechdel comments that "Whenever I would go out and speak about *Fun Home* or do a reading from it, inevitably almost the first question would be what does your family think about this, what does your mother say" (quoted in Heer, 2012). The constant repetition of this question to Bechdel reveals a common worry among her readers: does our work in the world have the capacity to hurt our mothers? Is our work somehow *contingent* on hurting the mother? Bechdel shares this symptomatic question with her readers: "I didn't write *Are You My Mother?* because people asked that question, but I think I had the same question and had the same narrative urgency to answer that question" (quoted in Heer, 2012).

In this chapter I argue that this question of narrative urgency – does my work hurt my mother? – can both illuminate, and be described by, the psychoanalytic concept of reparation. There is a paradox at the heart of Bechdel's sense of narrative urgency. Her work gives rise to a question of whether it has hurt her mother. This question becomes an urgent one, driving her to narrate the story of her mother's reaction to the work. But in rendering more of her mother's life

in narrative, Bechdel once again risks hurting her mother. In *Are You My Mother?* Bechdel admits that she's at an impasse when it comes to narrating her relationship to her mother. This admission is in itself paradoxical, because here it is, in her published book. Speaking about her mother, she tells her psychoanalyst: "The thing is, I can't write this book until I get her out of my head. But the only way to get her out of my head is by writing the book! It's a paradox. Or a dilemma or something. I don't know" (2012, p. 23). This paradox figures the way the dynamic of matricide as a condition of a woman's thinking life repeats throughout her career, and how, through her identifications with her mother, a woman's matricidal act threatens her self in the process. But the paradox also introduces reparation into the picture: the urgent and unending work of making amends. An ambivalent theory of creativity, symbolization, and narrative, reparation is made from aggression but also emphasizes the role of love in the development of our subjectivity and thinking.

I begin this chapter with the concept of reparation, examining its gendered implications. For Klein (1952), reparation is an effect of matricide; acts of reparation atone for the subject's matricidal act, but also reduplicate it. An urgent drive, reparation provides a theory of narrative. I contrast Kleinian reparation as narrative drive with a more melancholic view of how maternal loss drives our intellectual and artistic activity (Green, 1986). I read Bechdel's (2012) *Are You My Mother?* to argue that the production of the memoir, specifically, denotes the daughter/author's reparative urgency. Next I turn to Adriana Cavarero (1997/2000) who theorizes the human memory as a mode of narrative urgency which structures the self and is driven by one's inability to remember the moment of separating from one's mother, the moment of being born to her. Cavarero's concept of memory suggests that to narrate the self, one must constantly return to the mother, the origin of the story, the one to whom the story is indebted.

Like Bechdel who needs to exorcise her mother by writing about her, but who can't write about her until she has exorcised her, Cavarero's notion of memory requires the loss of the mother – separation from her – but is then driven by the subject's inability to access, in memory, this moment of loss. A woman's indebtedness to her mother exists in a complex relation to her ability to narrate that indebtedness: this relation both drives and limits a woman's capacity to write a story of her life. Can we regard reparation not only as the driving force behind a woman's work of writing, but also as the structuring logic of the story she writes? To consider this question I analyze bell hooks's (1996) memoir *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*. I read hooks's memoir as an effect of her reparative efforts in relation to her mother, a woman whose way of life hooks repudiates in order to pursue her own passion of becoming a scholar.

Reparation and the Gendered Self

Reparation, like matricide, is a necessary and complex developmental task that shapes and informs subjectivity. In the wake of the matricidal destruction that the infant projects toward the mother as a result of some early – and entirely ordinary – unmet need, she soon arrives at the mindset of the depressive position, a new orientation for living in the world. The depressive position is a developmental achievement and although the subject will oscillate throughout her life between the mindset toward the world that the depressive position represents and the earlier, persecuting and terrifying realm of the infant – the paranoid-schizoid position, where the matricidal scene lurks – the infant first inhabits the depressive position when she can recognize and tolerate the mother as a whole, not merely as a set of parts organized around the infant's desires (Klein, 1952). The infant's development allows her to recognize that her mother "exists outside [her] field of vision" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 75). From this new vantage of the depressive position the infant can hold on to an idea of her mother as a separate, whole object.

From there, her guilt about her violent phantasy life which has been directed at her mother begins to surface in her mind.

This guilt drives the work the subject will go on to do in the world: "the depressive position generates symbolization and language, which in turn designate an object for the ego" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 73). In the depressive position, our new capacity to regard the mother as an object separate from the self – a capacity which also gives rise to a terrible and guilty confrontation with the history of our violence in phantasy – inextricably links our creative and symbolic work with this earlier destructive force within us. Kristeva puts it this way:

> Klein's depressive position offers yet another innovation, one that will eventually encourage creativity: the feeling of depression mobilizes the desire to *make reparation* to objects. The baby, by believing that he is responsible for the loss of his mother, also imagines that he can undo the nefarious effects of his aggression. (p. 79, original emphasis)

This drive to repair is never without its underside; the creative impulse that attends our need to make reparation depends upon our earlier, infantile violence: "without matricide, the internal object cannot be formed, the fantasy cannot be constructed, and reparation…is foreclosed" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 130). That our creativity in the world relies on our earlier aggression brings to the fore the way in which the depressive position is characterized by the subject's renewed ability to tolerate ambivalence. In the depressive position, love and hate can coexist in our minds and our tolerance of this coexistence drives us forward in the world, for when we can recognize our hate through the vantage of our love, "depressive anxiety and feelings of guilt [ensue]," and we are confronted by "the over-riding urge to repair, preserve or revive the loved injured object" (Klein, 1952, p. 211; p. 214).

The ambivalence characteristic of the depressive position makes reparation an unstable and ambivalent affair. Although in the course of normal development the depressive position

comes to dominate the adult subject's worldview, she nevertheless reverts to the paranoid-schizoid position on occasion due to internal or external disturbances to the self (Klein, 1952). This reversion is a defense, and plunges the subject from her reparative realm right back into her matricidal one. The matricidal act that the subject commits in the paranoid-schizoid position haunts her in the depressive position.

Not only is reparation unstable, but in spite of its relation to creativity and love, it is also composed of the subject's history of violence and hate. Citing Kristeva's (2000/2001) reading of Klein's work, José Esteban Muñoz (2006) emphasizes that "reparation is far from idyllic, since the purportedly whole object is tainted with despair. The object's state of disintegration is never fully resolved. It is instead worked through" (p. 687). Reparation is thus a response to guilt, but is also composed *of* guilt: not only can we never repair, once and for all, the destruction we have wrought upon the mother, but our reparative efforts must always remind us of our destruction in the first place. This is why the "object is tainted with despair": no matter how hard we work to make up for it, the object will always be marked by the annihilating hate and aggression we have projected into it; the threat of the object's disintegration at our hands thus always lies in wait in our minds. That our creative drive in the world must be accompanied by this lurking, primal terror is the dilemma that Kristeva (2000/2001) calls "an antinomic crossroad in Klein's thought" (p. 132):

> Pity and remorse, which accompany the reparation of the lost object, carry the trace of the imaginary and symbolic matricide that reparation constantly evokes. In fact, the fear and anger common to the state of war that links me, in the paranoid-schizoid position, to Mummy-the breast are followed by a compassion for the other that Mummy becomes through the depressive position. And yet this compassion is no more than a scar of matricide: the ultimate evidence, if any were needed, that the imaginary reconciliation with the mother, which "I" need *to be* and *to think* at the cost of a putting-to-death that is excessive and of a matricide that becomes futile but that leaves me a memory that "haunts" me. (p. 132, my emphasis)

Kristeva captures the way that in order "*to be* and *to think*" the subject must grapple at once with her matricidal aggression and with her on-going work of repairing the damage upon which her very thinking subjectivity depends. Her use of "scar" as a metaphor for reparation evokes the way that reparation always carries a residual effect of our earlier aggression. 'Scar' denotes the futility of "the imaginary reconciliation"; although we can notice some of the ways in which matricide has left its mark on our selves and our lives, we can never heal it once and for all.

Throughout the subject's life, reparation is oriented in relation to a variety of objects toward which the subject might have reason to feel guilty. Yet it is a fundamentally gendered concept because the mother is the infant's first object of love and hate and therefore the prototypical relation around whom the subject subsequently organizes her affective states. For instance, Kristeva (2000/2001) argues that the child's "love for her father is…based on her initial – and eternally conflicted – bond with her mother" (p. 125). It follows that the reparation the subject might feel driven to make later toward her father (for instance) is likewise "based on her initial – and eternally conflicted – bond with her mother." This is one significant way in which reparation is gendered: it begins from the infant's relation to the mother, her body, and her maternal social role.

The infant's first relation to the mother is an oral one: love, hate, greed, and envy are organized through the infant's access to her mother's breasts (Klein, 1952; 1937/1964; Kristeva, 2000/2001; Waddell, 1998). Desires both to possess the mother and to punish and destroy her (accompanied by fears of being, in turn, punished and destroyed) are, in phantasy, connected to eating: Klein (1952) describes this infantile aggression as a violent wish to return to an originary state of one-ness with the mother. "The 'vampire-like' sucking," Klein explains, "the scooping out of the breast, develop in the infant's phantasy into making his way into the breast and further

into the mother's body" (p. 207). These "oral-sadistic impulses" toward the mother, these "phantasies of devouring and scooping out the mother's body," are common to the development of male and female children alike (p. 206). But there is more at stake for the female child in her aggressive wish to encounter and possess the inside of the mother's body than there is for the male. After all, as Kristeva (2000/2001) argues, reparation "is quite pronounced in women" (p. 124). The significance of the reparative drive for women begins in infancy.

As the infant, through the normal course of development, moves from the oral to the anal stage, her phantasies of sucking the life out of her mother, of taking the mother's insides into her own insides, shifts into a desire to *produce* something from those insides. In the previous chapter, I explored "excremental omnipotence" as a dynamic overdeveloped in female subjectivity since the desire to produce something from one's body has at once to do with a curiosity about the insides of the mother's body, a curiosity about the insides of one's *own* female body, and a desire to create a gift for the mother as atonement for the prior stage's "oral-sadistic impulses." Kristeva (2000/2001) points out that the desires encompassed by the notion of excremental omnipotence express a reparative urge and one having particularly to do with a wish to understand, signify, possess, and re-create the contents of the feminine body. This wish is reparative since our creativity expressed in the anal stage – a desire to produce and restore – is always marked by our terrible knowledge that we have devoured those inner contents in the first place. Thus, reparation holds a link to the anal stage of development; though reparation repeats in a variety of forms throughout the subject's life, it always carries the trace of the abject that the original relation to anality and excrement necessarily evokes. To corroborate her declaration that reparation is a particularly feminine urge, Kristeva points to women's "desire to beautify…: to create a *beautiful* child, to make oneself *beautiful*, to *beautify* one's home, and so forth. Such

specifically feminine acts of sublimation are reaction formations to sadistic fantasies about dangerous feces" (p. 124).

Klein (1952) details how reparation shifts from the anal stage to the genital stage of development. This shift, too, has gendered implications for the concept. Klein explains that as the infant enters the genital stage,

> the capacity for reparation increases, its range widens and sublimations gain in strength and stability; for on the genital level they are bound up with the most creative urge of man. Genital sublimations in the feminine position are linked with fertility – the power to give life – and thus also to re-create lost or injured objects. In the male position, the element of life-giving is reinforced by the phantasies of fertilizing and thus restoring or reviving the injured or destroyed mother. The genital, therefore, represents not only the organ of procreation but also the means of repairing and creating anew. (p. 223)

While reparation is a factor in the psychic life of boys and men, Klein's description here of the phantasies it generates in the genital stage again revolve around creative (re)*production* – this time of a baby of one's own – for subjects occupying the feminine position. At stake in the reparative drive for girls and women, then, is a creative and productive externalization of the interior world; we might think of reparation as a psychic mechanism for signifying the female body and the infantile phantasies that reside within it. But as we have seen, this production will always be ambivalent: "sadistic fantasies about dangerous feces" underlie a wish to make beauty in the world, and our most cherished creations must always be driven and haunted by our "lost or injured objects" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 124; Klein, 1952, p. 223).

In its fundamental ambivalence, the concept of reparation signals the human drama of love and hate as it plays out at the very constitution of our subjectivity: we create our identifications from our affective relations – both loving and aggressive – toward our objects. Klein (1952) explains:

> The anxiety relating to the internalized mother who is felt to be injured, suffering, in danger of being annihilated or already annihilated and lost for ever, leads to a stronger identification with the injured object. This identification reinforces both the drive to make reparation and the ego's attempts to inhibit aggressive impulses. (p. 212)

Our "stronger identification" emerges, through love and guilt, toward our first object – the mother – along the lines of our recognition that we have "already annihilated" her through hate and envy. Klein's (1937/1964) theory of the self is that it is created from "[everything], good or bad, that we have gone through from our earliest days onwards: all that we have received from the external world and all that we have felt in our inner world, happy and unhappy," and that "[we] keep enshrined in our minds our loved people" (p. 111). It is not just that our loved object has been devoured and is in pieces, but also that those fragments, those scars that haunt us as evidence of our destructive violence and hatred, are also a part of the psychic material of which we ourselves are composed. Throughout our lives, internal or external disturbances that evoke our infantile reactions of hate, greed, and envy serve constantly to remind us of the fragmented object of which we are, in part, constituted: "frustration from external and internal sources, inevitably again and again give rise to a feeling that the breast is destroyed and in bits inside [us], as a result of [our] greedy devouring attacks upon it" (Klein, 1952, p. 205). Just as the female subject is implicated in her efforts to externalize the interior of the mother's body since to do so is also to externalize the interior of her *own* body, so the subject is implicated in her own reparative efforts since she herself is composed of fragments created from her own aggression.

Women's subjectivity depends on destroying the mother and then integrating those destroyed parts into the self. Kristeva (2000/2001) notes that "women's relations with one another [are]…intrinsically laden with guilt" (p. 125). The infant's envy toward the mother's breast is driven by an early sexual theory-phantasy that the breast contains the father's penis; the

infant's frustrated rage at the mother comes from her certainty that the mother is deriving oral satisfaction from the father's penis by keeping it all to herself, and that the presence of the penis indicates the mother's love for someone other than just the dependent infant. This envy directed at the mother's relation to the penis is heightened for girls who, lacking a penis of their own, must sort out their primary relations to desire, authority, and aggression without recourse to the signifying function of the penis: the penis is not only frustratingly kept from them by the mother's breast, but also by their own lack. Kristeva (2000/2001) illustrates the way this lack structures the girl's psychic life, setting her identifications up along stern and persecutory lines:

> the female superego, which is formed as a response to this sadistic impotence, is even more severe than is the boy's. Because the girl is unable to edify her superego in the image of her same-sex parent (since the mother's femininity is invisible and her interior is threatening), she structures her superego in a solely reactive way. (p. 124)

The girl's relation of envy toward the mother is heightened by the lack of a penis of her own, and this increased envy gives rise to increased persecutory anxiety for the girl in relation to her mother:

> When projection is dominated by persecutory fear, the object into whom badness (the bad self) has been projected becomes the persecutor *par excellence*, because it has been endowed with all the bad qualities of the subject. The re-introjection of this object reinforces acutely the fear of internal and external persecutors. (The death instinct, or rather, the dangers attaching to it, has again been turned inwards.) (Klein, 1952, p. 207)

This psychic structure, coupled with the female experience of meeting on a daily basis the sexism that organizes the external world, does indeed seem likely to enhance women's "frustration from external and internal sources, inevitably again and again [giving] rise to a feeling that the breast is destroyed and in bits inside [her], as a result of [her] greedy devouring attacks upon it" (Klein, 1952, p. 205).

For the little girl, then, her sense of self is unconsciously informed by her identification with her mother as a threatened and threatening body, one necessarily torn to bits: the little girl must come to terms with her unconscious knowledge that women's bodies are to be violently fragmented and used for the making of others, in order that others may not only have life, but also a self. Moreover, the girl's unconscious knowledge must include the recognition of her *complicity* in this arrangement: after all, it is "a result of [her] greedy devouring attacks."

A woman's aggression toward the maternal object – an aggression which inevitably arises again and again – contributes to her anxiety about the disintegration of her *self* because she has made herself from the fragmented pieces of the object (Klein, 1952). Reparation functions not only as a mode for trying infinitely to reproduce the injured mother's lost wholeness, then, but also as a way to hold the *self* together, to make something of oneself out of the pieces from which one is composed. Miglena Nikolchina's (2004) use of matricide as a conceptual dynamic to explicate the loneliness of the woman writer is an example of what is at stake for women in our reparative work. In her description of Kristeva's oeuvre, Nikolchina regards women's work in and with symbolization as a "quest for the mother" (p. 17). She considers the work of the writing woman to signify "the disconsolate wanderings (in search of the mother) of the speaking being" (p. 18). Yet, reparation's greater urgency for women than men signals the disconsolate search for the self at stake in women's reparative labour. As we saw in Chapter Two, Nikolchina identifies a repetitive refrain that marks the work of women writers throughout the ages: the sense of being the first of one's kind, of being a new type of woman. It seems, then, that women's writing is driven not only by "the quest for the mother," but also by the desire to make something of one's self, to be received in the world in the solidness of one's identity as a writer. Inherent to this reparative work of holding oneself together through one's identifications is the

desire to heal past wounds, past slights historically directed at women: in declaring myself the first of my kind, I declare my phantasy that I can repair for the paucity of great women writers and thinkers throughout recorded history. I phantasize that I can repair not only the damage I have inflicted on the mother upon which my very subjectivity is contingent, but that, in spite of the pernicious illusion of "the maleness of all wisdom," I can also repair the wounds tied tightly within "the female knot of pain" and thus make for myself – and for other women writers in the world – a room of my own (Felman, 1993).

Mourning, Melancholia, and Memoir

Reparation is a mode of mourning, of working through the grief of one's violence and loss. Nikolchina (2004) describes the privileged role Kristeva allots to the mother in her theory of the affective conditions of our subjectivity, highlighting how the mother's elusiveness is the object of our mourning and reparation: "across this theoretic rehabilitation of the mother the tale/history of her loss emerges as the presiding destiny of the speaking being, forever mournful and therefore creative" (p. 19). Our mourning drives us forward, drives us to create and produce. In her (2012) poem "Another Obituary," written to mark the death of feminist poet and intellectual Adrienne Rich, Marge Piercy (2012) captures the way mourning drives us to create:

> Their voices murmur in my inner
> ear but never will I hear them
> speak new words and no matter
> how I cherish what they gave us
> I want more, I still want more. (online)

Piercy's desire is reparative because in her very act of writing this poem, she admits that if there is to be "more" it must be she who writes it, and that the condition for her writing is the occasion of mourning the death of a beloved object: this poem is made from Rich's (and that of other literary feminist foremothers) death. Piercy "cherishes" what Rich and other admired women

poets gave her because their work made possible a space for Piercy as a woman poet, and indeed, their deaths made possible this particular poem-creation.

The work of reparation drives Piercy's poem whose content literally mourns the death of Rich, her intellectual mother. Klein (1952) explicitly links reparation to the work of mourning, arguing that with the achievement of the depressive position when guilt about the injured love object arises, reparation functions as a way for "the ego to overcome mourning" (p. 214). Kristeva (2000/2001) points out that for Klein, mourning "is directed not toward the actual person but toward the internal object" (p. 79). Klein (1952) describes mourning as the labour of "building up securely the good objects within [oneself]" in order to be able to tolerate "the stress of fear of loss of the loved mother" without falling to pieces (p. 218). For without this capacity to mourn the loss of the mother and one's culpability thereof, one would encounter "a shattered inner world" (p. 217). Klein's concept of reparation describes how the subject lives with herself and her infantile violence, and learns to tolerate the vicissitudes of the intensity of love and hate which structures her psychic life. As a theory of mourning, reparation differs in an important way from Freud's (1917/2006) theory of mourning in which he posits that mourning allows us gradually to withdraw our affect from a lost beloved object so that "the ego is left free and uninhibited once again after the mourning-work is completed" (p. 312). Unlike Freud's description of the mourning-work, reparation as mourning can never be complete because every reparative effort is marked by the original matricidal scar.

For instance, the peace that Freud describes in his theory of mourning is markedly absent in Kristeva's (2000/2001) comment which suggests the on-going struggle that matricide and reparation represent for women: "The mother's interior continues to be the object of her daughter's destructive drives" (p. 126). The mother remains, interminably, the object of

destruction for the daughter, but also the object of creativity. Matricide and reparation operate through the subject's oscillation between the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive positions and it is this oscillation which generates a woman's creative energy to write. While the interaction of matricide and reparation in a woman's inner world drives her writing, it also lends itself as the conflicted object of inquiry which haunts the content of what she writes. She writes to undo her violence, yet the writing always repeats that violence.

Kleinian reparation, as Muñoz (2006) notes above, is a working through; although it never concludes quite so neatly as Freud's view of mourning, it is akin to Freudian mourning through its productivity. In this "Kleinian universe…[which] is dominated by the mother," what might constitute melancholia, the inability to mourn (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 114; Freud, 1917/2006)? And, if Kleinian mourning can never be complete, can we know the difference between mourning and melancholia? With his (1986) theory of the dead mother complex which describes the problem of having a mother who is not emotionally available to survive the infant's psychical and destructive use of her, André Green offers one way to think about melancholia: melancholia as the failure of matricide.

Green (1986) highlights the significance of the *mother*'s inner world to her capacity to affect the personality development of her children, and their experiences of the world. As we have seen for Klein, the mother is subject to her infant's psychically aggressive use of her as an internal object from which the infant creates the self. The mother must survive this destruction. The mother's psychical death that Green describes is different from that of Klein. In the dead mother complex, the mother remains physically alive, and goes about the business of caring for the baby's basic needs. But, overcome by some private bereavement – Green's examples are a miscarriage or the death of a loved one – the mother is emotionally unavailable to the baby for a

time; her warm presence is replaced by "a cold core", a "blank" state (p. 150; p. 146). Psychically dead, the mother is – at least temporarily – unavailable to survive the Kleinian infant's matricidal aggression: Green's conception of the mother's deadness marks a failure on the mother's part – one we might not blame her for, given the circumstances, but a failure nevertheless. Green theorizes that the dead mother complex explains periods of "intense intellectual activity" and "artistic creation" among those who have suffered from this maternal affective withdrawal (p. 160). However, what *drives* these creative periods differs from what drives Kleinian reparation-as-production. Green argues that the subject whose mother suffered this kind of emotional death – this blankness – is driven by the need to understand the cause of that death. The intense intellectual activity and artistic creation reflect the subject's narrative urgency to get to the bottom of the mother's inner world, a quest to make meaning of the mother's loss. This differs from the reparative Kleinian quest of atoning for the damage one does to the mother in the process of making a self capable of thoughtful and creative activity. Although the subject affected by the dead mother complex might assume, in accordance with her infantile narcissism, that she is at the centre of the mother's cold core – the cause of it – she isn't. Green explains that children who suffer from the dead mother complex are compelled to care for the mother, to attend to her psychic needs, rather than to have her take care of theirs. This configuration reminds us that the mother has an inner world and was once a dependent infant herself: here she fails to be a good enough mother[6], and instead depends upon the child to fulfill her own psychic needs[7]. If the mother's emotional unavailability can drive the subject's

[6] Winnicott's (1953) concept of the good enough mother describes the mother who adapts herself to her infant's needs, and then, in accordance with the infant's development, gradually reduces her adaptability to foster the child's growing independence. The good enough mother avows and tolerates both the loving and aggressive feelings that the infant arouses in her; in her ambivalence, she functions through the depressive position (Waddell, 1998).

[7] Just as I argue that the psychical dramas of the mother-daughter relationship according to Klein can illuminate women's relationships to each other and to feminist theory in the university, so perhaps can Green's notion of the

intellectual and artistic production, giving rise to its own kind of narrative urgency, how can we know the difference between this kind of narrative urgency and the reparative urgency I describe here, that motivated by a wish to repair for the psychical damage that the infant does to the mother? How might knowing the difference between these modes of production matter to the affective experience of thinking subjectivity for women?

I think the aesthetic object of the memoir, specifically – the story of the self – is the key to thinking about this difference. Revisiting Bechdel's narrative urgency is helpful here. In *Are You My Mother?* Bechdel's (2012) sense of narrative urgency shifts with her affective relation to her mother through different periods of her growing-up. Bechdel's memoir examines what it means to write this memoir about her relationship with her mother; it is about the conditions – particularly the psychical and emotional conditions – of the memoir's very possibility. In the course of the story, there are moments when Bechdel seems driven by the intense intellectual activity and artistic creativity that Green describes as symptomatic of the dead mother complex. For instance, Green explains that the subject who suffers the dead mother complex experiences the sudden decathexis caused by the mother's blank state as creating "'psychical holes'" in the ego (p. 146). The intellectual or artistic activity which Green says results from the complex functions as "a piece of cognitive fabric which is destined to mask the hole left by the decathexis" (p. 152). In *Are You My Mother?* Bechdel begins one chapter by recounting a dream in which her psychoanalyst comes to her office and offers to patch a hole in a pair of Alison's pants. Bechdel parallels her analyst's dream work of patching the hole with a childhood memory of her mother patching a pair of Alison's pants whose fabric had also been worn down. When Alison tells her analyst about the dream, the analyst notes that the dream reverses their roles by

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mother's use of the daughter. A question for another study might be: where can we see evidence in the academy of Green's dead mother complex?

having her, the analyst, come to Alison's office. Referring to *Fun Home*, the book which gave rise to her readers' question about what her mother thought, the analyst asks: "Do you think you're trying to heal your mother with the book about your father?" (p. 82).

Her analyst's question causes Alison to reflect on another childhood memory. One night when she is nine years old Alison can't sleep, and she gets up to watch some TV with her mother, Helen. Bechdel tells us that her maternal grandparents had both died in the spring before this memory and that "following their deaths, Mom fell into a deep depression" (p. 84). Bechdel says that as a child at the time, she didn't consciously know about her mother's depression. "But now," she writes, "I see that it explains the painful tenderness I developed toward Mom around this time. A tenderness all the more acute for its having no outlet" (p. 84). One way that young Alison tries to express this tenderness is by compulsively apologizing to her mother; apparently, Alison feels culpable for her mother's blank state. The memory scene when Alison is nine culminates when, in the context of a family which Bechdel says never spoke of love and loving each other, Helen asks Alison if she loves her. Bechdel conveys the weight of this question on her child self, and her sense that she couldn't possibly answer such a question adequately. This vignette resonates with Green's notion of the dead mother complex: here Helen uses Alison to fulfil her own psychical needs, rather than offering herself for Alison's use. As Green suggests, the blankness at the root of Helen's affective withdrawal leads Alison to generate theories about her mother's cold core. Alison's dream with which she introduces this memory lends credence to Green's idea that the mother's depression and psychical deadness can give rise to a melancholic and generative hole in her child's ego.

I contend that in order to construct this particular intellectual and aesthetic object, the very memoir in which she provides evidence of her own experience of the dead mother complex,

Bechdel has first had to move beyond – or work through – the complex. Immediately after depicting her mother asking her child self whether she loves her, Bechdel gives the reader an enigmatic clue that as the author, now, of the present memoir, she exists in a Kleinian reparative relation to her mother and this relation drives her work. On page 90 of *Are You My Mother?*, Bechdel depicts her mother as a child, perhaps about nine years old. Among the details she includes in this depiction is a small, unpatched hole at the bottom of her mother's dress. This detail suggests that Bechdel has achieved the perspective necessary to reflect on her own dead mother complex and is no longer stuck within the melancholia – the "painful tenderness" from which, as a child, she could not make meaning – that marks it (p. 84). She recognizes that the hole in the ego for which she has felt such intense responsibility began in, or belongs to, her mother's inner world, and thus preceded Alison's very existence.

Green's dead mother complex theorizes the melancholic relation of the child who invests too much in trying to heal her mother's wounds. Kleinian mourning, the reparative labour which drives a woman's narrative urgency, is also about healing. But this mode of reparation is the woman writer's work of trying to heal her mother for her own psychically destructive use of her. By the time Bechdel arrives at the end of recounting the laboriousness of writing this memoir, her narrative urgency is about her own use of her mother. Bechdel can only finish the memoir because of her mother's – perhaps newly found – capacity to survive Alison's necessary destruction of her. "At last," writes Bechdel at the end of the memoir when her mother reads a draft of the book and declares it coherent, "I have destroyed my mother, and she has survived my destruction" (p. 285). At the age of nine, while trying to fulfil her *mother's* psychic needs, Alison was no more capable of making psychic use of her mother than her mother was of surviving. But *Are You My Mother?* chronicles how this achievement – the daughter's capacity to use the

mother, and the mother's capacity to survive – is necessary to the aesthetic creation of a woman's story of the thinking self.

Bechdel's memoir is literally about how she couldn't finish the memoir until she felt assured that her mother could survive it. In this way it is exemplary of how creating the aesthetic object of the *memoir*, specifically, signals reparative narrative urgency, as opposed to the melancholic urgency that Green describes. Many of the memoirs I read in this study could be analysed for evidence of the author's dead mother complex: in *Memoirs from Away* Buss's mother is lonely and alone in Nova Scotia while pregnant and mothering two children (1999); Steedman's mother hates being a poor, powerless woman and mother in *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986). And yet, as Muñoz's comment suggests, and Bechdel literally depicts, each of the memoirs constitutes a *working through* which denotes the productivity of Kleinian reparation-as-mourning, rather than the stuck-ness of Green's melancholia. In order to produce the memoir, each daughter/author must have received enough resilience from her mother which allowed her both to experience and consider her indebtedness to her mother. Though it may bear a relation to the melancholic inquiry of what lies at the cause of the mother's blank state, this indebtedness constitutes the central narrative urgency that drives the memoir.

Just as the boundaries of the depressive and paranoid-schizoid positions are uncertain and oscillate, so, too, does the work of mourning and melancholia in the Kleinian universe dominated by the mother. Green's theory of the dead mother complex casts uncertainty on whether we can know the difference between the aesthetic object created from the quest to know and heal the mother's private wounds, and the work of reparation which atones for our own psychical violence to her. In spite of this uncertainty, however, Bechdel's *Are You My Mother?* supports my argument that the production of the memoir, specifically, signals that the mother's good

enough resilience has taken place to allow the daughter to work through the reparative work of mourning via memoir. In the next section I turn to Adriana Cavarero's (1997/2000) theory of narrative in which she demonstrates how having a story of the self relies on the mother in very particular ways. A woman's story of the self thus signals that her mother has been available to her.

"Narrative Urgency" and the Reparative Drive

My discussion of the concept of reparation illustrates reparation's urgency, particularly for women. But why are women's memoirs, specifically, reflective of the reparative drive? How can reparation help us to think about where our stories come from, why we tell them the way that we do, and how our narrative choices and interpretations implicate our selves and our inner worlds? In this section I explore Cavarero's (1997/2000) theory of narrative. Cavarero regards the mother as profoundly significant to the self's capacity to know her own life story. She links the crucial role the mother plays in one's life to her theory of memory as narrative drive. Cavarero's theory of narrative evokes how telling one's life story necessitates the interminable return to one's mother; she helps me articulate the way that Bechdel's sense of "narrative urgency" is, precisely, her reparative drive.

In her (1997/2000) book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero explores how narrative is urgent, arguing that our lives do not give rise to the stories we can tell about them, but rather that the stories about our lives reify the shapes through which we understand and make sense of our lives; narratives of our lives instruct us on the meanings that our lives hold. According to Cavarero, we cannot arrive at the meaning of our life alone; the story of our life requires the other and her recognition of us. My life story is inextricably entwined with the other's capacity to relate it to me: "Biography and autobiography are bound

together in a single desire" (p. 33). For Cavarero, the meaning of one's life is found in the narrative shapes that it takes on through story-telling, so we urgently need the other who can tell us these stories. Cavarero cites an allegory to help us understand how we need the other in order to narrate the self. She describes how in the story a man is woken in the night and needs to run outside to address some emergency. In the morning he looks out his window to where he ran. From this bird's eye view, he sees that his footsteps the night before traced a picture of a great stork in the mud. This story conveys how, as one proceeds through life, one needs distance to be able to see the shape and meaning one's life has taken. This distance is achieved with the help of the other – one who has distance as a result of her difference from the self. This different other can recognize the meaningful shape of our life when we, ourselves too close, cannot.

Cavarero's theory of narrative relies upon the mother and how she lends our life coherence. "The story of one's life always begins where that person's life begins," she writes. "We are not speaking of Man in his disembodied and universal substance, but rather of a particular man, a unique being who bears [his] name….Since he exists, he was born of a mother. The uniqueness of his identity, his *daimon*, has its origin in the event of this birth" (p. 11). It is the mother who gives us not only life itself, but also the possibility of being recognized by others. This amounts, for Cavarero, to the capacity to have – and to know something about – a self and a life story, for "the category of personal identity postulates an*other* as necessary" (p. 20, original emphasis). When we are born into the world, we are exposed to it; our exposure requires recognition from others because "another can render tangible the identity of someone by telling him/her his/her story" (p. 20). Though many others will give us to ourselves in the form of stories throughout our lives, the mother is the paradigmatic first other, the other on whom this narrative process of encountering the shape of our life depends: "Besides being she from whom

the existent comes, the mother is also the *other* to whom the existent first appears" (p. 21). It is a tremendous debt of gratitude that we owe to the mother, then, for she has given us both life and the possibility that our life will hold meaning: we rely on the recognition of others throughout our lives to give meaning to our life-narratives, and these others always repeat that inaugural act of the mother's reading of us – that first moment of her recognition of us as a self.

Cavarero's discussion of the role of memory in our capacity to know the shape of our life story further reiterates the importance of the mother's role as she "to whom the existent first appears." Because we cannot halt our memories at will, they function in our minds as a constant autobiographical narrative. But the problem with memory is that it doesn't begin at the beginning:

> Indeed, the first and fundamental chapter of the life-story that our memory tells us is already incomplete. The unity of the self – which lies in the miracle of birth, like a promise of its naked uniqueness – is already irremediably lost in the very moment in which that same self begins to commemorate herself. This loss of unity gets turned into the lack that feeds desire. (p. 39)

Though our *capacity* for memory begins with the moment at which we are born into the world as a unique being, this is also the moment – that inaugural moment of our uniqueness – which our memory cannot access. This gap – what Cavarero calls "the lack" – is what drives the relentless narrative of memory and ensures that, without the (m)other, this constant autobiographical narrative of our minds must remain incomplete. The desire that this lack feeds in our memory is at once the desire to know the beginning of our life-story, of our unique, narratable self, and – related – the desire for an other who can tell us that story. This recalls Helen M. Buss's (1999) familiarly resonant comment: "I feel loved when my mother tells stories about me" (p. 43). How could there be a more loving gesture than the recognition that lends meaning to one's selfhood?

Without her mother, there could be no Helen, and, further, there could be no possibility for her to make something from the shape and meaning of her life. The desire that Buss's remark captures is at once the desire to hear stories about herself, and her desire for a mother who can tell such stories.

Cavarero argues that we are constantly seeking ways to hear and to tell the stories of our lives, and to understand the meaning that these stories hold, due to "the uncontrollable narrating impulse" of memory (p. 35). But both our memory and the stories we can tell about ourselves are reliant on the narratives which only others can provide. The mother is our first other, our life begins with her, and "the lack that feeds desire" is our lack of recollection of being born to her – of being one with her, and then separating from her. The uncontrollable impulse to narrate this lack returns us to her, again and again. A woman's urge to narrate her life thus requires her mother to recognize her and to offer her a story of her self, even while having a story of the self requires the repudiation of the mother. Reparation emerges as a dynamic that drives a woman's narrating work of expressing her indebtedness to the mother for her gift of recognition and as atonement for the violence she has done to her. And, reparation produces its own paradoxical trap: though it drives our writing, our narrating, it also interminably enacts our original matricidal crime.

Bone Black: Righting the Mother

As a psychical dynamic which structures our subjectivity and creativity and which gives shape to women's lives in particular, reparation offers us a theory of narrative and a way to explore what it is that drives the thinking woman's memoir writing. In the Foreword to her (1996) memoir *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, bell hooks describes her writing process in a way that resonates with the concept of reparation. The memoir is composed by the gathering of

fragments of hooks's self and her memories of her loved and hated objects. Stitching each piece of the memoir to the next (as opposed to patching holes), she holds herself together through her story, warding off the "states of disintegration" which threaten the thinking woman through the aggressive and mournful conditions of her intellectualism (Klein, 1952, p. 204):

> like a crazy quilt, *Bone Black* brings together fragments to make a whole. Bits and pieces connect in a random and playfully irrational way. And there is always the persistence of repetition, for that is what the mind does – goes over and over the same things looking at them in different ways. (hooks, 1996, p. xiv)

Hooks explicitly links this method of reparative suturing which is foregrounded and thus clearly visible in her memoir writing to the very possibility of her prolific career as an academic writer: the fragments of self from which *Bone Black* is composed – "the dreams, fantasies, experiences that preoccupied [her] as a girl" – "are the foundation on which [she has] built a life in writing, a life committed to intellectual pursuits" (p. xiv).

Bone Black tells the story of hooks's early cerebral and creative passions. It also situates hooks in the social context in which this passion was born, bringing forward the significance of context for hooks's work. An academic and a public intellectual, hooks has rallied throughout her career as an anti-racist feminist scholar for equity and social justice in American public and private life, and for the recognition of the role that the emotional world plays in our human endeavour of living well with one another across our differences (e.g. hooks, 1990; 1993; 1994). Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in a working-class black family in the American south, hooks's girlhood interests were shaped and informed by questions of race, class, sexuality and gender that presented themselves as pertinent material realities in her daily life. One way to read *Bone Black* is as a step toward repairing an injustice – a lack – that hooks locates at the very heart of the American literary landscape: "Not enough is known about the experience of black

girls in our society" (p. xii). Citing as exemplar the works of one of her intellectual mothers, Toni Morrison, whose novel *The Bluest Eye* provided young hooks with a refreshing glimpse of her own human experience in the world, hooks calls for a spectrum of representations of "girls confronting issues of class, race, identity, girls who [struggle] to confront and cope with pain," and of "black girls who [are] critical thinkers, theorizing their lives, telling the story, and by so doing making themselves subjects of history" (p. xii). In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison (1970) introduces us to Claudia, a question child whose observations about the politics of race, class, and gender are personal, painful, and precise. Claudia's perspective as a child gives her theories about the world a directness and an incisive clarity. In *Bone Black* hooks returns to her child self to give us a portrait of a young black girl whose childhood curiosity about her world will give rise to her professional intellectualism. Hooks explores how her identifications and her ambitions interacted, informing one another in an interplay of pleasure and pain.

Hooks's reparative drive is implicated in both the quantity and content of the writing she has produced throughout her career as an academic woman. *Bone Black,* as a story of the self and of the inner life, allows us to trace the origins of her urge to reparation which would later structure hooks's work in the world. *Bone Black* gives us insight into the debt hooks owes to her mother and into the ambivalence imbuing her identifications as an intellectual black American woman. A key to the reparative function of hooks's memoir lies in her memory of the times when, as a girl, she refused to buy little gifts for her mother's birthday or for Mother's Day because she felt sure that such a gesture could only cheapen the deeply passionate feelings that she held for her mother. This refusal of material gifting was interpreted by hooks's mother as a sign that she was "an uncaring girl" (p. 140). This devastates hooks who desires "to be a better daughter, a daughter that makes her life brighter, easier" (p. 140). In this yearning to make life

easier for her mother lies a clue to hooks's dedication to equity and social justice throughout the whole of her career. This vignette also provides a hint about what drives the particularity of this memoir, about the "narrative urgency" behind this story of hooks's self: she writes to right the injustices she worries *she* has caused her mother. She writes toward a fantasy of finally being able to offer the right gift to her mother, a gift that could hold the intensity of hooks's affect and indebtedness.

The fragments of her mother's life that hooks offers her readers in *Bone Black* create the impression of a hard working woman in a difficult marriage who has had to sacrifice parts of herself for her roles as wife and mother. Hooks identifies a tension in her relationship to her mother that arises partly from hooks's own refusal to make the kinds of sacrifices her mother has made, the kinds of sacrifices that her mother regards as proper for a woman to make, even if – or perhaps *because* – they prioritize the lives of others before her own. *Bone Black*, hooks's gift to her mother, begins with a story of another gift. The first line of the memoir describes hooks's mother gifting her a quilt that her maternal great-grandmother made. Hooks and her mother have come across the quilt while sorting through her mother's hope chest, a collection of things that her mother imagined would serve the fantasy of pleasure in her future domestic life. This rare glimpse into her mother's interior life – hooks likens opening the hope chest to opening Pandora's box – also offers hooks a glimpse at the way in which she is profoundly in her mother's debt. Hooks notices that for her mother to have become her mother, she has first had to give up something of herself:

> I see her remembering, clutching tightly in her hand some object, some bit of herself that she has had to part with in order to live in the present. I see her examining each hope to see if it has been fulfilled, if the promises have been kept. I pretend I do not see the tears in her eyes. (p. 2)

By beginning her memoir with the gift of her mother's dashed hopes, hooks avows her indebtedness to her mother.

Hooks's sense of indebtedness structures and troubles her relationship to her mother. She tells us that she was her mama's "problem child" (p. 24; p. 84). Different from her siblings in her demand for a life of the mind, hooks's desires and passions seem illegible to her family. And yet, she has come *from* her family; they have contributed to making her who she is. Hooks describes the time her parents gave her a room of her own. Although she's not the eldest daughter, she is allowed to move into her brother's bedroom when he moves out because her difference from her sisters makes her so strange to them. This room of her own is both a refuge and an exile from the family; the room captures hooks's gratitude to her family for the opportunities it provides her, and her sense of lonely alienation that arises from her sense of her difference. While her difference from her family preoccupies hooks, her difference from her mother is what really poses the "problem."

Part of hooks's problem status is her resistance to the roles that the social world would force upon her. She vehemently resists marriage and domesticity, for instance, even or especially in the face of her mother's efforts to teach her domestic skills in order that she might become a good wife. Hooks's determination not to marry begins early, but comes to a head in her teen years when her mother can't understand why she prefers the lure of a life of the mind over the promise of marriage and a husband. Using the third person to describe herself, a device which serves at various point throughout the memoir to convey hooks's sense of alienation and otherness within her family, hooks describes a typical scene:

> She stomps upstairs shouting, I will never be married! I will never marry! When she comes back downstairs she must explain why, she must find words – Seems like, she says, stammering, marriage is for men, that women get nothing out of it, men get

> everything. She did not want the mother to feel as if she was saying unkind things about her marriage. She did not want the mother to know that it was precisely her marriage that made it seem like a trap, a door closing in a room without air. (pp. 97-98)

This scene captures the problem of identification with and repudiation of the mother that structures a girl's thinking life: although her mother's domestic arrangement literally made hooks's life possible, hooks cannot tolerate the idea of a similar arrangement for herself. In trying so desperately to explain her resistance to marriage, hooks depicts the problem that a girl's necessary differentiation of herself from her mother can often feel like a terrible condemnation. In this conflict between identification with and repudiation of the mother, language begins to break down: hooks cannot find the words. This search for words drives her reparative work – her writing, her righting. As we see above, hooks regards *Bone Black* as a quilt that brings together fragments to make a whole. Her memoir is the story quilt that hooks has made to gift to her mother in exchange for the one her mother handed over, that first quilt which held her hopes.

Hooks's identifications as a girl whose bourgeoning intellectualism calls to her like a siren song proceed along similarly ambivalent lines that mark her relationship to her mother. At various points throughout *Bone Black* hooks deploys the image of a snake to signal her hunger for knowledge and language. The first time we meet the snake, he is a friend, an ally for young bell; frustrated in the context of her family among whom she often feels like a misunderstood outsider, bell turns to the "green tree snake" who understands her, who listens to her troubles (p.11). She feels at home with her fantasy of the snake who offers her a new kind of future, one where her questions and ideas will be listened to and heard; she "[promises] the snake that they could live together forever near their favorite tree" (p. 12). Still just a child, hooks has found her own tree of knowledge, a temptation away from the kind of security that conformity to the life

she knows – a life structured by her constant confrontations with the frustratingly unjust demands and conventions of gender, race, and class – would offer.

The trope of the serpent with its connotations of women's knowledge as the original sin cannot be without its underbelly. Later in the memoir we meet the snake again, but this time it figures death. Hooks describes her confusion about and fascination with death when her paternal grandmother is dying. By extending her serpent metaphor to describe her curiosity about death – "Death, that snake that had confronted them on the way to school…year in and year out" (p. 40) – hooks reminds us that we cannot shed the coil of death and knowledge. By drawing upon the image of the snake to signal both the pleasure of knowledge and the destruction of death, hooks brings to the fore the unconscious connection between knowledge, thinking, imagining, and its condition, matricide: the death of the mother in phantasy. The serpent metaphor evokes Eve's sin, specifically, which denotes how women's lust for knowledge is somehow more pernicious and deadly than men's. Woman – Eve, hooks – becomes responsible for the destruction upon which her knowledge is contingent, and for the exile – from family, from the comforts of home – to which it affectively and/or literally gives rise. Can woman make reparation for this original sin? Although hooks's alliance with the snake on the one hand signifies her refusal to obey the law of the father, its phallicism also pulls her into and implicates her in the masculine realm where language, a component of the paternal function, resides. This requires a shift in hooks's identifications and allegiance; a shift away from the world of her mother. Hooks's commitment to her intellectual pursuits leads her down a life-path that is not only radically different than that of her mother, but, through the ordinary injustice of generational change, is comprised of different opportunities than her mother would or could have had as a black woman in the south. Reparation – for rejecting her mother's way of life for herself, for having opportunities that her

mother was denied – drives hooks's on-going dedication to feminist, anti-racist theory and pedagogy, even as the conditions of such work must reduplicate hooks's repudiation of her mother.

Hooks's temptation for knowledge pulls her between gendered poles of identification – rebellion from her father and rejection of her mother. As a child, she has a recurring dream which captures this ambivalence. The dream once more features a snake. Hooks describes the dream which emerges from a story that her beloved maternal grandmother tells her. Though her grandmother cannot read or write, she bequeaths to hooks a rich oral history, "She tells me the stories over and over so I will know them, so I will pass them on" (p. 50). Hooks's dream is about

> a magic woman who lives inside smoke. She hides in the smoke so no one can capture her….She can take the smoke and make it become many things. Using the smoke she turns herself into a male. She must be male to be a warrior. There are no women warriors. She fights fiercely against her enemies. They cannot understand when the arrows that pierce her body do not cause her to fall. When they try to capture her alive she takes the smoke…and turns the smoke into a snake that devours her enemies. (p. 50)

Hooks is unsettled by how "the face of the young male warrior looks like my face. I stare into his eyes as if I am looking into a mirror," but when the warrior in the dream returns to her woman form, "she no longer looks like me" (p. 51). Hooks tells Saru, her grandmother, about the dream:

> When I tell Saru of my dream, of the young warrior who wears my face in battle, she says that this is the face of my destiny, that I am to be a warrior. I do not understand. I do not intend to fight in wars or battles. She says that there are many battlegrounds in life, that I will live the truth of the dream in time. (p. 51)

Hooks will become a warrior of words, a warrior who wields knowledge – that snake who will destroy her enemies. But why does her dream tell her that to achieve this position of power and

authority she must identify with the masculine and shed her feminine identifications? What do we make of hooks's claim that "there are no women warriors"?

Even while negating its significance with her declaration that there are no women warriors, hooks's assertion alludes to Maxine Hong Kingston's (1975) *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. Like *Bone Black*, *The Woman Warrior* situates Kingston's intellectualism in the context of an oral tradition of dreams and stories told to her, a woman of colour in America, by generations of women before her. An early precursor of the memoir boom among women academics, *The Woman Warrior* is a kind of mother to the genre. Hooks and her memoir are indebted to Kingston in a similar way in which they are indebted to the stories from hooks's maternal line. And yet, hooks's remark that "there are no women warriors" also works to silence the reverberations of Kingston that we might hear echoing through hooks's prose. Here is an instance of hooks taking up Nikolchina's (2004) lonely-but-aggressive refrain that she is the first of her kind.

Hooks's assertion that there are no women warriors disavows the significance of Kingston's labour, but also that of her personal mother. Saru – a woman who has surely fought many battles of her own – advises hooks that "there are many battlegrounds in life." Might one such battleground, for women, be motherhood itself? Hooks's mother must combat and survive the onslaught of the particular social circumstances of her motherhood, including a sexist and racist environment, a difficult, perhaps violent, marriage, the use of her body, and the sacrificing of her own hopes. And she must prove resilient in the face of her children's unconscious violence, described by Kristeva with the language of revolutionary battle: "The 'beheading' of the mother, understood as both a 'putting to death' and a 'flight' to be taken both with the mother and against her – is a necessary precondition for the psychic freedom of the subject" (2000/2001,

p. 131). Can hooks recognize how motherhood constitutes a battle for her mother? Freud (1925/1961) proposes that negation – a negative statement such as "there are no women warriors" – admits, through disavowal, something unbearable to conscious thought. Hooks's negation of woman warriorhood admits to conscious thought her mother's survival of hooks's destruction. Hooks can't allow that her mother is a woman warrior because to do so would require her avowal of how she has waged battle on her mother in the name of her own subjective development, in the name of her capacity, now, to write this very book. Examining her mother's battlegrounds would require hooks to confront a difficult truth: the things hooks's mother sacrificed in battle, the wounds and scars she accrued, have directly benefitted hooks by giving her a life and a mind, and have provided hooks with the opportunity to become a more recognizable woman warrior than her mother. As a warrior of words, hooks writes books – including *Bone Black* – in order to repair for the social conditions that embattle women and people of colour. Yet her work can't escape the way it enacts the *psychical* destruction upon which it depends, for, "The loss of the mother – which for the imaginary is tantamount to the death of the mother – becomes the organizing principle for the subject's symbolic capacity" (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 129-130).

Conclusion

The paradox that plagues Bechdel (2012) – she can't write about her mother until she gets her out of her head, and she can't get her out of her head until she writes about her – echoes through the dilemma that plays out in *Bone Black*. Hooks writes the memoir to right the wrongs she fears she did; the book fills the gap of those missing gifts which hooks considered meaningless and so refused to buy for her mother. But while the book seeks to repair, it also necessarily reduplicates the very matricidal act and its reverberations for which hooks desires to

atone. This is the problem which repeats in women's narratives which are driven by reparation, made urgent in the depressive position:

> As for reparation itself, it is by separating from the mother, to which the self was once linked through an initial projective identification, that the self learns to engage in reparation. At that point the self can rediscover the mother, but not as it once knew her. On the contrary, the self never stops re-creating the mother through the very freedom it gained from being separated from her. The mother is a woman who is always renewed in images and in words, through a process of which 'I' am the creator simply because I am the one who restores her. (Kristeva, 2000/2001, p. 131).

The loss of the mother – our destruction of her – gives rise to narrative urgency, to our on-going reparative work of "re-creating" and "restoring" the lost mother. This necessary loss of the mother is "the lack that feeds desire" (Cavarero, 1997/2000, p. 39). Cavarero points out that our inability to access our earliest memory – separation from the mother – drives us incessantly to seek that moment in the form of narrative from the (m)other. Kristeva agrees, above, that the loss of the mother entails our constant return to her in our work of symbolization. As Bechdel and hooks discover, however, we can never access the mother as we "once knew her," and so our reparative narrative urgency is constantly resumed.

Chapter Four: Between the Mother Tongue and the Name-of-the-Father: Women's Dilemma in Language

The lost languages, forever lurking somewhere inside the ventricles of the hearts of those who had lost them.
– Margaret Laurence, 1974, p. 264

Introduction

Shoshana Felman (1993) suggests that because educated women's self-consciousness is always inflected with the traditionally male context of our learning, our autobiographies can only ever exist in a state of becoming. Women do not yet have an autobiography because insofar as language – structured by phallic logic – positions women as objects, we find ourselves in a paradoxical relation to language as we make of ourselves, through our writing, subjects of our own life stories. While this paradoxical relation to language belongs to every woman, Felman identifies the problem as a particular one for "educated women" (p. 13). In the course of our academic training in philosophical and literary traditions, "educated women" simultaneously become complicit in the patriarchal logic of academic language and aware of our complicity. This simultaneity is what Felman means when she refers to women's reading as "an act that constantly – deliberately or unwittingly – *enacts* our difference yet finally escapes our own control" (p. 10, original emphasis). Madeleine Grumet (1988) describes this dilemma of language as it plays out in speech and writing: in drawing on her academic privilege to address the oppression of women, the academic woman must speak in the language, and thus become a part of an institution that is implicated in that oppression: "The very institutions that I repudiate for their perpetuation of patriarchal privilege are the ones within which I have found the voice that tries to sing the tune of two worlds" (p. 29).

Like Grumet, Jacques Derrida (1996/1998) considers how our language use relates to – and even constitutes – the complexity of the speaker's very subjectivity. His theory that language

positions subjects politically resonates with Felman's (1993) contention that reading and being read call women into feminism. Foregrounding how language estranges, even while it constitutes our subjectivity, Derrida makes the paradoxical claim that "I only have one language, yet it is not mine" (p. 2). In the wake of this strange remark, Derrida's imagined interlocutor interrupts him: "there you are, claiming, in French, that French has always been a foreign language to you! Come off it! If that were true, you would not even know how to say it; you would not know how to say it so well!" (p. 5). Derrida points out the interlocutor's slippage between Derrida's claim that, as a non-French citizen, the French language is "not mine," and a claim that it is "foreign." Derrida's imagined exchange can illuminate the academic woman's dilemma. If academic language were foreign to women, women could not use such language to discuss its foreignness, let alone to "say it so well" as, for example, Felman and Grumet do. Yet as women enter into language through separation from and destruction of the mother (with whom, paradoxically, we are then to identify) and via compliance with the symbolic power of the father, it is 'not ours.' This chapter explores how this estranging function of language – its 'not-ours-ness' – plays through women's status as speaking (and writing and reading) subjects.

Jane Gallop (1985) offers an example for thinking about this 'not-ours-ness' of language. Gallop wonders about the role of the apostrophe in the academic and disciplinary title "Women's Studies." "Women's Studies" is an ambiguous title insofar as it is unclear whether women are the objects of studies – studies about women – or whether women are the subjects of studies – studies belonging to, studies by women. The very language used to name the field describes a constitutive problem within, and taken up by, the field. Gallop muses about the fecund meaning bound up in that little apostrophe, the mark of the genitive:

> The word "genitive" – which means "indicative of possession" and which etymologically traces back to gignere, to beget – may itself be pregnant with the history of the Name-of-

> the-Father as an attempt to legislate begetting under a name indicative of possession. The inevitable ambiguity of the genitive (subjective or objective) may resonate not only with the mother as bound up with the infant prior to the latter's ability to distinguish subject and object but also with women's traditional place in culture as neither object nor subject but disturbingly both. Woman's ambiguous cultural place may be precisely the standpoint from which it is possible to muddle the subject/object distinction, that distinction necessary for a certain epistemological relation to the world…Might not one of the goals of what we so ambiguously call "women's studies" be to call into question the oppressive effects of an epistemology based on the principle of a clear and nonambiguous distinction of subject and object of knowledge? (pp. 15-6)

While Gallop refers specifically to "Women's Studies" as a discipline or department within the university, her discussion also applies to the dilemma of women studying. Although women are in a bind through this relation to language which amounts to a paradox – in using language, women enter subjectivity, but in using language, we are reminded of, and complicit in, our objectified status – our willingness to theorize and think about this relation, Gallop insists, can privilege our capacity to "question the oppressive effects of…epistemology." In this way, Gallop suggests that the academic woman's dilemma, should she choose to think about it, can actually position the academic woman in a uniquely generative relation to her thinking and learning.

One way to think about women's problem with language, its 'not-ours-ness,' is that women's necessary use of language enacts a lifelong repetition of the psychical act of matricide. Kristeva (1980) puts it this way: "*entry into syntax constitutes a first victory over the mother*" (p. 289, original emphasis). But though one condition of entering language is "the phantastical killing and survival of the mother" (Gilbert, 2009, p. 67), in this chapter I also explore the implications of the father's role in the conditions of women's speaking subjectivity. I read texts which demonstrate that women's passionate relations to language – a drive to speak, read, and write – are haunted not only by an ambivalent psychical relation to one's mother, but also by an ambivalent relation toward one's father.

To grapple with the problem of language for women I read closely three texts which dramatize it in different ways. First, I examine a footnote in Gallop's (2011) book *The Deaths of the Author* that conceptualizes the gendered estrangement that attends a woman's language use. I argue that women's work in language puts us in a relation to the father, while also withholding the patriarchal privileges that organize the social world. Next, I turn to Alice Kaplan's (1993) memoir, *French Lessons*, to explore how the passion and anxiety Kaplan experiences in relation to language symbolizes her necessary, but fraught and limited, identifications with her father. I go on to look at Julia Kristeva's (1996/2000) theory of language. She argues that women's speaking subjectivity is contingent on identification with, and repudiation of, both the mother and the father and contends that the estranging function of language for women gives women a privileged opportunity to think about and represent the ways in which self-estrangement in language is a component of the human condition.

To "'perform in the capacity of a father'": Women's Dilemma in Language

In her (2011) book, *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time*, Jane Gallop elaborates her methodological concept of "close reading," explaining that the practice involves focusing upon those "passages where…an oft-cited author says something that unsettles received assumptions about what he thinks" (pp. 22-23). Gallop argues that the dead author, dead insofar as he is lost in the static time of the tome (the author may or may not literally be dead), can speak to his readers through the uncanny "passages" that stand out in their strangeness. These textual moments provide an opportunity for opening into renewed conversation with the author now, in the temporal space of conversation, no longer quite so dead – or lost – in his text. This notion that our close reading – our conversing, challenging, teasing reading – can offer us access to the dead author speaks to the problem that Nikolchina (2004) identifies in her discussion of "the

'strange spaces of silence'" which characterize women's contributions to the history of thought (p. 2). For Nikolchina, the dead mother haunts not only the specific texts written by intellectual women (now, lost in their texts, dead authors), but the whole history of theory and literature which suffers from the loneliness that women intellectuals encounter there. Where Nikolchina offers the concept of "abjectivity" as a way to understand the silence that enshrouds women's contributions to theory and literature as "literary assassination that presupposes a baffling inattentiveness toward the texts of the author" (p. 9), Gallop proposes a strategy for interrupting that inattentiveness with her "ethics of close reading" which entails "[r]eading such passages [which unsettle our received assumptions about the author's thinking] [as] a way of releasing him from the categories where intellectual history has buried him" (p. 23). With her use of masculine pronouns, the author whose passages Gallop advocates we mine is male. A close reading of *women*'s passages involves attending to meanings of "passage" beyond segments of text and passings-away. "Passage" refers also to a mysterious corridor, a metaphor for the unconscious. "Passage" holds the ambivalence described in Kristeva's (2000/2001) Kleinian phrase, "excremental omnipotence" (p. 126), the feminine attempt to render external the internal relation to/between creativity and destruction. And finally, "passage" conveys the vaginal canal and its maternally-charged implications for women's symbolic labour.

Reading Gallop, I am struck not so much by a "passage" where this "oft-cited author says something that unsettles received assumptions about what [she] thinks," but rather by a moment where she *passes up* a textual opportunity in a way that surprises me based on my own "assumptions about what [she] thinks" (pp. 22-23). Here is yet another meaning of "passage": passing by, passing up, over-looking. This new meaning brings us back to Nikolchina's discussion of abjectivity and entangles Gallop in what Nikolchina describes as its "circularity":

"With its monotonous production of maternal corpses, abjectivity remains trapped by a curious circularity: the victorious murderer appears as the forgetful replica of an earlier, supposedly lethal writing that is incorpsed and thrown out of the body proper of literature" (p. 9). I want Gallop to give me a discussion of gender and its relation to reading and writing. It does not escape my notice that insofar as I am accusing Gallop of becoming entangled in the circularity of abjectivity, I am, in a sense, 'passing the buck,' for I entangle *myself* in abjectivity's circularity by rendering Gallop's actual argument silent in order to foreground my own interpretation of the implications of her work. My encounter with an absence in Gallop's book is a problem of my disillusionment that, as one of my intellectual mothers, her interpretations are not exactly like my own; the absence signifies the conditional way that the murdered mother informs my work. While I worry that in the particular passage to which I will turn Gallop "incorpses and throws out of the body proper of literature" and theory the question of gender – a question which I regard as central to feminist theory and to the problem of women's relation to reading and writing – my own discussion here has the effect of throwing *Gallop* "out of the body proper" by turning her method of close reading against her, in a sense, in order to *read her out* of her own discussion. Certainly, it would seem that my study cannot avoid ambivalently participating in the "monotonous production of maternal corpses" that I seek to understand and, impossibly, interrupt through theoretical intervention.

The moment in *The Deaths of the Author* where I want Gallop to take up my questions about gender's relation to women's labour of reading and writing, but she passes, comes in the last chapter of her book, titled "The Persistent and Vanishing Present." This title could also describe the frustration inherent to trying to untangle the problem of matricide in women's relation to language and thinking even while being necessarily entangled *by* that very problem

through my work of reading, writing, and interpretation. In "The Persistent and Vanishing Present," Gallop considers Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak's reluctance to publish her first monograph. Gallop's analysis of Spivak's aversion to being a book writer is that the static temporality of a book threatens the author with obsolescence: having written words and ideas down in a book, one can never catch up to the persistently vanishing present that the book seeks to describe and understand something about. The death at stake in this formulation of the death of the author is a theoretical death, a harbinger of a time when the author fails to be relevant in the present moment. There is something of a parental wish and worry here: there will come a time when I will have done my job so well in the world that I will no longer be needed because my child will have moved above and beyond me and what I can offer her.

Gallop relays, in passing, information about a particular turn of phrase that Spivak uses to describe her reluctance to book writing. The uncanny significance of this 'in passing' remark stands out to me in the way that those "oft-cited" "passages" stood out to Gallop. It is this point – one which seems to vanish in Gallop's text – which I want persistently to present here. In an interview, Spivak says she's working on a book. She continues: "'I'm not a book writer, I'm very unhappy about the fact that I have finally had to perpetrate a book, but that's that'" (quoted in Gallop, 2011, p. 117). Gallop notes that Spivak's book-writing entails an estrangement, and argues that the estrangement is temporal. By focusing on the word that feels strange in the context of the sentence, "perpetrate," Gallop points to how the estrangement of book-writing is also gendered. She notes that "perpetrate"

> has a range of meanings, all pretty negative: from the first, most familiar meaning, "be guilty of (as a crime, an offense)," to "carry through (a deception)," to what is the most likely meaning in this context, "produce, perform, or execute badly or in a manner held to be execrable or shocking." (pp. 117-118)

Concluding this list of the possible meanings that "perpetrate" carries, an endnote sends us to the back of the present book which Gallop has (has had to have?) written. In the endnotes, we find this passage: "Interestingly, it turns out that the etymology of 'perpetrate' is from the Latin 'perform in the capacity of a father,' from *pater*" (note 4, p. 159).

I want to stay with this etymological significance of "perpetrate." *Why* does Spivak *have* to perpetrate a book? Back in the main body of her text, Gallop suggests that the move from essayist to book writer is a shift from writer to author, and that this shift is temporal: while the essayist is constantly revising and updating her theory, the book writer has committed to a kind of 'once-and-for-all-ness' in her act of publishing a book. The author risks an obsolescence that the writer avoids. Spivak *must* "perpetrate a book" because she regards legitimacy as an intellectual within the academy as tied to a shift from being an essayist to being a book writer, from being a writer to being an author. This condition of academic legitimacy and success is gendered: to be an author, one must "perpetrate a book," one must act in the capacity of a father, even if one is a woman. Spivak's choice of the verb "perpetrate" offers us a way to think about a woman's affective relation to her academic work and specifically about the ambivalence she feels in relation to language and the symbolic economy of intellectualism.

Gallop turns to another striking moment in the interview in which Spivak tells us that she has "had to perpetrate a book." In this new moment, Spivak confirms that what bothers her about writing books is the way in which writing a book renders the author stuck-in-time. Spivak argues that analysing metaphors must be a persistent act, and she opposes this persistence, this on-going-ness, to writing books. But it is not just that Spivak discusses the persistence of metaphors at all; rather, she talks "about the way she has challenged phallic metaphors," specifically (p. 120). Gallop links this moment in Spivak's interview to the other moment when Spivak says that

she has "had to perpetrate a book." The etymology of "perpetrate" turns the *book*, itself, into a phallic metaphor; the book becomes Spivak's phallus. It is because of her persistence in "[challenging] phallic metaphors" that Spivak is so reluctant to write a book, complicit as it will render her in the symbolic order and its valorizing of the phallus. Bringing Gallop's interpretations together with my own, we might think about the time of the woman's gendered dilemma in the academy: for Spivak to write a book is for her to be stuck in the time of acting in the capacity of a father. It is to be stuck in the time of the legitimating symbolic power of the phallus. And it is to be stuck in the daughterly time of the matricidal act.

We glimpse this problem of book-writing-as-perpetration in the strange moments of linguistic dissonance which, like Gallop noticing Spivak's odd choice of the verb "perpetrate," stand out in their strangeness. This outstanding strangeness has something to tell us about the estranging function of language and the way this estrangement necessarily ensnares women whose lives are built upon a passionate relation to language. Women writers and readers intent on theorizing and perhaps intervening in the variety of ways that women are objectified, oppressed, or made strange to ourselves in the social world remain subject to these perpetually estranging effects of language. For instance, we glimpse this problem in Nikolchina's (2004) book which critiques the very way in which writing great intellectual works is structured around one's capacity to act as a father. To explore the effects of matricide on the history of intellectual culture and thought, Nikolchina follows Kristeva's theoretical search for the dead mother and her impossible effort to theorize the gap – the hole in the ground – the dead mother leaves behind her. As Kristeva's work shifts, she makes various "attempts to name the void and its unsettling powers" (Nikolchina, 2004, p. 4). Kristeva's body of thought is interested in the absence of the dead mother and the way in which her residual haunting is the grounds of (im)possibility for

women's difficult negotiations with language. Nikolchina regards Kristeva's concept of the abject to be the most useful and poetic of her theoretical "attempts," naming it her "masterstroke" (p. 4). Here language entombs Nikolchina in the very dilemma she works to describe: to adequately pay homage to Kristeva's conceptual labour is to name it her 'mastery'; such praise for Kristeva can only reinscribe (or "stroke" the ego of) "the maleness of all wisdom" (p. 2). Kristeva's prolific works seek to explore "woman's estrangement from the symbolic" (p. 12), and we bump up against that very estrangement in Nikolchina's tome whose goal is a loving and critical engagement with Kristeva's theory: for her contribution to intellectual culture (which must exist within the conditions of the symbolic) of a theory of the dead mother, Kristeva is praised, in writing, in language, for her "masterstroke". While Nikolchina writes against the vanishing point of women's intellectual contributions that is the object of her own study, she teeters on the edge of the void from which she hopes to spare Kristeva, her intellectual mother. The bonds of women's entanglement in the symbolic and its conditions are strong, after all, and, as Nikolchina, drawing upon Kristeva, points out: "The necessity of matricide faces the would-be speaking being as the only way toward subjectivity and language" (p. 3). To speak, to write, to theorize, a woman must stroke the master and kill her mother.

In order, paradoxically, to enter symbolization as a subject a woman must destroy her mother, with whom she identifies. She must also participate in a cultural form of matricide which regards the tradition of writing great books to be a *male* history of wisdom. But a woman's father does not remain unscathed in the process. In my analysis of Spivak's use of "perpetrate" to describe her act of writing a book, the book comes to function as the phallus for the writing woman, rendering visible the way in which the phallus, in its capacity as master signifier, requires gendered estrangement as a condition of a woman's taking up of the role of author. But

if we can hold on to this etymological significance and return to the "first, most familiar" definition that Gallop provides for "perpetrate": "'be guilty of (as a crime, an offense)'" (pp. 117-118; p 118), we can also consider how a passionate relation to language – such as that required in order to write a book – not only necessitates a woman to negotiate two poles of identification, but also to perpetrate violence in relation to each pole as a matter of subjective (and symbolic) development.

Bringing the etymology of perpetrate together with its "most familiar" meaning recalls Freud's myth of the band of brothers in which to "'perform in the capacity of a father'" is, precisely, to "'be guilty of…a crime.'" In *Totem and Taboo* (1913/1950) Freud tells a story of civilization which, he posits, repeats in the life of the individual through a phylogenetic psychical trace. Freud imagines a primal social organization in which the most powerful male exiles his male progeny in order to remain dominant and in possession of the females. This band of exiled brothers unites to kill and eat the father in order to enter into and identify with the powerful and patriarchal economy of the social. This violent act is an ambivalent one, though, for in their new identification with (introjection of) the destroyed father the brothers also incorporate his law, their violation of it, and the accompanying guilt. Now incorporated as part of the structure of the brothers' subjectivities, "[the] dead father [becomes] stronger than the living one had been" (p. 143). The band of brothers are guilty of – and from – their crime of performing in the capacity of the father. This ambivalent crime is played out in and dramatized by the Oedipal complex in Freudian theory.

For the father's progeny to inhabit his symbolic position and live according to his laws, they must identify with and repudiate him. But killing the father is different than killing the mother because assuming his position brings with it a set of symbolic privileges within a

patriarchal social context[8]. For instance, by eating the father, the male progeny introject the father's attributes; what was his is now theirs (Kristeva, 1996/2000). The father's language is now "ours". The brothers become the father, either actually or symbolically (Pitt, 2006). In becoming the father, the patriarchal privileges the brothers acquire include, notably, the assumption and distribution of women-as-objects. Women's collusion in the brother's patricide is necessary in order for women to live in the symbolic world, but that world doesn't bring women the same privileges as men. While the brothers become the subjects of patriarchy, women remain "disturbingly both" subject *and* object (Gallop, 1985). A symbolic gap, a reminder of a woman's objectification within the patriarchal world, remains between women's entrance into the symbolic, and her full access to it.

Spivak's use of "perpetrate" to describe the necessity she felt to write a book signals the way in which the conditions for women's entrance into the social and symbolic world – the world of language – include a dual identification and repudiation. From our particular psychical position as daughters, women must commit matricide to access a capacity to symbolize. But women's new social position within the symbolic also entails a colluding *patricide*, for if to write

[8] In "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis," Freud (1936/1964) analyses his disbelief at finding himself at the Acropolis in Athens as a displacement of his ambivalence about having 'gone further in life' than his father. He takes the occasion to describe a dilemma for men which structures much of Freudian theory: he reflects that it is "as though the essence of success was to have got further than one's father, and as though to excel one's father was still something forbidden" (p. 247). This worry can be traced back to the brothers' guilt at having destroyed the father in order to become him. A detailed discussion of the difference between women's destruction of the mother and men's destruction of the father – as well as the question of whether or how the earlier destruction of the mother haunts men's destruction of the father – is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet, we might inquire into the different psychical uses to which the fantasies of maternal and paternal destruction are put. As I have argued throughout this study, the fantasy of matricide is at the origin of the subject's capacity to think and to symbolize, so it repeats throughout those activities ever after. For women whose sense of self is tied to identification with the mother, their thinking and symbolizing work threatens to undo the self. To think about the use of the fantasy of patricide, we might recall Grumet's (1998) comment about why fathers send their children to school. Grumet argues that, for men, school functions to instill in children the laws of the father. The allegory of the band of brothers helps us recognize how boy children, when ushered into the laws of the father, are groomed to become the father: they are subject *to*, but will also be subject *of*, his laws. The psychical consequences for women and men of matricide and patricide, respectively, are thus quite different: the threat of self-estrangement versus the recognition of one's subjective identification as at the center of the patriarchal law.

a book is to perpetrate one – that is, to "perform in the capacity of a father" – then it is already "to be guilty of a crime". To access the power of the symbolic, to attempt (always futilely) to master its laws, a woman's persistent perpetration of language ensnares her in a violently ambivalent relation not only to the mother but to the father too. When Nikolchina names "the repetitive generic loneliness" of writing women – women who passionately perpetrate books – such loneliness comes into sharp relief with these terrible and doubly violent conditions of women's symbolic work. When language requires a woman to destroy her parents, no wonder the writing woman is lonely.

Language, Loss, and Gain

Alice Kaplan, an American Professor of French, describes her passionate and lifelong attachment to language in her (1993) memoir, *French Lessons*. In naming "the estrangement of working in French in American university French departments," Kaplan gestures to the loneliness that language can provoke, a loneliness I argue is especially resonant for women (p. 177). In *French Lessons* Kaplan dramatizes the problem that Spivak wrestles with: to work within language, a woman must turn from her mother to identify with her father. Yet, once in language, she risks destroying and losing her father, too. In this section I explore how Kaplan's ambivalent desire for French gives her an object through which to exteriorize the necessary psychic tasks of finding, betraying, and losing her father. What does Kaplan's love of French have to do with her love for her father – who died when Alice was eight years old – and the fact of his loss? I go on to examine Kaplan's relation to the band of brothers which appears throughout the memoir in the forms of her lovers, her colleagues, and her brother himself. This band of brothers helps me better reflect upon how women's access to the symbolic is restricted and contingent, while men benefit from their gendered identification with the father and their

access to the privileges of patriarchy. Kaplan's ambivalent desire for French brings me to the final section of this chapter, Kristeva's insights about language. *French Lessons* puts Spivak and her dilemma into conversation with Kristeva because it lets us glimpse the estrangement, loss, loneliness and violence that attend women's perpetrations in language, but also the satisfactions of pleasure and desire in relation to the symbolic which, Kristeva argues, women are in a particular position to enjoy.

Reflecting on the significance of French in her life, the way it has shaped her personal and intellectual trajectories, Kaplan argues that "French is the mark of something that happened to me, that made me shift into another language," and wonders: "Was it my father?" (p. 201). To learn to speak in the first place – in Alice's case, her mother tongue is English – the infant must turn away from the mother and toward the father. Alice sets about seriously learning French, her second language, when she is about fifteen years old; she leaves her mother and her home to attend boarding school abroad and to throw herself into the infantile experience of learning something new. Working to enter a foreign symbolic economy as a young woman on the cusp of adulthood, Alice renews her turn to her father.

Kaplan's relation to French is a metaphor for women's dilemma in language: she leaves her mother to pursue her desire to master French which is an exteriorized wish to find her lost father. Yet, Kaplan never feels satisfied that she has mastered French, and dead, her father remains lost; his absence and its effect on Kaplan's drive toward French signifies the gap that always separates women from attaining the father's power and position. Kaplan recognizes how the pleasure she derives from French has terrible conditions beyond the already difficult tasks of leaving her mother and home: "I understood how much I owed to [my father's] death, his absence a force field within which I had become an intellectual," and she conceives of her

dissertation work – the labour that reifies her as an intellectual – as "my imaginary conversation with my father" (p. 197; p. 160).

We learn in *French Lessons* that Kaplan's dissertation was a study of fascist French intellectuals and the crimes they committed in and with language during the Holocaust. Throughout the memoir, Kaplan traces the roots of this research and her emotional attachment to it to various moments of her personal history. One scene stands out as the seed of what will become Kaplan's intellectual preoccupations. As a child, Alice does her homework at her late father's desk. The use of the desk seems a pleasurable treat to Alice; she explains that her mother now used the desk occasionally, but that as a girl she "was *allowed* to sit at the desk, too" (p. 29, my emphasis). Her father was a Jewish lawyer at the Nuremberg Trials, and while rummaging through his desk drawers searching for clues – about him, about herself, about the contents of her unconscious – Alice finds and views her first images of the Holocaust. Kaplan regards this childhood discovery, made while working in her father's place, a betrayal: "I violated the privacy of my dead father's desk drawers and found the evidence from Nuremberg: photos from Auschwitz" (p. 197). Her discovery of the photographs is a terrible punishment for presuming to take – and feeling delight in doing so – her father's place. The discovery also marks how her father fails *her* by inhibiting, through his absence, her access to meaning, the symbolic: "he hadn't been there to explain the photographs of Auschwitz" (p. 197). Kaplan must make sense of the horrifying perpetrations of the Holocaust on her own, and her efforts to do so give shape to her lifelong research interests. Kaplan's dissertation and her work of writing it evoke and depend on the earlier moment of studying at her father's desk as a child: Alice's schoolwork, her work in and with language and its crimes, offers her the opportunity, at once full of pleasure and grief, to inhabit the space of her dead father. Working at his desk – significantly, it continues to

be her "father's desk" even though he is dead – Alice performs in the capacity of her father (p. 29).

Kaplan describes another scene that lays groundwork for the dissertation she would go on to write. This new scene conveys how Alice's performance in the capacity of her father articulates and depends on both her love and admiration for him, but also her betrayal and aggression. These vicissitudes play out in and for Alice's love of language. As an undergraduate studying abroad in Bordeaux, Alice falls in love with the writing of French author Céline. Foretelling her dissertation, and echoing the knot of love and hate that drives the daughter's passion for language, Alice finds herself positioned as a Jew who yearns for the language of a fascist. The scene that describes this bind begins when she visits the Museum of the Resistance in Bordeaux to inquire about Céline. The librarian at the Museum admonishes Alice for being curious about a collaborationist instead of a resistance writer. Alice quells the woman's anger by assuring her that she is interested in Céline only to know where and how he had "gone wrong" (p. 107). To validate or justify her curiosity she invokes her father's work at Nuremberg. Kaplan goes on:

> Her voice softened immediately. The line about my father worked. Except I was lying. I had made myself out to be a literary prosecutor, my interest in Céline 'official.' That was only part of what drew me to Céline. The rest had to do with what happened while I was reading him, the music I felt in my heart, a sense of lightness and magic, as well as a total confidence in this writer's knowledge of the depths of individual human suffering. Our literature professor wanted us to hear that music; the Resistance museum official was implying that people who celebrated Céline's prose style were whitewashing an evil man of all responsibility for his language. (pp. 107-108)

As an English-speaking American Jew with a passion for French literature, Kaplan both admires and reviles Céline, and is at once drawn to and excluded from his language. Her love for her father, her turn to him and desire to be like him and even to advance his life's work drives

Kaplan's intellectual work in and with language. Yet, acting in the capacity of the father also entails betraying him. Alice misuses the name of her father: she exploits his symbolic capital – capital she does not have without him – to access the language of a fascist upon which she will build her *own* life's work.

Reflecting on her career, Kaplan asks: "What does it mean for a Jewish intellectual to work on fascism?" (p. 190). Kaplan's ambivalent love of fascist French literary figures like Céline reduplicates her betrayal of her father: claiming his symbolic capital is the first betrayal, and doing so to access the language of an Anti-Semitic fascist is the second. But her question about the relation between her American Jewish intellectualism and French fascism as her object of study also reduplicates the woman's dilemma in language at the heart of this chapter. Studying Anti-Semitic hate speech and racist propaganda, some of the most extreme examples of perpetrations in language, Alice is struck not only by how she is excluded from language as a woman, but also, more specifically, as a Jewish woman. The language to which she dedicates her life estranges Alice and gives rise to despair at the impossibility of mastery: she continually confronts the multiple ways in which language is 'not-hers.'

Describing her estrangement within French and her inability to master it, Kaplan calls French a "secret language" which leaves her "wanting in and never quite getting there" (p. 208). Yet, in spite of how it keeps her at a distance, "I think I would stave without it," she writes (p. 208). Kristeva (1996/2000) warns that women who attempt – always futilely – to resist and refuse the symbolic and its conditions lapse into silence, and become lost to the world. Kaplan can't not live within the symbolic, nor does she want to: after all, just as the fascist writer Céline lets Kaplan hear "music,…lightness and magic" in his lyrical prose, French for all its demands and cruelties also offers her immense pleasures. Without her attempts to act in the capacity of the

father she would starve: French has become her bread and butter, after all. But more nuanced, the symbolic economy of French which Kaplan so desires to consume – and feels that she survives on – *is* the father, a role which, regardless of her "wanting in," Alice can never fully master. Even though she must continue "never quite getting there," she would starve if she declined to join the perpetrations of the band of brothers who eat the father in their attempt to become him.

Reinforcing how symbolic capital is the privileged domain – the "secret language" – of brothers and fathers from which women remain estranged, Alice's older brother gives her another way to think about her particular pursuit of French mastery as a turn to her father. Although Alice thought that her father didn't speak any French, one day her brother asks her whether she remembers their father speaking French with his brother, their uncle. Alice's brother tells her that the two men used to converse using their college French if they didn't want the children to understand them. With her brother's reminder, Kaplan can just barely remember this secret language between men. This vignette is a metaphor for Kaplan's exclusion from language and meaning. The men used French, a foreign language, as a kind of 'grown up code' to which the children had no access. The children experienced this language of grown men as 'not-ours.' Perhaps the way that French signalled the privileges of adulthood in Kaplan's hazy memory contributed to her desire to make a home in and with language. Leaving her childhood home as a young adolescent, French is Alice's pursuit of adulthood. Yet, in this memory, French-as-secret-code is a code among men – among brothers. Ostensibly, Alice's brother remembers this secret code more clearly than she because he is older. However, he might also remember more clearly because, in the course of his growing-up, he would be ushered and invited into men's codes, including into the way that masculinity derives its power within patriarchy by excluding women and children. Alice's memory – or rather the gap in her memory, the memory's incompleteness –

literalizes the problem of always "wanting in and never quite getting" access to the symbolic through mastery of a language. In the vignette, the children are excluded from French – they confront its 'not-ours-ness' – in a way that repeats the problem of language in general for women. Kaplan's adult "wanting in and never quite getting there" parallels her childhood wanting, which reminds us of the infantile origins of women's estrangement in language, of the confrontation with the way the symbolic and its meanings are 'not-ours.'

Even though Kaplan is now far more proficient at French than her father ever was – she has grown up to teach the college French that he and his brother used to exclude her – in the strange time of memory, her father remains the master: she can never access and infiltrate his secret code. The fact that, at first, Alice doesn't even remember her father and uncle speaking French, but needs to be reminded of it by her brother, solidifies as particularly masculine this mastery that she lacks. By remembering this secret code so much more clearly than Alice, and by gifting her the memory, Kaplan's brother demonstrates that he has access to a part of their father that she doesn't have. This little story is full of brothers who know something and have something that Kaplan doesn't. *French Lessons* helps us think some more about women's relation to the patricidal band of brothers who access power and the symbolic by seizing the father's place. Although women are implicated in perpetrating the patricide committed by the band of brothers, a gap remains for women between the crime and its spoils: men's patricide grants them modes of power and privilege that women continue to lack.

Throughout *French Lessons*, Kaplan's male counterparts form a makeshift band of brothers. Kaplan describes her frustration as a university student studying abroad that she never felt sufficiently recognized by the French. She writes that of all the American students on exchange, the French preferred a "freckled jock who could hardly speak French," and that this

young man became their "American mascot" (p. 92). Kaplan recognizes that one of the reasons she fails "to be rewarded for [her] good French" is that she "was trying to be French" and "never quite getting there" (p. 92; p. 208); the way that she can't be French bumps up against the way that she can't be the father: these roles are 'not-hers.' Alice can't be the French favourite because the version of American-ness that they celebrate is a particularly masculine one: she confesses that she "would have been ready to pose as the Marlboro Man to get the kind of attention [the American mascot] got from the French," but that she "knew his ploy wouldn't work for me: a girl can't be a Marlboro Man" (p. 92). Despite Kaplan's hard work, intense desire, and best intentions, the American man who doesn't speak French derives symbolic capital from his masculinity alone: Alice has to toil and study and negotiate a myriad of exclusions in her work of acting in the capacity of the father. The Marlboro Man just is the father.

The band of brothers in *French Lessons* are men whose access to the privileges of the patriarchal symbolic exceeds Kaplan's, regardless of her superior proficiency, work ethic, intelligence, or determination, as in the case of the "American mascot". In one section of the memoir, Kaplan details her love affair with André, a Frenchman she meets while studying abroad. Her attraction to André is an attraction to his language and his 'French-ness,' so she feels the sting all the more sharply when he grounds his poor treatment of her in her Anglophone- and American-ness: he corrects a love letter she writes to him; he tells her he could never love her because the language barrier means he can't fully express himself to her; he has an affair with a French woman while Alice is ill. Kaplan's desire for André withstands his poor treatment because her desire is for his language and his symbolic capital: recalling the band of brothers who eat the father in order to take his place, Kaplan writes of André: "I wanted to crawl into his skin, live in his body, be him" (p. 88). Yet the brothers do eat the father while Kaplan is left

wondering: “What was the difference between his words and my words, his world and my world?” (p. 87). André’s poor treatment of Alice reminds us that, in a patriarchal society, women endure sexist denigrations and humiliations as a condition of a legible life within the social, symbolic world. After years apart, Alice receives a letter from André riddled with errors. Although she notices the mistakes, she does not feel like this letter signifies a reversal of the time he corrected her love letter years before because, in spite of the errors, his language still has that Francophone *je ne sais quoi* that Alice desires and feels excluded from. Kaplan’s questions about the difference between herself and André and their respective access to the word and the world are also questions she has about her father: like her father, André inhabits a role within language that Kaplan forever feels she can’t attain.

Back in the United States for graduate school, Alice falls in love with a fellow American Francophile graduate student, Bill. Also an Anglophone, Bill renames himself to reflect his belief in his French-ness: asserting masculinity as one’s ticket to the symbolic capital for which Alice yearns – and in an uncanny repetition of the masculine power conveyed by André’s name – Bill chooses for himself the name “Guy.” Guy’s intensity about his studies and the difference in their work patterns makes Alice feel like she’s not a real intellectual. For instance, he shames her for wanting sex when they both have papers due: Alice’s body interrupts and makes demands on Guy’s high-mindedness. Alice’s relationship to Guy reaches its climax when he slaps her across the face in reply to her pleading that he spend the night with her. The slap dissolves the romantic relationship between Alice and Guy and Alice finds herself “relieved to be alone” (p. 157). Kaplan goes on:

> There was no expert eye over my shoulder, no thicker book across my desk, no rigorous schedule making me look lazy. Suddenly I wasn’t lazy anymore. I could work for hours without noticing the time. I wondered – in that secret part of my brain where I admitted my responsibility – if I hadn’t provoked Guy into hitting me. (p. 157)

If his belief in his right to rename himself is Guy's ticket into the symbolic, the slap Guy delivers to Alice is hers. The slap punishes Alice for being a woman in the band of brothers. When Kaplan reflects that perhaps she provoked the slap – that perhaps Guy's violence was her responsibility, her fault – she grapples with the price women pay as entrants into the symbolic and patriarchal world.

In spite of Guy's greater privileges within the symbolic, he can't tolerate the demands that the academic life of a French Professor entails, and he leaves the university shortly after finishing graduate school. Meanwhile, Alice remains in the academy and creates a life for herself there. Having grown used to the punishment that participation in the symbolic economy demands of women, Alice can tolerate the effects of perpetrating a dissertation. Tolerating punishment offers its own pleasures and compensations: here I am making Kaplan's memoir a beloved object of study while Bill goes about his life, a guy whose life story doesn't get added to the public record. The pay-off of pleasure to which Kaplan's capacity to tolerate the punishing demands of the symbolic gives rise brings us to Kristeva's theories of language.

The Symbolic and its Illusions

In *French Lessons* (1993), Kaplan offers a brief summary of Jacques Lacan's theory of language:

> He believed that the child gains access to language only when it perceives the existence of the father, which allows it to break out of infantile dualisms – self and mother, inside and outside. "Somewhere out there, somewhere else, is my father": this, says Lacan, is the child's inauguration into language, the symbolic order, and the law. (p. 99)

As such, according to this Lacanian framework for thinking about language, entering language "involves a price to be paid" for both male and female subjects because entering the symbolic

requires that the subject give something up, chiefly the primary, presymbolic identification with the mother (Leader & Groves, 1995, p. 95). This price is costlier for women whose use of language – and the concomitant requirement that we renounce identification with the mother in favour of identification with the (Name-of-the-)Father and the signifying function of the phallus (Lacan, 1958/1982; Leader & Groves, 1995) – amounts to complicity in the devastation of our own gendered subject position and in the disavowal of how gender informs meaning. This echoes Felman (1993) who writes that a function of language is that women are "[trained] to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged to ourselves" (p. 14). Kristeva (1996/2000) offers us a theory of language which, though it continues to regard the phallus as the privileged signifier, resonates with Gallop's (1985) argument about how women in the academy are caught between being at once the subjects and objects of study and that this bind gives us a particularly fecund epistemological and/or ontological vantage. Although entering language, according to Kristeva, involves a renunciation of the mother in favour of identification with the father, women's paradoxical relation to language may also function to position us in a uniquely thoughtful position vis-à-vis language and the symbolic. Kristeva's theory of language offers us a way to understand the on-going desire that Kaplan has for French, and the pleasure she derives from it, in spite of the petty humiliations and frustrations it puts her through. Related to this, Kristeva's theory speaks to the difference between Alice's and Bill's capacities to tolerate the punishing demands of the academy.

According to Kristeva (1996/2000), both the boy and the girl infant exist in a presymbolic symbiosis with the mother prior to the Oedipal stage. What the infant knows, she knows through her pleasurable sensory relation to the mother. Kristeva argues that this "sensoriality" – senso-reality – is stronger in the girl than in the boy because her love relation to

her mother allows the girl a period of primary homosexuality, an erotic attachment to the early symbiotic experience of her *own* senses as well as those of her mother (p. 99). The presymbolic little girl can accordingly recognize "the narcissistic overinvestment" (p. 99) the boy and those around him attribute to his penis; Freud's phallic stage, referring as it does to the infant's relation to the penis in the case of a boy and the clitoris in the case of a girl, offers an explanation for this. The anatomy of bodies matters in psychoanalytic accounts of language and the development of speaking-subjectivity because "desire for meaning [is] anchored in the sexual body" (Kristeva, 2006, p. 16). As such, it matters that "a dissociation is structurally inscribed between the sensory and the signifying in the phallicism of the girl" (Kristeva, 1996/2000, p. 99); while the boy's phallicism is signified by the external, visual organ of the penis, the girl's phallicism can only be sensed and intuited by her. This affects the girls' relation to reality and meaning.

Kristeva (1996/2000) acknowledges that the girl's lack of penis has social and symbolic consequences for her:

> Invisible and almost impossible to locate, the real and imaginary basis of phallic pleasure in the girl (the clitoris) immediately dissociates the female subject from the phallus in the sense of a privileged signifier in the logos/desire conjunction that I have called a phallic kairos, to which the girl nevertheless accedes with as much ease as the boy, if not more. This symbolic ease (of thought), however, is not accompanied by sensorial experience (distinct from the phallic drive), in light of the disappointment of the perception of being less visible and less remarkable: less appreciated, although pleasure is not necessarily less intensely felt. Lesser valorization of the girl by her father and mother, in comparison to the boy, traditionally played out in families or as a result of specific psychosocial configurations, contributes to consolidating this disappointment with regard to the symbolic link. (pp. 99-100)

Kristeva suggests that while thinking, meaning, and a capacity to symbolize are linked, for the boy, to the pleasure of the penis which signifies the phallus, for the girl thinking and symbolization are dissociated from her sensorial experiences of the phallus. The girl still enters into thinking and symbolization, but to do so she must acquiesce to a phallic symbolic order that

she feels dissociated from, does not have a primary erotic attachment to, and is "less valorized" within. She retains "the hallucination of earlier sensorial experiences" with the mother while she must also enter the symbolic which is not reminiscent of her earlier sensorial and homoerotic experiences of meaning (p. 100). Thus the girl encounters a "gap" in her subjectivity between her experiences in the earlier, pleasurable sensorial realm and in the later symbolic realm which she perceives to be organized around "the other (the man) that 'I am not'" (p. 100). This moment of recognition that the external, social and symbolic world – that language – is organized around a body that is not her own has a profound effect on a girl's sense of subjectivity, for it "immediately strikes the female subject with a negation ('I am not what is,' 'I am, nevertheless, because of not')" (p. 100). If the female subject is not what is, she is also not who speaks: "I only have one language, yet it is not mine" (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 2).

While Kristeva's formulation of the girl's subjectivity, based as it is upon a negation, might seem dire, in fact Kristeva regards the relation of girls and women to speaking-subjectivity as offering unique potential for our thinking – our thinking about ourselves, but also about the social order and the symbolic realm. For instance, Kaplan's inability to master French gives her occasion to inquire into the difficult conditions of her access to language and subjectivity. For Kristeva, the gendered estrangement inherent to language enhances women's potential for thinking because: "with the sensory/signifying dissociation, the belief is established that the phallic-symbolic order is illusory" (p. 100). Just as Gallop (1985) argues above that women's paradoxical positioning in relation to both subjectivity and objectivity is beneficial as it offers women the opportunity "to call into question the oppressive effects of [epistemology]" (p. 15), Kristeva (1996/2000) argues that while "Freud…was right: everyone wants an illusion and

insists on not knowing that it is one,…a woman is better placed than anyone to explore illusion" (p. 106).

Although the female subject unconsciously understands that the symbolic order, in which "the phallus is the signifier of the lack as well as of the law, supported in the imaginary by the penis" (Kristeva, 1996/2000, p. 99), is based upon illusion, she also recognizes it as "indispensable" (p. 100). As in Spivak's and Kaplan's cases, in order for women to become speaking-subjects, it is necessary that we enter into and participate in the symbolic economy shaped by the law of the father: the acquisition of language and meaning entails a shift in gender-identification, an estrangement from the erotic feminine self which is marked by an unconscious adherence to masculine psychic processes. The capacity to acquire language and make meanings "[follows] both a certain neurobiological maturation and that mythic event of instinctual repression through murder-assimilation-identification with the father" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 12). To live in the world we must live in language which is constituted by – and entails – the harnessing of our primal desires (Kristeva, 1999) which, for women, are organized by those desires belonging to the primary homoerotic attachment to the mother. Although women must pay the steep price of self-estrangement for admission into the social, symbolic world, Kristeva contends that women's belief in the illusoriness of the phallus allows women to recognize that "this law, this pleasure, this phallic power and, simultaneously, their lack…is a game" (1996/2000, p. 100). As such,

> The phallus that 'I' invest is what makes me a subject of language and of law; there 'I' am. There is something else, however, a je ne sais quoi. Nonetheless, 'I' enter the game, 'I' want some, too, 'I' play along. It's only a game (jeu), it's only an 'I' (je), 'I' am pretending, and this, for the female subject, is indeed the so-called truth of the signifier or the speaking-being. (p. 100)

Under the law-of-the-father, the female speaking-subject retains an unconscious relation to her primary homosexual, presymbolic and sensorial experiences of meaning-making (what Kristeva calls "mother-daughter sensual duality" [p. 104]) which belonged to the pre-Oedipal symbiosis with her mother. This is the *je ne sais quoi* silently informing subjectivity. It is a silent informant because it precedes language; it precedes the signifying function of the phallus. Kristeva calls this *je ne sais quoi* "signifiance".

Signifiance is the "other" of language; it precedes language (while also informing it) and is related to the subject's pre-Oedipal "instinctual substrata" (1996/2000, p. 56). Indeed, *je ne sais quoi* is perhaps the best way to think about the concept of signifiance not only because of its silence, but also because it is "extrapsychical": signifiance "is neither language nor drive but overdetermines both" (p. 59). Signifiance, the mode of meaning which belongs to the symbiotic, presymbolic relation to the mother, continues to inhere to meaning (through a *je ne sais quoi*) upon the subject's entrance into the symbolic: "[signifiance] refers to the work performed in language…that enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say" (Roudiez, 1980, p. 18). Kaplan's inability to master the *je ne sais quoi* of French speaks to how learning a second language entailed reduplicating the turn to her father, a turn away from her mother. Kristeva's (1996/2000) contention that women can more easily regard the phallic symbolic order as illusory supports her related claim that women are in a privileged (psychical) position to sense the signifiance inherent to meaning. Attending to signifiance involves "a revalorization of the maternal" under the law of the father; for a woman signifiance functions as a post-Oedipal "reconciliation with primary homosexuality," an honouring of the presymbolic symbiosis with the mother (p. 105).

In spite of the potential she sees for women's thinking based on our presymbolic experience of primary homosexuality and subsequent ability to understand the phallic signifying order as illusory while, nevertheless, 'playing the game', Kristeva also warns that women can be caught in a double-bind in relation to speaking-subjectivity. This double-bind is at the heart of my analysis, above, of Spivak's act of writing a book which requires of her a psychical violence directed at each parental pole in turn. Women's psychic life, impressed by the illusoriness of the phallus, entails that women, as a matter of our subjectivity, be pulled between two modes of identification. When a woman loses touch with her first maternal pole of identification upon entering the symbolic, this can lead "to an identification with the man's phallic position and scotomization, [and] the quashing of the primary semiotic link with the mother" (p. 102). This "quashing of the primary semiotic link with the mother" is the loss of signifiance, the loss of the feminine mode of meaning-making. Thus women are caught in a psychic bind in relation to speaking-subjectivity in the symbolic, and it is a bind that we ought to think about, for, "the structural difficulties of this positioning – more than the historical conditions that must inevitably be added to it – perhaps explain the difficult fate of women throughout history" (p. 105).

Kristeva wonders whether the struggle for women between the desire for the pre-Oedipal mother and the desire for the post-Oedipal father and his phallic signifying order "might…be the object par excellence of literature and art" (p. 105). She continues:

> Beyond the uncomfortable feminine position that many of us are familiar with, the psychical bisexuality of the woman [desire for the presymbolic mother and for the symbolic father,] remains a promised land that we must attain, particularly in psychoanalysis, by curving the pleasure that our professional, clinical, theoretical, and clearly phallic accomplishments give us toward the barely expressible and highly sensitive territory of our silent mothers. (p. 105)

What could this "curving" look like for the reading and writing woman whose work implicates her directly in the phallic economy of language but is also *driven* by her search for signifiance? Kristeva's use of the image of "curving" to describe how women's thinking about language invokes our relation to the illusoriness of the symbolic world in which we live functions to remind us that Kristeva, herself, is subject to the dilemmas of women's speaking-subjectivity which her theories articulate. Kristeva's theory of women's relation to language curves back upon itself: her *own* use of language, her own reading and writing, is itself affected by the vicissitudes of her psychic life and, thus, subject to interpretation. After all, as Kristeva (2006) points out, whatever our relationship to the illusions inherent to living in the world, we ought to remember that they nevertheless affect our senses of self and our capacity to make and interpret meaning: she reminds us that those "psychic movements, which allow the human being to become a speaking subject and either a locus of culture or a center of destruction" are, paradoxically and at once, "far from being illusions, while nevertheless being illusions" (p. 14). To clarify what she means by these "psychic movements," she explains: "Examples include the importance of law, the celebration of the paternal function, and the role of maternal passion as the child's sensorial and prelinguistic support" (p. 14). While "the role of maternal passion as the child's sensorial and prelingustic support" might position the girl child in her subjectivity at such a vantage that she can think about the illusoriness of the phallic order, of "the importance of law [and] the celebration of the paternal function," that maternal passion is also, itself, an illusion while the constituents of the phallic order are also "far from being illusions." Kristeva cannot rely on signifiance to articulate her theories of language since signifiance, the maternal passion, is the inarticulable. Instead, Kristeva must perpetrate a book.

Conclusion

Near the end of *French Lessons*, Kaplan questions the dedication she commits to her futile pursuit of French mastery:

> Why have I confined myself to teach in this second language, this language which will never be as easy as the first one? Why have I chosen to live in not-quite-my-own-language, in exile from myself, for so many years – why have I gone through school with a gag on, do I like not really being able to express myself? (p. 210)

Kaplan's use here of a sadomasochistic metaphor describes the ambivalence that the estrangement of language evokes for women. Entering and learning language catches women destructively and creatively – painfully and pleasurably – between two gendered poles of identification and modalities of desire. Spivak's sense of loss at having to perpetrate a book implicates the pain and violence with which women must comply and endure as a condition of entrance into the symbolic. Kristeva's pleasure in the privileged position women occupy to give lie to the phallicism of the social world helps us understand how women can fall in love with the symbolic in spite of its destructive demands. In *French Lessons*, Kaplan dramatizes the pain of loss and the pleasure of insight to which a study of language gives rise for women; as in the quotation, above, loss and learning and pain and pleasure are interchangeable or even indistinguishable throughout the memoir.

Each of the women scholars in this chapter – Gallop, Spivak, Kaplan, Kristeva – has made a place for herself in the academy through her passionate relation to language, even while theorizing the gendered alienation inherent to language and its uses. This in itself speaks to the complexity of women's language use, the dilemma that "the ways in which words fail us…can only be described in words" (Phillips, 1998, p. 52). Language requires of women a valorization and betrayal of each parental pole: one way to think with Nancy Miller's question, "*how* can a

woman be at home in the university?" (1997, p. 983, original emphasis), is to examine what language has to do with home and its structures. Faced with the conditions of identification and repudiation that language requires, to what extent do all university women feel the way Kaplan does when she asks: "Why have I chosen to live in not-quite-my-own-language, in exile from myself?" (p. 210)?

Chapter 5: Feminist Accused of Difference from the Self

And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive.
– Luce Irigaray, 1981, p. 67

Introduction

Women's work in the university is structured by the affective conditions of our thinking and symbolizing lives. Throughout this study I argue that in order to better understand how the on-going problem of gender inequity in higher education feels for women scholars we must consider the impossible and gendered origins of the life of the mind for women. To undertake this task, the questions I began with included how or whether a woman can be at home in the university, and how generational conflict structures feminist theory and Women's Studies. Susanne Luhmann (2004) links these questions by pointing out that generational conflict, itself, is a factor in what constitutes at-home-ness for feminist scholars. Because the future directions of Women's Studies, for instance, will not necessarily align with the history of the field – its past directions – what feels homely for a given scholar will likely shift with her generational identifications. Luhmann contends that the mothers of institutionalized Women's Studies often experience the future of Women's Studies as a loss if it doesn't align with the past priorities and paradigms that those mothers set in place. Through the inevitability of generational conflict – inevitable because it is a condition of our subjectivity as women – the mothers of the field may no longer feel at home in the very home that their labour built. To grapple with this problem, I commit a final close reading of a memoir by an academic feminist. A story about generational conflict and its effect on women's capacity to be at home in the university, Jane Gallop's (1997) *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* brings the affective stakes of the academic woman's gendered dilemma into sharp relief.

As a well-known academic memoir that has generated much commentary, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* gives us occasion to think some more about the "memoir boom" of the 1990s and why memoir as a genre has become particularly meaningful for women academics. Gallop's own (1992) question helps me understand the boom: what do the shared "textual symptoms" of women intellectuals express and help us think about (p. 8)? Gallop's memoir evokes the concepts and questions that have given my dissertation shape, dynamics which find expression in the boom: matricide as a condition of women's intellectual lives; the psychic task of reparation as a driving force behind women's intellectual work; the problem of language as a woman's restricted and ambivalent access to the symbolic; and what it means and how it feels to be a woman working in "the literary academy" today (Gallop, 1992, p.3). But importantly, it is not only Gallop's memoir which raises these questions, but the way in which I encounter, read, and interpret her work. This chapter offers me the opportunity to grapple with my implication in the dilemmas that I describe in my dissertation.

To begin, in the first section of this chapter I return to the question: why memoir?, offering Cynthia G. Franklin's (2009) recent reflections on the uses of memoir in academic circles. I go on to examine Franklin's reading of Gallop's memoir, considering what, for Franklin, is at stake in *Feminist Accused*. In the next section, with Franklin's analysis as a starting point, I offer my own interpretations of *Feminist Accused*. I read it as a tale that describes academic women's defenses against the violent conditions of their thinking. Gallop's memoir chronicles the thinking woman's need to navigate the problematic reality that she is not of one body, mind, and self with her intellectual mothers. In section three, I turn my focus to my own ambivalent identifications vis-à-vis this memoir, noting the ways in which my reading repeats both daughterly violence on Gallop and motherly violence on her graduate students. I ask

what women's willingness to grapple with the tangle of our own defenses and identifications can offer our thinking as academic women.

Memoir and the crisis in authority

In her (2009) book *Academic Lives: Memoir, Cultural Theory, and the University Today*, Cynthia G. Franklin argues that academic memoirs, proliferating rapidly since the 1990s, offer us a vantage through which to consider the problems, issues, and intellectual trends facing the field of higher education in the context of the increasingly neo-liberal university. In particular, Franklin is interested in debates surrounding and shaping the status of the humanities, contending that "academic memoirs serve as a barometer for the state of the humanities during a period of crisis" (p. 2). She also notes the way that the genre of memoir offers established academics (to whom she refers as participating in the "academic star system" [see, e.g., p. 1]) a complex opportunity to comment upon their academic and institutional environments: often, academic memoirs, frequently published by prestigious university presses, offer critiques of the university, but they do so from the author's privileged location as tenured "stars" *within* the academy. Franklin highlights the way that the memoir genre softens the blow of the academic memoirist's critique not only because of her or his ironic position vis-à-vis the academy – the memoirist critiques the very institution which supports her capacity to offer a critique – but also because the genre itself is structured around a logic of individualism and, as such, allows the writer to present her or his views as personal while also, paradoxically, overlooking the "ways reigning theories can be fueled by personal investments" (p. 26). Although she's interested in "the complex story that accounts of individual professors' lives have to tell about the current cultural and political climate in the academy" and regards memoirs as "offering spaces that are more musing and pliable than those afforded by theory [allowing them to] display contradictions between the

personal and political without having to reconcile them," Franklin is also wary of the individualism of "the monological genre of 'me-moir'" because it can obscure the power and privilege inherent to the academic memoirist's professional position (pp. 1-2; p. 2; p. 158).

Even for scholars committed "in their other work…[to] a progressive politics and structural analyses of power," memoir can offer tenured academics a space in which to posit themselves an exceptional individual and thus, Franklin argues, to overlook their own locatedness in matrices of power and politics (p. 4). Franklin articulates this complexity: "I am especially interested in how memoir both depends on institutional privilege and can render it invisible" (p. 23). Franklin identifies this function of memoir as specific to the memoir boom of the 1990s, arguing that the memoir writing coming out of the academy in the 1970s and 1980s functioned as a demand for recognition of the ways in which the personal is, precisely, political. In those decades, academic memoirs tended to be "by those challenging or at the margins of the academy (i.e., Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis, and Cherríe Moraga)" (p. 4). 1990s memoirs, on the other hand, tend to be written by academics "around the age of fifty, after they became full professors and established a national reputation" (p. 4). Franklin's characterization of the landscape of academic memoirs in the 1990s, then, repeats the problem I've identified. Built on the backs of the intellectual labour of academic women who came before, Franklin argues, memoirs that come later destroy, or at the very least render invisible, the important links between the personal and the political that those early memoirists' labour helped to forge.

Writing of academic memoirs written since the 1990s, Franklin asks: "Must a focus on the individual happen at the expense of larger, potentially revolutionary, social and political identities and concerns that challenged the academy in the 1980s?" (p. 6). She echoes the question, identified in Chapter One of my study, among feminist scholars about the dilution of a

politically feminist agenda that may or may not attend feminist theory's institutionalization in the academy. For instance, just as Franklin argues that academics who regard themselves as politically progressive have, in their memoir writing from the 90s on, traded their social situatedness for a radical individualism, M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) argues that "subordinated knowledges within the academy have traded radicalism for institutionalization" (pp. 5-6).

Franklin's focus on the state of the humanities implicates the field of Women's Studies – one such home for the "subordinated knowledges" to which Alexander refers – insofar as the theoretical trends in the contemporary humanities operate through current notions innovated and/or foregrounded by Women's Studies, such as the multiplicity of the subject and shifts in our understanding of the human condition in light of the insights generated by "identity politics, postcolonial studies, feminism, and disability studies" (Franklin, 2009, p. 4). As such, Franklin's discussion of memoir and its capacity to provide unique insight into tensions and issues in the university joins a conversation which precedes *Academic Lives*: the question which resonates in Alexander's critique, of what happens when feminism is institutionalized.

One memoir Franklin focuses on is Jane Gallop's (1997) *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*. Franklin reads Gallop's memoir as symptomatic of her inability to recognize her culpability for the ways in which she, individually, has benefitted from this problem of dilution that attends feminism's institutionalization. Franklin "[argues] that prominent feminists write pedagogy memoirs to negotiate the anxieties that attend the institutionalization of feminism, particularly as it is accompanied by the academic star system, the underfunding of the university, and the devaluation of the humanities" (p. 26). Gallop is one of these "prominent feminists" to whom Franklin refers, and the latter considers *Feminist Accused* as instructive of "how memoir both depends on institutional privilege and can render it invisible" (p. 23). For: "As Gallop

attempts through her feminist pedagogy to transgress – but reinstates – institutional roles and rules, she suggests the difficulties for feminists of maintaining an oppositional politics when feminism has achieved institutional power" (p. 26).

In its basic form (*Feminist Accused* does not present a straightforward, linear telling of the 'facts'), the scandal that *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* (1997) describes goes like this. In April, 1991, at a party held in a lesbian bar following a busy and stimulating day at the First Annual Graduate Student Gay and Lesbian Conference held at the university where she is tenured, Gallop publicly kissed good-bye a woman student at the party. The student, an advisee of Gallop, was to present a paper about Gallop's writing and the erotics of their pedagogical relationship at the conference the next day. While it had become the habit of Gallop and her advisee to kiss good-bye after their meetings, for the first time this public kiss was of a more passionate variety: "the usual good-bye peck suddenly became a real kiss" (p. 91). According to Gallop and her report of witnesses' accounts, the kiss between the two women was consensual and enjoyed by both parties. Sometime between this public kiss in April, 1991 and November, 1992, Gallop and her advisee ceased working together and speaking to one another after Gallop found some of the student's work to be unsatisfactory. In November, 1992, this and one other woman student filed a "Complaint of Discrimination" to the university against Gallop, charging her with sexual harassment (p. 77). Both students charged Gallop with quid pro quo sexual harassment, claiming that Gallop had tried to initiate sex with each of them (which Gallop denies) and that when they refused she began "rejecting" their work (p. 94). In their Complaints, both students sought four remedies from the university. They requested that Gallop "be reprimanded,…that [she] be kept out of any decisions regarding their work,…that the department create a mechanism to deal with sexual harassment," and that she "'understand that making the

complaint the subject of intellectual inquiry constitutes retaliation'" (p. 77; p. 78). Although the Complaints, while open, were meant to remain confidential, the students organized their colleagues to vocally oppose Gallop's involvement with a conference she organized in the spring of 1993, and they handed out flyers detailing the case. In the end, Gallop was found not guilty of sexual harassment although, in the case of the student whom she had kissed, she was found in contravention of the university's policy against "consensual amorous relations" between professor and student (p. 57). In 1994 the story of her students accusing Gallop of sexual harassment, and Gallop's point of view regarding the case, was the cover story of the then popular academic magazine *Lingua Franca* (Franklin, 2009). The case rapidly rose to notoriety; its sensationalism both drew upon and contributed to what Franklin describes as Gallop's rising "star" status in the academy. The scandal was – and is – the object of much inquiry and debate (see, e.g., Cavanagh, 2007; Kaplan, 1998; Malcolm, 1997; Miller, 2011; Patai, 1998; Showalter, 1997; Talbot, 1994). *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* was published by the prestigious Duke University Press in 1997.

For Franklin, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* is symptomatic not only of Gallop's anxiety in the face of feminism's institutionalization, but also of her "crisis in authority" (see, e.g., p. 144). Franklin locates this crisis as specific to the late 1980s and the 1990s, a time when theoretical trends in the humanities demanded of academics – particularly of white men – that they examine their "formerly unmarked positions of privilege," a demand arising directly from, among other intellectual locations, the memoir writing of feminists of colour mentioned above (p. 144). But, Franklin argues, this crisis in authority is also to do with the contemporary and popular degradation of the status of and resources for the humanities in the university and the public imaginary alike. For Franklin, then, Gallop's memoir is the work of a

privileged, if anxious, academic who holds all of the relative power in this case – including the support of the university, in spite of her rhetorical positioning of the university as somehow working against her. The memoir functions to divest her students of power, control, and authority, both academic and feminist, and to "shore up her authority in the name of feminism" (p. 146). And, according to Franklin, it is relevant that Gallop uses the memoir genre in order to tell this story because it allows her to elide the kind of theoretical rigour which would certainly bring Gallop's power play to an unflattering light.

Franklin argues that, in the course of her effort to secure her own authority in telling about their difficult encounter, Gallop's "student is diminished to the status of prop," and moreover that this is a part of Gallop's larger problem that she positions her students generally "as passive recipients" of her feminist pedagogy – including of the ways in which she eroticizes her classroom (p. 157). But in suggesting that this aspect of Gallop's pedagogy is extended to the case under scrutiny – that her students were passive recipients of her attentions, both in the form of her flirtation and her criticism – Franklin positions the student accusers merely as passive victims, overlooking the powerful threat that they represent for Gallop in their structural relation to her. Herself Gallop's junior – she writes about being in graduate school during the scandal and hearing Gallop speak right around that time – Franklin also overlooks her own capacity to pose a threat. In an earlier (1992) text about the history of feminism's institutionalization in the academy, Gallop offers a strategy for thinking about the vehemence of our revulsion to certain texts and narratives, such as that which characterizes Franklin's condemnation of *Feminist Accused*. We must try, argues Gallop, "to recognize the intensity of [our] negativity as a symptom of disavowed identification" (p. 9).

The intensity of Franklin's response to Gallop's memoir carries the trace of her matricidal act which gave rise to the pleasures and dangers of language and selfhood. Insofar as her writing about Gallop repeats her original matricide, it is perhaps easier to notice Franklin's identifications with Gallop's students: she positions herself, analytically, 'against' Gallop, and she writes of hearing Gallop speak as a graduate student and of needing to solicit Gallop's permission to quote her comments from an online forum in *Academic Lives* (Gallop grants the permission). But we should also consider Franklin's identifications *with Gallop*. After all, like Gallop, here is Franklin writing a book. Now that she's written a book, what will become of her? If her book is contingent on the destruction of Gallop, for instance, then a part of her aggression speaks to her *own* anxiety and crisis of authority: for who might be waiting to destroy Franklin?

The complexity of Franklin's identifications vis-à-vis *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* speaks to another way to understand how it articulates a crisis of authority. For Franklin, what is at stake in Gallop's crisis of authority is her status as a professor and as a feminist, and the memoir genre serves her purposes in this crisis by allowing her to overlook her structural position within matrices of power and powerlessness: it renders her radically individualized. But I want to think about what is at stake in the crisis in authority that attends feminism's institutionalization a little differently. Although her story is of her individual experience, I will explore how Gallop's memoir elaborates a psychical crisis that structures women's academic experiences, particularly within Franklin's site of interest, the humanities, and what Gallop (1992) calls "the literary academy" (p. 3).

The "terrorist graduate student" and the problem of the mother's otherness

In *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* (1997) Jane Gallop tells the story of a scandal in which she found herself ensnared. Although Franklin (2009) is suspicious of the trickiness of

the time of narrative in *Feminist Accused*, the uneven time of Gallop's telling of the scandal contributes to the tangle of identifications we encounter in our reading of it. In the memoir, Gallop plays out a drama that evokes an uncanny familiarity for women engaged in the labour of conceiving and delivering ideas in language. As such, through its tricks of time and its confusion of identifications, the scandal she describes arouses our deepest affective relations to our academic lives, leaving none of us untouched. This explains our fascination with the scandal and the impulse that many of us feel, to varying degrees, to condemnation of those involved: either of Gallop or of her graduate student accusers, or even of both. By thinking about the way *Feminist Accused* evokes our complex identifications we can better understand our affective responses to it, and, importantly, locate and implicate ourselves in the attraction or revulsion (or both) we feel in relation to Gallop's narrative.

In *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, Gallop's side of the story is that of the mother who has had to survive her own destruction at the hands of her daughters, a destruction – and survival – upon which the daughters' capacity to understand themselves as women scholars at the university is contingent. The case that the memoir describes has captured the imagination of the academic community, and particularly of the humanities, for years not only because of its sensationalist structure – sex!; student-teacher sex!; intergenerational sex!; lesbian sex! – but also because it unfolds along the lines of the painfully personal matricidal scene which, in becoming thinkers, we have all had to endure and carry with us in our minds as at once our intellectual burden and our creative drive.

Gallop positions herself, in no uncertain terms, as one of the mothers of Women's Studies, a bourgeoning discipline in the university beginning in the 1970s:

> At the time, women's studies was not yet a formal program; a steering committee was set up to conceive its shape before we applied for official university status. The decision was made, on principle, to include students on what would more traditionally have been a faculty committee. As an undergraduate, I got to serve on the committee, and I felt privileged to be allowed to join the faculty in building women's studies. The inclusive composition of this committee betokened our vision of women's studies as different from the rest of the university: knowledge would be more egalitarian and more alive. (p. 17)

Though a student at the time, occupying what might be thought of as a daughterly role, Gallop is invited to help "conceive" Women's Studies. She is there at its conception and at its birth in the university. In the conception of Women's Studies as Gallop describes it here resides a fantasy that marks women's intellectual work, including my work in this dissertation: the fantasy that knowledge (women's knowledge, knowledge about women) could be "more alive," that is, that our labour of thinking, reading, and writing, need not be haunted by the spectral mothers upon whose destruction such work is contingent. But this wish is doomed to falter and Gallop herself becomes one casualty of the way in which matricide remains a condition of women's intellectual lives. And, in the tangle of identifications, aggression, and desire that mark the mother/daughter dynamics of matricide and reparation, Gallop also leaves casualties in her wake.

As we have seen, Franklin (2009) regards *Feminist Accused* as symptomatic of Gallop's anxiety in the face of her "crisis in authority" in the academy and among feminist intellectuals (p. 144). Franklin's notion of Gallop's "crisis in authority" focuses on structures of power and privilege and a worry about where she stands in relation to such structures. My notion of Gallop's "crisis in authority" inquires into structures of subjectivity and the symbolic and her worries (conscious and unconscious) about where she stands in relation to those structures.

As one of the mothers of contemporary and institutionalized Women's Studies Gallop has certain intellectual and political hopes for the field; in *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* she details her disappointment that sexual harassment, a concept fleshed out by feminist

intellectuals, has been coopted in ways beyond her control, including by her students who use the concept to denounce her and what she regards as her feminist pedagogical practices. The memoir is so captivating because it tells the familiar story of a woman whose maternal hopes and expectations are violently dashed. The objects and subjective and symbolic positions which Gallop has helped to make possible in the world through her conception and her labour – feminism, feminist theory and discourse, feminist women graduate students – turn against her in the scandal. In "Talking Across," a (1997) conversation with feminist then-graduate student Elizabeth Francis,[9] Gallop speaks abstractly (during their conversation about generational conflict in the feminist academy, neither she nor Francis explicitly mention the scandal – as if an analysis of the case bears no relation to their topic) about the women students, self-identified feminists, whom she names with the category of the "terrorist graduate student" (p. 118). In *Feminist Accused*, the 'terror' constitutive of Gallop's graduate students' 'terrorism' is of a Gothic variety: by taking what she has given them and using it to turn against her, the fruits of Gallop's labour – her feminist women students and their use of the feminist discourse of sexual harassment – have become, in Gallop's narrative, quite monstrous.

Structuring Gallop's encounters with her graduate students and her telling of the tale are the defenses which, Nikolchina (2004) argues, particularly plague the feminist intellectual community: abjectivity and merginality. The passionate kiss between Gallop and her student represents the fantasy of merginality: it functions as what Kristeva (1980) calls a moment of symbiosis. In this moment, the mother and the daughter are one; they have not yet arrived at the need to recognize each other's otherness. When Gallop reads her student's work and declares it unsatisfactory, this is the interruption of language – the paternal function – into the symbiosis

[9] Francis, though a graduate student during their conversation, is not a student of Gallop's. She is the wife of Gallop's male advisee to whom Gallop dedicates *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, published the same year as "Talking Across" (Franklin, 2009; Gallop & Francis, 1997).

between mother and daughter: and it is a rude awakening indeed. Although it is arguably the kiss that renders *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* so sensational and attention-grabbing, in fact the literal kiss is beside the point. What makes this story so familiar and unsettling to those of us reading it is that there needn't be a kiss at all. Rather, what the story stirs inside us is the infantile fantasy – one that repeats through our subsequent relationships – that we are of one body and mind with our mother, that my needs and her needs, my desires and her desires, are merged, the same. And, as in the events described in *Feminist Accused*, we cannot sustain this liminal state of symbiosis: eventually a woman "must tear herself from the daughter-mother symbiosis, renounce the undifferentiated community of women and recognize the father at the same time as the symbolic" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 279). This tearing is painful for both mother and daughter, each of whom might seek shelter in the defense of abjectivity: actually, we are nothing alike; we have nothing to learn from or with the other. In the case of this particular story, the pain that the students can't tolerate is that Gallop has desires beyond them: she wants their work to be something that it is not. And the pain that Gallop can't tolerate – a pain that is tantamount to a violent betrayal – is that her students have developed minds of their own and relationships to language which exclude her.

"Good luck with the diss…"

Once again, neither I nor my intellectual work can escape the dilemma I describe. Just as, in Chapter Two, I was forced to recognize the way in which my writing about Buss is a repetition of the beating she experienced at the hands of that other Mary, here I must acknowledge that there is no way to save myself from becoming just another of Gallop's "terrorist graduate [students]" (Gallop & Francis, 1997, p. 118). That I use against her something that Gallop has given me – my imagination is sparked to life by a piece of the world that only she

could make possible – is one of the worries that plays itself out in the fourth chapter of my dissertation in which I draw upon Gallop's own methodology of close reading to do violence to her interpretations in her (2011) *The Deaths of the Author*. That my capacity for authorship, as a young woman scholar, is dependent on my complicity in the deaths of the authors to whom I am indebted is precisely the problem. And just as Gallop's students took what she gave them and used it to terrorize her in the case described in *Feminist Accused*, here I am, once again, doing the same. Although I certainly repeat on Gallop's work the aggression her students displayed toward her, I also repeat Gallop's violence toward her students who explicitly requested that her use of the case as an object of intellectual inquiry be regarded as an aggressive retaliation for their accusations against her. In identifying with, and repudiating the mother as a way to structure and develop a mind of my own, the boundaries of the self become slippery indeed.

One complexity of my identifications which informs my capacity to interpret, analyse and write about *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* is that my copy of the memoir literally bears the trace of Jane Gallop herself. Early in the same academic term when I would later begin drafting this chapter, I had occasion to meet Gallop in the context of a graduate seminar at the university where I study. Gallop's visit and the seminar had been organized by two women professors – one of whom supervises my doctoral research – in the Faculty of Education whose work, and whose opinions of my work, I care intensely about. The seminar offered me and several other graduate students the opportunity to talk to Gallop about her recent (2011) book *The Deaths of the Author*. At the conclusion of the seminar many of us asked Gallop to sign our copies of her new book. I had brought along my copy of *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* and asked her to sign it too, because, and as I told her, it is a book that is important to me and my

work. Gallop graciously agreed and thrilled me by inscribing a little message along with her signature. "For Mary," she wrote, "Good luck with the diss…"

I felt (and feel) very proud of the inscription. Gallop knew that I was writing about *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* in my dissertation – I had told her this news when I met her two days before the seminar, and she seemed to have held it in her mind since then – and her well-wishes felt at once like permission and encouragement. But, a couple of months later when I went to begin writing the analysis of *Feminist Accused* that had been percolating in my mind since I'd reread the memoir just before Gallop's visit, her kind inscription began to take on new layers of meaning which now haunt me, inhibiting and inhabiting my writing. Gallop's own methodological practice of closely scrutinizing the meanings of words that stand out to us in our reading encourages me to attend to these layers (2011).

I grew up in the 1990s, the very period of the memoir boom and of the events described in Gallop's memoir: if writing my dissertation is figuratively the adolescent period of my academic career, how interesting that I turn to books that were published when I was, literally, an adolescent. Having been a teenager in the 90s, I can't hear the short form for 'dissertation' – 'diss' – without always also hearing the gleefully taunting short form for 'disrespect' – 'diss!' – which was a popular saying then. As I began to apply the analytic lens that I develop in my dissertation to Gallop's memoir, this old, if not entirely forgotten, taunt resurfaced in my mind. "Good luck with the diss…," she wrote. What could those ellipses possibly contain?

The ellipses serve a function for the development of my dissertation's analytic lens because, in conjunction with the laden word "diss," they render Gallop's well wishes complex and ambivalent. Contained within the ellipses is my own implication in the academic woman's gendered dilemma. Regardless of Gallop's intentions when she wrote the inscription, my own

interpretation of it – full as it is of pleasure and guilt – reifies the way that the dilemma structures my reading of and writing about Gallop's work. Just as her students' use of sexual harassment policy depended on the labour that Gallop and others invested in creating and implementing such policy, so my dissertation depends on using the work of my intellectual mothers in ways which might treat with disrespect their original intentions for or visions of their work. To write this dissertation, I must take what my forebears have given me and use it to make something new, something that is about expanding the possibilities of *my* world, regardless of the kind of interpretive carnage I must leave in my wake. To have found and made any kind of home for myself in the academy, I have needed to rely on the work of women thinkers who have gone before me. And yet, I am entangled in the very problem that is my object of inquiry here: the dissertation as violent act of disrespect.

Arguing that conflict is a necessary and desirable component of learning, not least because it keeps our thinking moving by demarcating intellectual generations, Jen Gilbert (2009) draws on Alice Pitt and Madeleine Grumet to argue that "the phantastical killing and survival of the mother is both an obstacle to and the precondition for entering symbolization" (p. 67). Gilbert emphasizes the paradoxical survival of the destroyed mother: her capacity to survive is yet one more debt which we owe her. She asks: "Can parents survive their child's adventures in reading?" and goes on to answer that although "one may have to destroy one's mother,…she in turn will have to survive this destruction, in order that we may think through and with her" (p. 67; p. 70). The inscription: "For Mary, Good luck with the diss…" functions for me as Gallop's acknowledgment of my need to destroy her and as her resilient survival. The language of the inscription contains my matricidal act, and the work of reparation – Gallop's and mine. It holds my reparative act insofar as my writing about Gallop's work, while certainly a tearing-to-shreds,

is also already an attempt to put-back-together-again, as I explore in Chapter Three. It functions as *Gallop*'s reparative act insofar as I stand in for those earlier graduate students and their disrespect; by giving me permission and encouragement to use her work to make my way in the academic world, she can, in the deferred and transferential time and space of thinking, offer her student accusers the same. The inscription's few words convey conflict, aggression, permission and forgiveness. And in those ellipses lies the interminability of the dilemma.

Chapter Six: Thinking Through the Dissertation: Conclusions

School was the only place where I felt 'myself.' There, I could just manage to stand being separated from my mother.
–Sarah Kofman, 1994/1996, p. 24

Introduction

Women's thinking subjectivity is born of conflict. Women who study – and Women's Studies – grapple with the ambivalent effects – and affects – of these conflicted origins of the life of the mind. In my study of academic women's memoirs I examine how the problem of needing at once to identify with and repudiate the mother in order to become a thinking self plays out and repeats in the conflicts women confront in our work in the university. By analyzing Klein's theory of the infantile fantasy of matricide, I bring to light its gendered implications: because a girl's gender identity is aligned with that of her mother, the problem of the girl's need to destroy the mother also puts her *self* at risk of destruction. I explore how this problem of destruction haunts women's reparative creations; writing to right the mother reduplicates the damage for which the writing woman seeks to atone in the first place. I go on to locate the dilemma of women's subjectivity as an effect of identification and repudiation in language itself, inquiring into the psychic cost of language and its pleasures for women. My study of the origins of the life of the mind helps us understand why a career in the academy – a career made from language and thinking – can feel so ambivalent to women. My analytic lens offers a new way to understand the conflicts that can erupt in women's academic lives, such as that which Gallop describes in *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*.

In this concluding chapter I begin by considering whether my focus on gender as it affects and structures women's emotional experiences of thinking precludes an inquiry into other modes of human difference; specifically, I think about how to extend my conception of the

academic women's gendered dilemma to more adequately include an analysis of race. I apply my analytic insights from this dissertation to the development of a set of questions and strategies for my future women's studies.

Thinking Through Subjectivity and Difference

In this dissertation I examine the problem that difference poses for women: how does the painful history of coming to know one's mother as an other, different from the self, haunt and shape the academic life for women? One question I have about my work in this study is whether I adequately interrogate how a range of human differences affect a woman's experience of her gendered subjectivity in the world. I came up against this question particularly in my writing about bell hooks's (1996) memoir *Bone Black* and Alice Kaplan's (1993) memoir *French Lessons*. In my analysis of those works I circle – but never quite land on – the question of how the gendered dilemma for an academic woman echoes through the range of her identifications. For instance, in a social context that privileges and naturalizes whiteness and maleness, with what must one identify and repudiate to be a black woman academic or a Jewish woman academic? In this section I offer some strategies for how, going forward, I might open up my thinking about women's affective experiences of the academy.

In *Bone Black*, hooks describes the implicit and explicit lessons she learned as a child about race and its functions, about the assumptions that others made about her based on the colour and shade of her skin, the texture of her hair, or the shape of her body. She loves what she calls "wonderful black things," and, as a child, must sort through her confusion about the ways in which blackness is at once celebrated and denigrated by those around her (p. 32). She examines the role that blackness plays in her own life; the way that, through shifting economies of racism, belonging, and community, it is, on the one hand, held against her but also, on the other hand,

held out to her as an identity achievement that she cannot quite attain or get 'right.' She describes her experiences of negotiating spaces in which she is too black – for instance, at the supposedly 'integrated' highschool she attends after desegregation, or at the "White Folks' Library." In other spaces, however, hooks is not black enough – at the beauty parlour with her mother and sisters, for instance, where the particular shade of her skin and texture of her hair serve as physical markers of her difference within her own family, a difference she feels profoundly as she comes of age and longs at once to belong to her family and to know and theorize the world beyond it.

It is in one of the sections in which she muses on how this dilemma of blackness as too much and not enough plays out in her life that hooks first introduces an enigmatic refrain which can help me to think through the complexity of identifications that the academic woman's gendered dilemma arouses. As a girl, "She cannot wait to grow up and be a woman who can wear black slips, black dresses." But, hooks learns, "Black is a woman's color – that's what her mama tells her. You have to earn the right to wear the color black" (p. 32). Something about this line – "Black is a woman's color" – which repeats throughout the memoir, holds the deep ambivalence that circulates in hooks's relation to her mother, a relation shaped by hooks's conflicted desires at once to identify with her mother whom she loves desperately, and to reject those identifications which would structure hooks's life in ways against her will. While this ambivalence belongs to hooks and her conflicts of subjective identification, it also belongs to hooks's mother who, perhaps as a kind of revenge for what she sees as hooks's refusal to identify with her particular version of black womanhood, withholds both the possibility of hooks's blackness – her alignment with those wonderful black things that she loves – and her womanhood with the utterance of this one haunting line. This vengeance reflects how the dilemma of women's identifications gives rise to the likelihood that the mother's life and labour

will make possible particular opportunities for the daughter which were not available to the mother herself. Black womanhood will mean something very different for hooks than it has meant for her mother.

One complexity of thinking about the way hooks experiences her blackness as a conflict – as too much and as not enough – in relation to the dilemma that a woman must repudiate the mother with whom she must also identify, is the danger that the question of race will be subsumed by the question of gender. Certain psychoanalytic orientations can help me think about the inextricability of race and gender in our identifications in the world, and about the fantasies to which each gives rise and responds. Hortense Spillers (2003) resists the notion that psychoanalytic theory and critical race theory "are so insistently disparate in the cultural and historical claims that they each invoke that the ground of their speaking together would dissolve in conceptual chaos" (p. 378). Spillers regards psychoanalytic theory as offering a vocabulary for understanding how the subject introjects and projects social constructions, fantasies, and myths of race. And she regards race as a discourse that can expose the gaps and limitations of psychoanalytic theory. Taken together, psychoanalytic theory and discourses of race can help us to examine "The relay between self-fashioning and 'out there'" (381). In this study I ask how women introject fantasies of gender which have a profound effect on our emotional and intellectual lives, but also how women then project these fantasies back out into our work in the world. Spillers asks a difficult question of the subject's racialization, one that can help me complicate my questions in future inquiries: "The question, then, for this project is…how that difference [– 'race' –] carries over its message onto an interior, how 'race,' as a poisonous idea, insinuates itself not only across and between ethnicities but within" (p. 385). What does it mean not only for bell hooks to be and identify as a black academic woman, but to *feel* like one? How

do the exterior and interior worlds interact to shape and condition her experience of her intellectualism? While I examine how women are psychically complicit in the conflict that femininity poses for us as intellectuals, Spillers can help me to ask how we are also psychically complicit in the way that discourses of race structure our sense of self, including our particular, subjective experience of femininity.

In her (2012) study of subjectivity, gender, and race, Gail Lewis argues that feminist theory and critical race theory, often grounded in a poststructural framework, need psychoanalysis for the work it does of expressing the significance of the inner world. While poststructural theory can offer us a way to think about the effects of sexism and racism, for instance, Lewis argues that it can't necessarily help us get at the *affects* of these ideological structures. In future studies of the academic woman's gendered dilemma, Lewis can help me examine how or whether affect is already composed of the identity structures through which we understand ourselves in the social world. In other words, Lewis, like Spillers, wonders about whether affect and subjectivity precede social categories – such as race – or vice versa, and each scholar argues for psychoanalytic theory as contributing a lens through which to grapple with this question. Going forward, Spillers and Lewis will help me examine this question which remains at the conclusion of my study, offering me a psychoanalytic orientation from which to explore the origins of the conflicts inherent to our social identifications alongside those inherent to gender. Spillers' and Lewis' work offers me a place to begin to elaborate and complicate my thinking about difference as I continue to study the academic woman's gendered dilemma.

How might I make meaning from this difficulty of providing a more integrated discussion of how social discourses of race and the vicissitudes of their introjection and projection shape the affective terrain of intellectualism for women? Pitt and Britzman (2003) argue that learning

occurs precisely at the site of breakdowns in meaning and significance; the breakdown in one's attempt to represent her knowing and learning signals the interior conflicts from which both learning and the subject are made. In this study I have grappled with how thinking is made from a repudiation of the mother, the painful recognition of her otherness. In Chapter Three I think about how the question "Does my work hurt my mother?" constitutes a reparative narrative urgency for the woman thinker and writer. My confrontation now with the breakdown of my analysis to understand the complex relationship between race and subjectivity signals its own narrative urgency: the question of race has erupted quite suddenly at the conclusion – the limits – of my dissertation. My narrative urgency here seeks to repair for my entanglement in the difficult knowledge that gives rise to the urgency in the first place.

Pitt and Britzman argue that difficult knowledge exists at the intersection of "the difference between obstacles to learning and obstacles to representing learning. If obstacles to learning are made from all that impedes from the outside, obstacles to representing learning return us to the inside" (p. 768). My reparative efforts address my complicity in social obstacles – "the outside" – to learning about race, and especially about the lived and subjective experience of race for racialized women. Hooks's contention that "not enough is known about the experience of black girls in our society" (1996, p. xii) repeats in my oversight here to critically examine race as it pertains to intellectual women's subjectivity: perhaps in this study, not enough is known about the experience of intellectualism for women of colour in the academy. Women of colour are underrepresented in the academy because of its history of inhospitality to people of colour, and especially to women of colour (see, e.g., Alexander, 2005). This inhospitality complicates Miller's (1997) questions about women's capacity to be at home in the university. This limit in my work is an effect of an external, social obstacle – in this case, racism and its

significance for representation and access – but also ends up reproducing that obstacle through my omission of an integrated discussion of the relation between the social category of race and the psychic structures that shape women's thinking subjectivity. What could my reproduction of this obstacle symptomatize?

This inquiry into the origin of the symptoms that structure my intellectual work "returns us to the inside" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 768). Although the sudden urgency to narrate the problem I have had in understanding the relationship between race and subjectivity expresses my wish to repair for my complicity in social obstacles to our learning about race, this narrative urgency also gestures to the conflicts that structure my very capacity to know and to represent my knowing. In my dissertation I argue that women's intellectual subjectivity is born in the breakdown of sameness and difference in relation to the mother, the first other. My inability to adequately study social difference and its effects on subjectivity hints at how my intellectual work – including my work in this study – necessarily gives rise to my own crisis of otherness, a breakdown of meaning in the face of my questions about sameness and difference. Inadequately integrating critical race theory into my theory of subjectivity, in the way Spillers recommends, is one of the ways this breakdown gets expressed in this work. My analysis of the dilemma that the mother's otherness poses for the thinking woman's self thus offers me a way to understand why social differences can provoke such anxiety. Mining my examination of women studying for the moments where meaning breaks down and difficult knowledge emerges reminds me that my continuing research must examine the gaps in my knowledge – in this case, what race could have to do with subjectivity – but also what those gaps suggest about the interior conflicts that structure my research in the first place.

Questions and Strategies for Future Research

Having arrived at the end of my study of how conflict and difference structure the very possibilities of a woman's thinking life and the projects to which it gives rise, I notice my own entanglement in the dilemma once more. As I reflect on what questions I'm left with at the conclusion of my dissertation, my impulse is to ask the kind of question that strives to 'save' academic women from the very conflicts that make our work possible at all. For instance: how can recognizing the psychic dynamics that structure women's thinking and Women's Studies help us to better think about or even manage those conflicts? Because my difference from my mothers – personal and intellectual – is so difficult to bear, my desire to resolve that difference emerges in my reparative and impossible questions for the field.

As I discussed in my introductory chapter, many feminist theorists of higher education explore conflict as the grounds of possibility for women's academic labour and the defenses that feminist scholars mobilize in order to avoid confronting the inevitability of conflict in our work of thinking. For example, Robyn Wiegman (2012) examines what is at stake in recent debates about the renaming of Women's Studies departments, asking: "why is U.S. academic feminism so deeply in need of believing that an object or analytic, configured properly, will be adequate to all the wishes that are invested in it?" (p. 42). While my dissertation is an attempt, in many ways, to converse *with* Wiegman's question, I also recognize myself caught *within* it. My question about how the analytic I develop here can help academic women and the feminist field of higher education better manage our conflicts and ambivalences reveals a reparative wish to resolve the originating conflict that makes my thinking possible at all. And, my question houses a progress wish that my work can both name in a new way, and fix, the inadequacies of the field (Hemmings, 2011).

The feminist fantasy that we can repair for the original conflict that gives rise to our thinking lives by resolving the conflicts that now structure those lives, works to disavow that first conflict and the difficult knowledge of our difference. Yet, our fantasies, like our conflicts, are also the things that keep us going, that lend a 'so what' to our work, that make us sit down to write/right the field. When Fields (2013) writes of feminism that "Our conflicts help to generate, direct, and amend our concerted movements toward intellectual insight and social change" (p. 492), she could also be speaking of our reparative fantasies. We need our conflicts, but we need our fantasies, too. The fantasy that we can repair our conflicts is precisely a strategy for surviving those conflicts. Without both conflict and fantasy, Women's Studies could not survive being passed on (Braithwaite, Heald, Luhmann & Rosenberg, 2004). As I proceed in my scholarship, I will continue to ask: what possibilities will embracing conflict and fantasy as integral to our scholarship allow for the feminist field of women in higher education, and for the affective reality of working as a woman in the academy? And, I will continue to attend to how my own conflicts and fantasies structure that very question.

Another question I'm left with at the end of my dissertation is why don't I have an academic memoir, or perhaps, why can't I have one? With a feminist theory reading group at my university I recently read a series of memoirs written by intellectual women (e.g., Bechdel, 2012; Behar, 2013; Sedgwick, 1999; Uppal, 2013; Warland, 2000; Winterson, 2011). In these texts which we came to refer to as "mother memoirs," the authors grapple explicitly with their histories and relationships with their mothers, each wondering what her mother had to do with her capacity to become a writer. During our discussion of one of these mother memoirs, one of my colleagues asked whether anyone knew of a memoir in which a woman examines what her history and relationship with her *daughter* had to do with her capacity to be an intellectual or

writer[10]. This question helps me notice how, with the exception of Gallop's memoir, my analyses of the memoirs in my dissertation position the author in a daughterly role. Yet, even though the author might use the memoir to work through her status as daughter, each of the memoirists I read are – institutionally, at least – also mothers; their very inclusion here makes them my intellectual mothers. Franklin (2009) reminds us that academics who publish memoirs do so from an established, privileged, and secure position within the academy. Perhaps I can't yet have a memoir because I am still too close to the debt I owe; in fact, I still depend upon it. I haven't yet separated from my intellectual mothers to have my own story of an intellectual self; I don't have an intellectual autobiography, but my work must become one through the bond of reading with other women (Felman, 1993). Attending to my own implication in this tangle of motherly and daughterly identifications – one of my objects of inquiry in this dissertation – will continue to inform my investigations of how the dramas of the mother-daughter relationship structure women's work in the university.

Women's labour in the academy and within language will always be ambivalent. Thinking and language are gendered processes made from conflict, but they also open a world of creative possibilities: through thinking and language a woman both makes and undoes her self. Although Miller's (1997) questions about whether or how women can ever be at home in the university perhaps remain unanswerable, they capture the affective experience of the intellectual life for women. A career made from thinking and language entails that a woman find herself and confront her estrangement within the social world all at once.

[10] Thanks to Julia Sinclair-Palm for this question.

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